PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION IN SCHOOL:
REFLECTING ON OURSELVES

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PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION IN SCHOOL: REFLECTING ON OURSELVES

by
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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an account of the transformation of my personal thinking and practice, as I developed my own new living theories about my practice. As I chose an action research approach for my research, my research is practice based, as outlined by Whitehead (1989), McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead (2003), McNiff and Whitehead (2005b), and Whitehead and McNiff (2006). As McNiff et al. (2003) explain, action research focuses on learning and embodies good professional practice and praxis; it will hopefully lead to personal and social improvement; it is a response to a social situation; it demands critical thinking and political intention; and the focus is on transformation within this thesis.

The thesis comprises an account of my learning at both theoretical and practical levels, as I discovered how to live my values more fully in my practice. Inclusivity and leadership establish a set of values and purposes that underpins the educational process in a school. The individual commitment of the teachers and leader drives the values and purposes into reality. Values without implementation do little for school improvement. It is in dealing with the challenge to change and improve, often by confronting unacceptable practices, that teachers and leaders show their educational values.

The thesis is the story of how I learned to speak for myself and came to regard her as a person who has something to say for herself in the context of the impoverished schools of South Africa. My thesis is an articulation of my belief that teachers and learners should be counted ‘among those with the authority to participate both in the critique and in the reform of education’ (Cook-Sather, 2002:3). It also articulates my commitment to a scholarship of teaching that allows teachers to learn from pedagogical experience and exchange that learning in acts of scholarship that contribute to the wisdom of practice across the profession (Shulman, 1999:17).

Collaborative and reflective discussion allowed me to capitalise on the social nature of learning. I not only considered how education could be used to assist children’s growth, learning and development, but also applied the same concepts in the development, growth and learning of their teachers. I would argue that through my own work, I have attempted to establish a community of enquiry within my school that draws on a multi-generational model of knowledge production through bringing together teachers, researchers, students and critical friends.
DECLARATION

I, Deidre Chanté Geduld, sincerely declare that

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is my own work except where indebtedness to other sources has been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that this work was not previously presented for a degree to any other higher education institution.

SIGNATURE       : __________________________

DATE            : __________________________
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank You, God, for all the second chances You have given me and for never asking me to do anything I was not equipped to do. It is only by Your divine grace and mercy, that I have made it thus far.

I have come to deeply appreciate the importance, power and gifts of wonderful and caring people in my life. I am delighted to acknowledge the inspiration given to me by William and Freda Stevens, my parents and finest teachers. With wisdom, joy and care, they modelled learning that transformed me. Holding me all along the way, they helped me learn to love and stand for something. Their belief in me, and support for all I choose to do, are but two of the precious life gifts they have given me. It is on their shoulders that I stand in order to see farther. I thank you, Mummy and Daddy, for showing me how to appreciate the important roles that roots and wings play in building a happy and productive life.

I dedicate this research work to my beautiful children, Aygan and Cara, who were my motivation and inspiration for both living and writing this story. I am in constant awe that such beings could have spent their childhood helping me learn how to be happy. The goal of my life is to return that favour. My love for you permeates every lily that grows in muddy waters.

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Many thanks to all my participants, especially Bernadette Damons, who shared their many stories with me. This thesis was actually a community project, and I am delighted and grateful to be in community with you. You were remarkable thinkers and doers. Thank you for giving freely of your time, with commitment. Your warm welcoming of me into the school, your thinking and your lives continue to inspire me.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DoE</td>
<td>Department of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IBST</td>
<td>Institutional Based Support Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEPs</td>
<td>Individual Educational Plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LSEN</td>
<td>Learners with Special Educational Needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LST</td>
<td>Learner Support Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NQF</td>
<td>National Qualifications Framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OBE</td>
<td>Outcomes-Based Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RNCS</td>
<td>Revised National Curriculum Statement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDT</td>
<td>Staff Development Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMT</td>
<td>School Management Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZPD</td>
<td>Zone of Proximal Development</td>
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CHAPTER ONE
WHAT IS MY CONCERN?

Adding wings to caterpillars does not create butterflies –
It creates awkward and dysfunctional caterpillars.
Butterflies are created through transformation.

Stephanie Pace Marshall

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT OF STUDY

Personal background

How does one outline the genesis of an inspiration? My mother did not experience the enjoyment, excitement and the opportunities encapsulated in being able to read. However, to her, reading was always a priority in enabling her children. The education of her children was not static, and she chose the kind of education she wanted to give her children. Our home was a centre of learning. My mother was educated in a period when apartheid education was ruthlessly enforced. As a black woman living in South Africa with all that this implies, she experienced extreme discrimination during the apartheid period. But it was also the life of that generation of South African women as experienced by women elsewhere, in different periods in different countries, – who have moved from their traditional place in home and family to a questioning world in which they had to fight to make a place for themselves.

My mother’s way was gentle, but her lessons were very powerful. We learned as children to be grateful, no matter what our circumstances. In offering gratitude for our lives, we discovered how to change them for the better. This freedom encouraged us to bring order to our education and to go at our own pace, to learn to recognise our limitations, to appreciate our progress, and to weave these lessons into the fabric of our daily moments until they became a part of us. These lessons also kept me in touch with my humanity and in touch with my purpose, to educate for the empowerment of others.

As a little girl of six, I started my schooling in Port Elizabeth, South Africa under the impoverished House of Representatives Education Department. My classroom was a
prefabricated structure with an asbestos roof. At the age of three, I developed meningitis. The resultant ear infection was left untreated and had long-term complications. I suffered hearing loss in my left ear, which affected my speech and language development. My parents and my teachers were unable to identify this problem. However, they correctly identified my limited visual ability when I complained of extremely painful headaches, fatigue, eyestrain and blurred vision at all distances. I had to have my eyes tested at the local Livingstone Hospital, which treated coloured and black people only. I hated my visits to the Hospital, because we had to wait in long queues. My worst nightmare was the ugly glasses I would receive and the anticipated mocking reaction of my fellow learners. My parents could not afford to buy me a pair of glasses and the hideous ones I received from the state hospital virtually destroyed my self-esteem.

The ancient thinker Euripides noted, “There are in the worst of fortune the best chances for a happy change”. I believe my past difficulties have prepared me to serve my purpose equipped with my acquired wisdom. My life lessons will be my fuel for a better tomorrow for my learners and me.

_The end of all our exploring_  
_Will be to arrive where we started_  
_And know the place for the first time._

_T.S. Elliot (Four Quartets)_

I am challenged with issues that have haunted me for a very long time: **How do I create learning opportunities for learners from impoverished communities?** The community in which I grew up had a strong code of traditional moral values, mostly enshrined and intertwined in the language used; a language very rich in proverbs: _No man is an island...and he who laughs last, laughs longest._ However, this conventional wisdom is being eroded, as reflected in the fact that its manifestation in language is disappearing and losing its original meaning because of the unending cycle of poverty and its corrosive effect.

I started teaching when teachers were respected for simply transmitting knowledge; educators were vessels of knowledge, which they put forth to their pupils to pick up as best they could. In the previous system, under the apartheid government, education was a one-way process in which the adult (the teacher) was expected to “impart knowledge” to the otherwise less
competent child. This had been the status quo for centuries. Achievement was judged according to how much pupils had stored of the teacher’s information, opinions and value judgements and how far they accepted the teacher’s control over their learning. When I came out of college to begin my teaching career, I was told to go into the classroom and teach. I knew nothing of the literature that would introduce me to the subtleties of the teaching and learning process. Scheffler’s impression model (1977), developed from the tabula rasa theory of Locke (mid-seventeenth century), found further support in Plato who considered that teachers should rigidly control the experiential input in education and was simply not concerned with how learners learn.

**Political-educational background**

Education in apartheid South Africa, as a vehicle of undemocratic social control, created individuals who were not only short-changed, but also compartmentalised along racial and cultural lines. The system failed to address the democratic principles of access, full participation and equity. Under apartheid education, schools were divided according to “race”. Education accordingly entrenched and enhanced the divisions in society. These divisions reinforced the inequalities of a divided society. From an educator perspective, I deemed the curriculum irrelevant and monocultural, since it served to strengthen the dominance of one race over others. The apartheid school systems were achieving exactly what John Holt claims, namely sorting and indoctrinating learners instead of liberating them (Gutek, 1974). Education for “non-white” South Africans was a means of restricting the development of learners by distorting school knowledge to ensure control over the intellect of the learners and teachers, and propagating state propaganda (Kallaway, 1988). It was also extremely effective in creating huge numbers of passive learners.

The South African education system needed to change and it was very clear that it had to get rid of its discriminatory practices and its concomitant violation of human rights. In 1996, wide-ranging curriculum changes had to be introduced (Wallace, Mattson & Thomson, 2006:5). The first official curriculum statement of the new democratic South Africa was introduced, entitled Lifelong Learning Through a National Curriculum (1996), addressing the need for major reform in the South African education system. Following the 1994 democratic elections, the government proposed the transformation of education in schools so that “they would mirror the changes that are taking place in our society and strengthen the values and
practices of our new democracy …” adding that “… this is not negotiable” (Bengu, 1997:2). Transformation as a result of democracy was therefore considered to be a process in which institutions would develop and maintain an environment in which all role-players were afforded an equal opportunity to develop to their full potential and make a meaningful contribution to the institution and its objectives.

Outcomes Based Education (OBE) introduced new learning styles, implying a change from passive, rote learning to creative learning and problem solving through the active participation of learners in the learning process. The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) provided the structure for a new education curriculum in South Africa. The introduction of OBE in 1997 was a move to change the past system. OBE is a system of education based on outcomes. An outcome refers to anything in which an individual can demonstrate possessing knowledge or skill. Having ideas, the capacity to make decisions and the capacity to solve problems are among the possible outcomes that a learner can acquire in a learning environment. The essential outcomes enable learners to be equipped in life and to find employment. Learners who have learnt how to solve problems and make decisions and plan will be able to do a better job. OBE was regarded as a possible solution to the manifold social and political ills of South African society. It is characterised by active communication and grounded in interaction, multiple perspectives, holistic learning and social construction of learning.

The Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) informs an educational system that seeks to introduce egalitarian pedagogy in South African schools. The goals of this system are to create a new South African identity that encompasses critical consciousness, to transform South African society, to promote democracy and to magnify learner involvement in education. This system is based on the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996, which provides the basis for curriculum transformation in South Africa. Education and education curricula have a crucial role to play in realising the aim of developing the full potential of learners as citizens of a democratic South Africa (Department of Education (DoE), 2002:1). The aims of the Constitution include the following:

- To heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights;
- To improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person;
To lay the foundations for a democratic and open society in which government is based on the will of the people and every citizen is equally protected by law.

The RNCS also clearly states that educators and learners are to assume new roles. The new dispensation regards teachers as key contributors to educational transformation in South Africa. The RNCS envisages teachers who are qualified, competent, dedicated and caring. Teachers are expected to assume various roles, such as becoming mediators of learning, interpreters and designers of learning programmes and materials, leaders, administrators and managers, scholars, researchers and lifelong learners, community members, citizens and pastors, assessors and learning area or phase specialists (DoE, 2002:3). All these roles are crucial for nurturing a new identity in learners. Learners themselves are also expected to embrace the new values in the education system. The promotion of values is important not only for the sake of personal development but also to ensure that a new national South African identity is built on values very different from those that underpinned apartheid education (DoE, 2002:3). The kind of learner that is envisaged is one who will be inspired by these values, and who will act in the interests of society, based on respect for democracy, equality, human dignity, life and social justice. The curriculum seeks to create lifelong learners who are confident and independent, literate, numerate, multi-skilled, compassionate, and able to participate in society as critical and active citizens. The above roles of teachers and the learners are very different from those under apartheid education; the focus is on getting people involved in their own learning and taking action on that learning.

The values of the present South African education system are embedded in the Constitution of the Republic. The ten fundamental values are: democracy; social justice; equality; non-racism and non-sexism; Ubuntu (human dignity); an open society; accountability; rule of law; respect; and reconciliation. All these values are highlighted in the Manifesto drawn up by the Working Group on Values in Education (Ministry of Education, 2001:111). Educator responses and interactions within the context of the fundamental values of a democratic South Africa will be determined by the values that guide a teacher’s practice. As an educator, I realised that my practice did not exist within a black or white world, or a rich or poor world, and that I did not have to operate from a perspective of a perfect or an idealistic world. I do, however, aspire to construct a version of Utopia in my learners’ perception of themselves and in support of this I have significant responsibilities to carry out.
How do I begin to address this scenario? My research question rested on an appreciation that children are authoritative influences in their own learning, in their own lives, and in the learning and lives of others. I see two connections between what we collectively knew and new experiences that occurred. We had to become better at what we did at transforming practice from what it looked like to what we (my learners and I) wanted it to look like. From this analysis, I decided on the following principles to guide my practice:

- The importance of forming positive relationships.
- The value of finding foundations to offer praise.
- Inclusion must be intentionally achieved.
- Nobody is a lost cause (Ollerton, 2004:26).

Figure 1.1: Holistic presentation of my educational history and perspective (DC Geduld)
REFLECTING ON MYSELF

1. Writing an anecdote about events as illustrated in Figure 1.1

I am a teacher, coordinator of my school’s institutional level support team and a researcher, and this thesis explains how I generated my own living educational theory teaching to achieve *Ubuntu* and social justice. Person and teacher have become one: **Me.** My personal values are the same as the beliefs and convictions that guide my practice. At the heart of my efforts to foster learner participation is a clear and passionate sense of purpose. I try to be honest so as to cultivate my integrity, to present my thoughts as clearly as possible, and to be open-minded. I know that I am an enthusiastic and optimistic person, at times to the point of naiveté, and that I am seriously committed to my task. All these perceptible qualities mask the many insecurities I harbour; at times my low self-esteem and the feeling that I will never reach the crest of the mountain that teaching and the learning of my learners represents may become obvious; but on those occasions I count on my students’ empathy and compassion, qualities which a few have said they learnt from me, to create a mutual trust that liberates us all to be able to use our imaginations and endeavour to comprehend the world we live in and to create applicable motivation to voice democratic judgements based on justice, freedom and equality:

*The only kind of learning that significantly influences behaviour is self-discovered learning – truth that has been assimilated in experience.*

Carl Rogers

I make this claim on two accounts:

Firstly, I give this account against my own historical background, which served as the rationale for undertaking this study. My intention is to enable children who have been socially excluded from educational participation, to celebrate their value and recognise that they have a role to play in the public domain. If children and young people are to be empowered, to develop their talents to create, value and offer gifts, which can enhance their own lives and that of others, new pedagogical understandings and practices are needed. I agree with White’s (2006) conclusion:
“The school curriculum is not a thing in itself. It is a vehicle to realise larger aims... The school curriculum is – or should be – a vehicle to enable young people not only to lead a fulfilled personal life, but also to help other people, as friends, parents, workers and as citizens, to lead as fulfilled a life as their own” (p.151).

Social exclusion is a form of deprivation experienced by people who are denied the benefits enjoyed by most members of affluent societies through poverty or through belonging to a marginalised group and relates to the alienation or disenfranchisement of those people within society (Hickey & Du Toit, 2007). The South African education system is socially excluding millions of South African learners from participating in education through the inability of our schools to help them realise their full potential. Social exclusion leads to lower capabilities, which in turn reduces the prospects for escaping poverty and people’s ability to assert their rights. I also outline the relevance of my research in terms of the context of my current ontology. Although my research is a case study, I have deliberately used “in school” in the title because I hoped and believed that other educators may recognise that certain practice and insights were potentially adaptable and applicable in their own school.

The second count on which I claim to have generated a living theory of learning to teach for social justice is that I have attained justice for myself, in that I have found my own voice through pursuing my research into my practice. My research began with my questioning of the policy that labels some learners as having barriers to learning and development (Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001) so that they can access additional guidance within the school system. Engelbrecht and Green (2007:54) state that barriers to learning include: socio-economic barriers, discriminatory negative attitudes and stereotyping, inflexible curricula, inappropriate communication, lack of parental recognition and involvement, and a lack of human resources development. This concern developed into further inquiring of the literature, theory and research in the field. By challenging contemporary perceptions, I took the first step towards the transformation of my thinking and practice.

This thesis is an account of the transformation of my personal thinking and practice, as I began to develop my own new living theories about my practice. As I chose an action research approach for my research, my research is practice based, as outlined by Whitehead (1989), McNiff et al. (2003), McNiff and Whitehead (2005b), and Whitehead and McNiff (2006). As McNiff et al. (2003) explain, action research focuses on learning and embodies
good professional practice and praxis; it will hopefully lead to personal and social improvement; it is a response to a social situation; it demands critical thinking and political intention and the focus is on transformation specifically within myself. I brought about my own living educational theory as outlined by Whitehead (1989) in the process of the research. 

In living educational theories the explanations are produced by practitioner researchers in enquiries that are focused on living values more fully in the practice of enquiries of the kind “How do I improve what I am doing here?” Whitehead (in McNiff et al., 2003:165) 

The thesis gives an account of my learning at both theoretical and practical levels as I learn how to live my values more fully in my practice.

I have encouraged the continuous evaluation of my work to ensure that I am justified in the claims I am making. As an educator specialising in inclusive education, my interests lies in the socio-emotional aspects of children’s development, particularly children who are experiencing adversity in their lives that influences their psychological well-being. Anderson, Herr and Nihlen (2007:3) state that action research takes place in a setting that reflects a society characterised by conflicting values and an unequal distribution of resources and power. I came to realise that my practice was not monotonous and that my challenge would be to unearth, ascertain or create ways in which to support children to normalise their emotions positively as a defence against the negative psychological results of living in adverse circumstances.

The developmental nature of my research began when I asked, in my Master’s studies (Geduld, 2008): “How does the school management team (SMT) ensure that it embraces the interdependence and interrelatedness of each element (for example, school culture) of the school and focuses on the professional development of all educators and the school as an organisation?” I undertook my present research programme based on a sense of discrimination on behalf of my learners and myself. I was alarmed when learners I observed had to survive without the elementary freedom of action and choice that the better-off took for granted. I also observed that these learners were extremely vulnerable to ill-health, economic dislocation, and natural disasters. They were also frequently exposed to ill treatment by institutions of the state and society (specifically, to the social norms, values and customary practices within the family, the community, or the market that lead to exclusion of the socially disadvantaged) and were powerless to influence the key decisions affecting their lives.
Contained by my own practice, I experienced feelings of despair and helplessness to prevent the malfunction of certain learners, particularly within the discourse of adversity.

I also grew concerned that my learners lacked capacity or access to social opportunity. I believed myself incapable of achieving within them requisites for resilience, so that they would adapt to challenges and adversity. I believe that schools need to provide their learners with the social and psychological tools to manage the circumstances of their environment and its consequences, such as being provided by the Life Skills Programme of Drama in Education. Life skills are the abilities that help an individual to meet the challenges of everyday life. The primary aim of life skills education is to provide the knowledge, attitudes, values and skills needed by learners to deal with the demands and challenges of everyday situations and to promote and protect their own health and well-being. Life skills education should be coupled with a supportive social environment in schools. Within my own practice, I felt powerless as an educator to assist individual learners in identifying and coping with problems and finding resources within themselves and from others that would lead them to advocate, promote and maintain better health and emotional well-being through behavioural changes. Teachers are integral in making a difference in these times of increasing learner diversity. Accordingly, we need to find ways in teacher education to improve “the school success of diverse learner needs through culturally responsive teaching and for preparing teachers with the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to do this” (Gay, 2002:106).

**Extending understandings of inclusive education**

After completing my Master’s Degree in 2008 I felt I had a daunting task ahead of me; I was not yet comfortable in the big world of inclusion and the implementation thereof. I needed to find ways of making my school environment intimate, inviting and emotionally safe.

My story is a story of conflict, where, like Church (2004), I have consistently refused to give in to pressure to be silent and to allow injustice to flourish. My story text that is generated in my inquiry process can serve to transform “silence into dialogue, open out the ambiguities of the everyday, tease out the seamless labelling of the oppressed and capture the unruliness of human action” (Walker, 2003:3). I became increasingly aware of the profound influence of the words and language we use; I thus experienced the internal dialogue going on inside of me; encouraging me to improve my teaching.
The story tells about how I fought for an achieved justice, both for myself and for the children I work with, and so, in the same way as Sullivan (2006), my living theory of inclusive practice comes to hold within itself also a living theory of a practice of social justice. For too long I adhered to the safe shores in my life by making a choice to remained imprisoned by my fears. Within my classroom I was just doing the same things, constantly sticking to the known routine; however, I wanted to achieve different results with my learners.

In my thesis I express the belief that inclusion is grounded in the idea of justice. Like Young (2000), I believe that justice is a form of life in which people may exercise their capacity for self-development, but this can be achieved only within the conditions that enable self-determination, and those conditions are the conditions of freedom. I therefore show in my thesis how my practice became a context for development as freedom (Sen, 1999), in which people are at liberty to exercise their capabilities, without fear of exclusion because of their social or intellectual positioning within normative social contexts.

The thesis is a story of how I have learned to speak for myself, and come to regard myself not as a victim (being a victim is easy, because you do not have to assume any responsibility), but as a worthwhile person who has something to say for herself. I am unbendable in saying it, and desires to say it in an array of contexts. Most importantly, in the impoverished schools of South Africa, which is a context of significant import for influencing what counts as worthwhile knowledge, and who should be regarded as a worthwhile knower. My thesis is an articulation of my belief that teachers and learners should be counted “among those with the authority to participate both in the critique and in the reform of education” (Cook-Sather, 2002:3). It also articulates my commitment to a scholarship of teaching that allows teachers to learn from pedagogical experience and exchange that learning in acts of scholarship that contribute to the wisdom of practice across the profession (Shulman, 1999:17).

My story is about taking risks. But I realised that to take risks is to be most alive, because it forces us to be bold and to visit the unknown spaces of our lives. In my story, Woodrow Wilson spoke truth when he observed: You are here not merely to make a living. You are here to enable the world to live more amply, with greater vision, with a finer spirit of hope and achievement. You are here to enrich the world, and you impoverish yourself if you forget
that errand. Teacher education plays a significant role in influencing generations of future teachers.

This thesis is an essential text, I trust, and of significant import in relation to some implications for the future of teaching in marginalised contexts, both in South Africa and in international contexts, as I now make clear. Within our schools, I believe we need to provide our learners with the social and psychological tools to manage the circumstances of their environment and its consequences, as the learners partake in these inclusionary practices.

2. **Articulating values that underpin my practice**

The idea of valuing the individual and the learner has informed both my career path in teaching and my interest in research. According to McNiff and Whitehead (2006:24), action researchers choose which values they subscribe to and demonstrate their accountability. This rings true for me, as I chose to embrace and adopt the values stemming from the principles of:

- **Ubuntu**, kindness, humanity, compassion, and goodness, regarded as fundamental to the way Africans approach life;
- Respect
- Social justice;
- Accountability;
- Intention and attention
- Discussions and debates;
- Valuing difference;
- Leadership;
- Community.

I believe that inculcating a sense of value will help everybody attain higher levels of moral judgement. I was concerned that the value of *Ubuntu* was denied daily when my learners failed to display and failed to appreciate the value of human differences. I was not tuned into the culture of poverty and was not sensitive to the vast array of needs that the children of poverty brought to my classroom. I believed in the right to freedom of expression and choice, but my classroom practice fell far short of my ideals, because the access my learners had to education did not effectively address the socio-psychological disfigurements of poverty.
Mahatma Gandhi (Chadha, 1997) states that we want to provide only such education as would enable students to earn more; we hardly give any thought to the improvement of the character of the educated. In order to do this, warm and caring relationships need to be developed between teachers and children. *Ubuntu* is seen as one of the founding principles of post-apartheid democratic South Africa and is connected to the idea of an African Renaissance. In the political sphere, the concept of *Ubuntu* is used to emphasise the need for unity or consensus in decision-making, as well as the need for a suitably humanitarian ethic to inform those decisions.

Poverty is a condition that more and more of our nation’s children are encountering. Children pay an implausibly high price for being born poor. Each year, an increasing number of children are entering schools with a vast array of needs because of their circumstances, such as poverty, that educators are unequipped to meet. The apparent denial of appropriate teaching for learners from impoverished communities raised the issues of *Ubuntu*, which I considered required me to critically review my understanding of the practice of a resource, namely myself. I claimed this through my theory of learning to teach for *Ubuntu* and social justice, which is grounded in my practice. I realised that I needed to navigate pathways to help improve the educational achievement of children living in very poor families that may be at high risk for academic failure because of poverty.

My research and my research question evolved simultaneously. McNiff (see McNiff & Whitehead, 2002) sees the systematic action research cycle of observation, description, planning, acting, reflecting, evaluating and modifying not as a linear, sequential plan (see Figure 1.2). The action research process of living theory is a “spontaneous, self-creating system of self-enquiry” (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002:56), wherein generative transformational evolutionary processes influence and change the original research question such that new, different and exciting channels of enquiry are revealed in the process of the research (see 8.1).
I pondered the following broad questions:

- How could children who live in extreme poverty be assisted to experience a greater feeling of hopefulness and optimism?
- To what length could children be taught to engender positive emotions, despite the fact that they are dealing with distress?
- Is early intervention possible?
- Could, I, the teacher, assess improvement?
- Could any of the above activities improve or change professional practice?
- Could the project add to school policy decisions in the area of inclusive education?
- Could the project add to school policy decisions in the area of the Life Skill Programme for the Foundation Phase?
- Could Drama in Education be used as a tool to enhance self-confidence, critical thinking and problem solving, imagination, creative thinking, and cooperation collaboration?

Hence I am claiming that my living theory of learning to teach for Ubuntu and social justice is grounded in a deepening understanding of learners as possessing strengths and capabilities that need to be cultivated. In the words of Lyubomirsky and Abbe (2003:132), “In this study I would focus my research on studying the positive side of life alongside the negative side of life”. Buber (2000) outlines two different modes of relationship: the ‘I-It’ and ‘I-Thou’ relationships. The ‘I-It’ relationship is an objective separate relationship where there is little human connection between the two people, and the subject and object are divided. ‘I-Thou’
relationships have ‘no borders’ (Buber, 1970:56) and the ‘I’ and the ‘Thou’ are relational in a deeper communicative relationship. I am drawn to Buber’s ideas as he acknowledges what he understands to be the essence of being human. I like to use the term ‘human-ness’ when referring to this sense of wholeness, where “the ‘I and Thou’ is a holistic, direct, mutual relationship with no subject/object separation” (Yoshida, 2002:128).

In my understanding, a key characteristic of ‘human-ness’ is that it is relational. The realisation of one’s human-ness is the capacity to develop relationships where such relationships are grounds for personal growth. It is about engaging with the wholeness of people, accepting their human flaws and imperfections, as well as their strengths, as they create their identities in relation with others who occupy the same space as themselves (see Diagram 7.2).

3. **Extracting principles from the interpretation of the analysis**

Mills (2003:10) embraces the view that action research actually encourages educators to be life-long learners in their classrooms and in their practices. He is of the view that it gives educators the opportunity to set an example to their learners to demonstrate how knowledge is created.

This thesis illustrates how I did this in research cycles of action and reflection during my teaching of a group of Grade 6 learners over a three-year period (2008-2010). I accumulated a large volume of data over those years. The data is in my data archive, and is listed as Appendices 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 & 7 whilst Appendix 1 presents my ethical statements and samples of the permission to carry out the research. The DoE granted those learners who partook in my research resource-teaching hours.

4. **Analysing key events from the anecdotes**

**Lilies in muddy water**

I lived through many fundamental learning occurrences that underpin the cornerstones of my research. I often felt that the developmental focus of schools was on the provision of knowledge, at the expense of the attainment of skills and the establishment of a climate
promoting the opportunities to learn. I have conceptualised and organised my ideas by means of a metaphor, namely that of lilies growing in muddy water. I will use this metaphor to assist me in reaching my goal. Using a metaphor by definition is a very active process, because it is at the heart of understanding oneself, others around you and the world at large. According to Armstrong (2000), iso means the same, while morphic means to structure. An isomorphic metaphor is a story with a structure similar to some other event, perhaps as a way to offer solutions for educators’ problems.

I explored the creation and use of isomorphic metaphors in my personal development. Isomorphic metaphors could be used to coach educators to access their unconscious resources, to help educators find important goals, to find blocks and solutions and to identify potential consequences. Isomorphic metaphors could also help educators identify and voice their objections and resistances. I knew I learned best when I learned from others how to translate my experiences to my learners and, very important, when to find resources within myself and where to find them in my community.

I used this metaphor to exemplify that adversities (mud) that posed a serious challenge to the children in my study (who lived in extreme poverty on a daily basis), should motivate us to work harder to claim the beautiful lilies. The expanding petals of the flower are a metaphor for the expansion of the human soul. It symbolises purity, as the flower grows uncontaminated from the muddy waters. In our classrooms, we must use lilies (also known as lotus flowers) to inspire learners to continue striving for excellence, despite and/or whatever their circumstances. Lotus flowers (lilies), which usually take hold at the bottom of the pond, bring beauty and light from the murky darkness. Where they grow, children have been brainwashed not only to respect their environment but to fear it, lest they risk being trapped in mud where they could die without a soul from the community knowing about it.

The plant’s stem is easily bent, but is very hard to break, because of its many strong sinuous fibres. The fibre is representative of the plant’s support structures that need to be extremely strong and flexible so as to be able to withstand the vigorous challenges posed by the circumstances. Similarly, with the requisite and strong educational support structure in place, any child could emerge triumphantly from the worst circumstances. I believe that we as educators have a responsibility to encourage learners to recognise and utilise their own strengths to equip them with the necessary tools to become critical thinkers. The lotus could
therefore be compared to a child of great virtue for being able to live in muck without being tainted by it.

Lilies grow in muddy waters

Flower (learners living in extreme poverty)

Leaf (inclusivity, compassion for nourishment and growth)

Stalk (support systems)

I see myself as a navigator, controlling the direction I want to steer in education, rather than being controlled by it. When you navigate opportunity, you see the whole picture in your mind’s eye before you leave the dock. You have a vision of your destination; you appreciate what it will take to get there; you know who is a prerequisite on the team to be successful; and you are acquainted with the obstacles long before they emerge on the horizon. Teachers who are good navigators are capable of taking their learners just about anywhere.

THE ORGANISATION OF THIS THESIS

My thesis takes the form of an action enquiry, in which the underpinning question is, “How do I improve my practice?” (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006). As I encourage my learners to become independent learners and take responsibility for their own learning, I tell the story of my research in conversational form, by posing critical questions for myself and by addressing them through the form of my research. In Part One I ask: “What was my concern?” I addressed my question with an explanation why I engaged with this research.

In this section I outlined the background and contexts pertinent to my research. Crowell (2002:14) suggests: “Who I am and how I teach is woven together by the tapestry of my
life’s experiences and, I believe, by the ultimate quality of my commitments”. If I were to make a tapestry of the story of my research, I would use many different colours and shades, textures and techniques to represent the various nuances of my story. Because this is a tapestry of a real, living and organic story, the loose threads are never tidied away neatly; they are always unfinished and sometimes unravelled. Action research embraces the unfinished nature of its narratives, as each ‘ending’ is a new beginning, with a new set of questions (Said, 1994). McNiff et al. (2003) call this the “paradox of the ideal” where “we imagine the way things could be, but as soon as we have an answer, new questions arise” (2003:71). I believe that my own narrative would never be completed as an active living story. Instead this thesis would be presented as the best possible understanding at that given time (McNiff, 1993), while the act of living and understanding continues.

The first cycle of my action research design illustrates the interconnectedness of the different parts that comprise my research. The research design comprises five parts, with the intention of producing effective implementation strategies so as to ensure that my learners and I participate fully in education.

**CYCLIC PRESENTATION OF CHAPTERS**
The first chapter in Part One introduces the substantive concerns that motivate me to take action. These issues are around *Ubuntu – the essence of being human*. Ubuntu speaks particularly about the fact that human beings cannot exist in isolation. It speaks about our interconnectedness. We think of ourselves far too frequently separated from one another, while we are connected and what we do, impinge on the entire world. When you do well, it spreads out; it is for the whole of humanity. However, too many children are not ready to enter school and fail once they enter. They are physically unfit, engage in negative behaviours, make poor personal choices, or are victims of abuse and neglect. These children mostly come from poor families and from families with little education. I feel unfairly treated because my voice as a woman, as a mother, as a caretaker and as an educator is silenced. Many of my learners hesitate to participate in the learning process, because they lack confidence. I, on the other hand, as their educator, lacked enthusiasm and blamed everything and everyone for my educational dilemma.

In Part Two, I examine the question: *What are the central issues that concern me and why do these concern me?* I am troubled, because I believe that my learners and I have the opportunity to create educational experiences for ourselves that will not only heal our psychological damage, but also build our strengths, to enable us to achieve the best things in life. Children growing up in poverty and exclusion are likely to become entwined in a ‘cycle’, thus passing their baggage from generation to generation. My learners are experiencing inequality in access to resources and educational opportunities. They are often
discriminated against and, important, child poverty is a denial of their rights as children. It has severe long-term consequences, restraining them from achieving their full potential, negatively affecting their health, restraining their personal development, education and general well-being.

I am concerned that my potential and that of my learners is not being fully developed. In examining the context of my research, I will include current normative theories and practices in combating social exclusion. Freire (1993:14) declares that an individual’s ontological calling should drive him/her to act upon and transform his/her world, and in so doing proceed toward even new possibilities of a fuller and richer life, both individually and collectively.

Part Three of my study deals with the issues around methodology, as I pose the question: “How can I show the situation as it was and as it developed?” My methodology was informed by my developing understanding of theory, logic and practice. My research methodology will be discussed over two chapters. The first chapter will deal with my journey towards understanding, using a self-study action methodology. The second chapter will elucidate the process I engaged in to develop educational and practical theory from within my practice of teaching pupils who have been socially excluded from participation in education.

In Part Four, I explain how I theorised my practice by addressing the questions: “What did I do?” and “What was the importance of my actions?” These chapters will contain data from research episodes that are analysed and critiqued against the literature. My findings contain descriptions and discussions of my learning and that of my children. So that we will be enabled to say, “I know” (Macintyre, 2000:xii).

The second action research cycle of a Drama in Education Programme was being implemented. I was very reluctant to use drama activities, as I was never trained as a Drama in Education teacher. However, what encouraged me was the idea that children used drama to expand on their understanding of life experiences, to reflect on a particular circumstance, and to make sense of their world in a deeper way, working from the inside out. According to Wagner (1976), Dorothy Heathcote consciously employs the elements of drama to educate and aims “to bring out what children already know, but don’t yet know they know”.

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Drama in Education uses drama as an active, social process that draws on the children’s capacity for role-play, aimed at developing their powers of self-expression, self-awareness and self-confidence, and encouraging sensitivity and the power of the imagination (Andersen, 2004). Minor changes in teachers’ practices can effectively convey to students that what they think and say matter and that learning depends on the learners, and can give each learner great satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment (Watson, 2001).

The third action cycle; the action research investigation, interventions, the findings and reflections on those findings are conducted over three chapters: Chapter Five: Self-reflection involving the learners; Chapter Six: My own learning; and Chapter Seven: Teaming to promote social inclusion in school. I want to respect others and be respected by them. I want to be able to live through those who I lead. I want to be able to use my position of influence to make learners’ lives better. I want to improve the life chances of young learners. I want to move towards what I see is my purpose in life: enabling others to improve their world.

Through my thesis, I intend to explore the changing nature of the ‘I’ that I am:

- how as a teacher, I felt lost, young and inexperienced;
- how as a mother, I felt more stressed rearing an extremely visually impaired son, but became more confident and comfortable with my life, particularly after seeing him evolving into a competent young learner;
- how as an inexperienced senior leader, I initially struggled to find my own identity.

These provide examples of the complex nature of the ‘I’ that exists. I explore how the ‘I’ change through the roles that I have undertaken and how it has been responsive to the experiences that I have had. I explore how my journey has identified some key issues that I believe need to be embraced through education. I return to the original contributions that I make to knowledge through this thesis and further clarify them. I explore the nature of teacher-research and support my claims through reference to teacher-researchers. I argue that practitioner accounts need to be valued and circumstances need to be established to support the work of teacher-researchers in order to improve the quality of educational research that is emerging.
Part Five explains how I evaluated my interventions. How can I ensure that any conclusions I form, will be realistically just and accurate throughout my research process? In order to ensure that any research claims I make are realistic, truthful and just, I need to explain the grounds of my claims. First, I understood my learners to be a complex system that is more than the sum of the parts (Gay & Airasian, 2000:205).

In Part Six, I will ask myself: “How will I modify my practice in the light of my new learning?” I will explore the significance of my research and its implications for other colleagues’ learning and for new practices in teaching children from impoverished homes. I have developed an epistemology that explains how personal learning can occur through reciprocal interactions (Bandura, 1977:22). Knowing more about myself as a teacher and as an educator of teachers, stimulated me towards growth and shook me out of my complacency. I believe in enabling and emancipating (Freire, 1994) my learners; therefore, I have focused on their strengths rather than on their weaknesses.

The thesis ends by explaining my claim to have generated a living theory of learning to teach for Ubuntu. Ultimately, the social inclusion of all learners is not the end of my research journey, but rather the beginning of a new cycle of cultivating new talents and the unending possibilities dormant in our learners and continued professional development (see 7.7).

Teaming as used in my study between teachers and students calls for the development of human potential and centres on the following five interlinking principles, as articulated by Novak (cited in Davies & Brighouse, 2008).

1. People are valuable, able and responsible and should be treated accordingly.
2. The process of educating should be a collaborative, cooperative activity.
3. The process, the way we go about doing something, is the product in the making.
4. All people possess untapped potential in all areas of worthwhile human endeavour.
5. This potential can be realised by places, policies, programmes and processes designed to invite development, and by people who are intentionally inviting with themselves and others, personally and professionally.
1.1 INTRODUCING MY CONCERN

In the first year of my research programme (February 2009), I wrote in my journal:

In all my years of teaching primary school learners, I have never felt as voiceless and powerless as when a Grade 6 educator brought a learner in her class to me. She complained that the child had refused to talk and had not participated in classroom activities since entering her Grade 6 class. The school has been running for four weeks now since it opened on 20 January 2009. It was her 12th birthday. She was very emotional in class, crying because she wants to see her mom and wanted to be taken to her. I kept the girl in my class for the rest of the day and gave her a letter for her aunt who was her guardian. I am the Institutional Based Support Team (IBST) coordinator. Today, I had a visit from *Mica’s aunt. She informed me that the girl’s mother, who is her sister, dropped the child off at her mother’s home and had not been seen since. Mica is a Grade 6 learner at our school and had not completed her Grade 5 education at our school or any other school. She stayed with her granny till December 2008. The granny passed away at the end of December, and Mica is currently staying with her aunt, who brought her to Port Elizabeth after the granny’s funeral. Mica used to stay in Humansdorp, a small rural town 70km outside Port Elizabeth. Her aunt explained to me that it was difficult for her as a single parent to take care of four of her own children and Mica. She did not have the time or the energy to parent them all. Whilst talking to the aunt, I became aware that she was not sober and smelled of liquor (15 February 2009, reflective journal in data archive, Appendix 4).

Mica is but one of the many learners passing through our education system who receive very little or no educational stimulation at home.

I have written this thesis as an action research report in which I ask myself problematic questions about my practice. In this chapter and the ones that follow, I will ask myself:

❖ What is my concern?
❖ Why am I concerned?
❖ How do I show the reality of the current situation?
❖ What could I do about it?
My responses include the following: I am concerned that the learners entering our education system are socially excluded from participation in education through the inability of our society to keep all groups and individuals within reach of what we expect from our learners to realise their full potential. I hope to create responsiveness about this particular learning barrier, improve the academic performance of learners and possibly restore their self-esteem and confidence whilst understanding, reflecting on and planning the ontological and epistemological stance in my teaching. The central task of education is to implant a will and facility for learning; it should produce not learned, but learning people.

My values, as mentioned, are based on the principles underpinning the RNCS (2003:5), which give recognition to *Ubuntu*, social justice, inclusivity and human rights. However, I must state that I do not believe that any individual can force change in the way another individual thinks about him-herself and consequently how that individual feels about him-herself. It is possible, on the other hand, to treat an individual in a way that changes that individual’s feelings about him-herself. This change is encouraged when we create platforms where all role-players can express their fears, experiences, aspirations, opinions and knowledge. The best-laid teaching plans may go askew if the overall milieu of the school is not supportive, encouraging and stimulating to all stakeholders (Davidoff & Lazarus, 2002:vii).

1.2 I AM CONCERNED THAT PUPILS FROM IMPOVERISHED HOMES ARE SOCIALLY EXCLUDED FROM PARTICIPATION

(a) Social exclusion

Social exclusion is a multidimensional process of progressive social rupture, detaching groups and individuals from social relations and institutions and preventing them from full participation in the normal, normatively prescribed activities of the society in which they live (Silver & Miller, 2006). Whereas poverty and inequality refer to the distribution of valued resources, social exclusion refers to a social relationship that involves two parties, namely the excluders and the excluded.

**Social exclusion** in schools can lead to **social rejection**. This occurs when an individual is deliberately excluded from a social relationship or social interaction by his peers or adults. Rejection was witnessed by me both in an active and non-active way; it was demonstrated
actively through bullying, teasing or ridiculing; or passively by ignoring a person or giving him/her the “silent treatment”. The experience of being rejected is subjective phenomena for the recipient and can be perceived even when it is not actually present. I was concerned that prolonged experience of rejection could lead to a number of adverse psychological consequences, such as loneliness, reduced self-esteem, aggression and depression. It could also lead to feelings of insecurity and a heightened sensitivity to future rejection. The relevant learners’ educators communicated to me that they seemed very withdrawn and sad and that many tended to remain silent when they felt anxious or troubled. I was concerned, because children who chose not to respond or to communicate their feelings or ideas manifested a low self-esteem, a low self-image, and very limited future-directedness. Whilst I worked with these learners, I experienced that they had very low concentration levels, which added to my concern.

Poverty, even in South Africa, still carries a significant stigma and their peers, the school and the broader community may exclude children who find themselves in an impoverished home situation. Poverty entails not only deprivation of economic or material resources, but also a violation of human dignity. Poverty as a cause of deprivation of capabilities includes situations of low income, undernourishment, illiteracy, premature mortality, social stigmatisation, and low self-esteem. However, more important than any academic definitions of poverty is the lived experience of people in poverty and, for me the lived stories of impoverished children at my school.

At its most basic, poverty is experienced as a source of pain. There is often a perception that people in poverty themselves are to blame for their circumstances – even if they are striving hard to overcome them – which can lead to a sense of stigmatisation or shame. If people in power (educators in schools) refuse to listen or respond to the needs of people in poverty (the learners in their care), as happens all too often, a sense of helplessness and hopelessness may also be experienced. People in poverty do influence the course of their own lives: but poverty makes it harder for them to do so. This cohort of impoverished learners can become either a reward or a burden to their country, depending on the competence of government, schools, communities and families to develop their human potential.

Education is a powerful means for reducing poverty and inequality. Poverty and extreme inequality are still an integral part of the legacy of apartheid, especially in the education
system. Institutions were recognised along racial lines and drenched with the dogmas of apartheid and entrenched inequality. As a corollary of the unequal distribution of resources, historically white colleges still tend to be well resourced, while historically black institutions tend to be poorly resourced. This has impacted negatively on the quality of teaching and learning and presented one of the most intimidating challenges for the new democracy (National Curriculum Statement, 2003). Willan, Parker-Rees and Savage (2007:122) suggest that tackling multiple disadvantages early in the lives of children may help break the cycle of social exclusion.

(b) **Inclusive education/Inclusion**

Within the context of education, the concept of “inclusion” or “inclusive education” refers to one of the major challenges facing education in South Africa, namely, how schools can be continually restructured in order to respond positively to the diverse needs of all learners.

The following features of inclusive education and training highlight this challenge:

- Acknowledging that all children and youth can learn and that all children and youth need support.
- Enabling education structures, systems and learning methodologies to meet the needs of all learners.
- Acknowledging and respecting differences in learners, whether due to age, gender, ethnicity, language, class, disability or HIV status.
- Acknowledging that learning also occurs in the home and community, within a formal and informal manner.
- Changing attitudes, behaviours, methodologies, curricula and environments to meet the needs of all learners.
- Maximising the participation of all learners in the culture and the curriculum of educational institutions and uncovering and minimising barriers to learning.

Equality of opportunity or the lack of it has an impact on everybody’s life (Willan *et al.*, 2007:120). Children are not in control of their own lives; therefore, it is imperative that the adults on whom these children are dependent for their social and economic position protect them and to treat them equally. Can South Africa as a country rightfully say that it upholds
and implements inclusive education as laid down in the Constitution? Inclusion can be seen as much more than just a simple issue of placement: It also entails the quality of learning and participation (Rouse & Florian, 1997; Mittler, 2000). Inclusion provides people with the opportunity to function in society on active levels and to enjoy equality and respect and have the right to be different.

1.3 I AM CONCERNED THAT LEARNERS ARE UNFAIRLY TREATED BECAUSE THEY LACK CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS (RELATEDNESS) AND FRIENDSHIPS

Let us not forget that children from affluent homes are often in trouble but their parents “buy them out of trouble” so that their cases do not appear in the written notice record. Money buys silence. Their dysfunction remains hidden. Who helps these children? There is agreement between researchers that children affected by poverty and social exclusion more frequently display emotional and behavioural problems than children from more affluent homes. Friends are vital to school-age children’s healthy development. Research has found that children who lack friends can suffer from emotional and mental difficulties later in life. Friendship provides children with more than just fun playmates: it helps children develop emotionally and morally. In interacting with friends, children learn many social skills, such as how to communicate, cooperate and solve problems. They practise controlling their emotions and responding to the emotions of others. They develop the ability to think through and negotiate different situations that arise in their relationships. Having friends even affects children’s school performances. Children tend to have more positive attitudes about school and learning when they have friends. In short, children benefit greatly from having friends.

Cicero writes: Now friendship possesses many splendid advantages, but of course the finest thing of all about it is that it sends a ray of hope into the future, and keeps our hearts from faltering or falling by the wayside. For the man who keeps his eye on a true friend keeps it, so to speak, on a model of himself: For this reason, friends are together when they are separated, they are rich when they are poor, strong when they are weak, and a thing even harder to explain – they live on after they have died, so great is the honour that follows them, so vivid the memory, so poignant the sorrow (Welty & Sharp, 1991:72).

I had two primary concerns regarding the learners that were being sent to me:
1. They did not have friends with whom they interacted at school.
2. They did not communicate with anybody at school.

Relationships amongst learners are important, because they could potentially serve as systemic buffers. I claim that children learn from each other during socialisation and in their relationships. The knowledge gained during their communication and interaction may enhance their confidence and self-esteem. I found that the children I was working with were experiencing school life in a way that was contrary to my values of *Ubuntu* and social justice. During the critical school years, children either learn to be competent or productive or to feel inferior, which could have long-lasting social, intellectual and emotional consequences (Csikszentmihalyi & Schneider, 2000).

During my teaching career, I have become extremely aware of the suggestions made by Piaget and Vygotsky, namely that the key mechanism for child development is the cognitive conflict that is created through social interaction; a contradiction between a child’s existing understanding and his/her experiences with others, especially peers slightly older or more knowledgeable, which causes him/her to question current beliefs and seek new levels of understanding. My experiences are supported by Vygotsky (1978:90), who argues that “Learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and with his peers”. Let me explain further. In my work situation, learners cannot be seen as separate from social influences and their learning must be viewed as culturally and contextually specific.

The Guidelines for Inclusive Learning Programmes (DoE, Pretoria, 2005) suggest that teachers can assist learners in overcoming socio-economic barriers in that:

- Teachers need to create a welcoming and supportive environment for learners and be sympathetic to and understanding of their needs.
- The social environment of the school needs to be comforting, listen to the learners to identify their need, and be able to detect distress and depression.

1.4 *I AM CONCERNED THAT MY LEARNERS AND I DO NOT HAVE PILLARS OF SUPPORT*
According to Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), there are three essential components in building human strength, namely:

- Positive emotions;
- Positive characteristics, skills and capabilities;
- Positive systems.

No person can operate in isolation; we all need the nested arrangements of families, school, neighbourhood, communities and societies (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2006). Not all systems into which my learners are born are positive and enabling. Many of my learners return to an empty nest in the afternoons after returning from school and receive no parental supervision to meet their needs after school. Many of these children have to be supported by the larger community, which adopts the role of the extended family. This scenario can be in the best interest of the child, or it can have detrimental effects on the development of his self-esteem and self-concept. My learners’ home environments in general are socially impoverished and they experience very little mutual interaction with their parents and/or caregivers.

My learners received very little physical and emotional support at home; this has at times resulted in aggression towards their peers and acting out behaviour as a form of self-protection. The constantly changing care-givers add to the insecurity and turmoil they experience. My learners’ basic need for food, shelter and education often so significant that they struggled to overcome them. Too often, my learners came to school in the morning without having had anything to eat since they left school the previous day. The education of children at my school was severely fraught, and they became effectively excluded from it and from its opportunities, entitlements and benefits. We needed to embrace a systemic paradigm in which the structures and functioning of the education system were called into question (Engelbrecht & Green, 2007:99).

Perhaps the most interesting thing shown by research findings on motivation is that the things that matter and motivate most people are not the hard tangible things such as money and material things, but the softer, less tangible things, like the freedom to develop one’s own ideas and a sense of being valued.
“We are one thing to one man and another thing to another.” “...There are all sorts of different selves answering to all sorts of different social reactions” (Mead, 1934 as cited in Whitehead, 2003:5).

I allowed myself to become too sensitive to strong external influences. Daily examples of dishonest practices in the government establishment of my country and the lack of the basic enforcement of the laws written in our Constitution to protect law-abiding, ordinary citizens from the aggressions of the populism that panders to misery seeped down into the fabric of our society. When I experienced my students unconsciously mirroring the evils of our diseased society as something natural and good, I reacted strongly to plagiarism, selfishness and frivolous laziness.

My research originally took the form of a mission to understand my work practices and their educational value. The focus of my research changed as my understanding of my work evolved and as I began to develop my evolving living educational theory, which I generated from my practice. I outlined this change of focus in greater detail in the course of this thesis. I examined how the focus changed from being an investigation into the nature of inclusivity and collaborative projects to how I developed an understanding of how traditional approaches to learning could be inadequate for many learners and what I needed to do so that all my learners could celebrate their capacity to learn. This understanding led to my evolving new epistemology that is located in dialogical, holistic and inclusional ways of coming to know. In the research process, I developed an understanding around these inclusive projects so that I began to perceive them as processes for developing spirituality and holism in education, as I understood it. Palmer talks about spirituality in education:

\[
I \text{ see the ancient and abiding human quest for connectedness with something larger and more trustworthy than our egos – with our own souls, with one another, with the worlds of history and nature, with the invisible winds of the spirit, with the mystery of being alive.}
\]

(Palmer, 1998a:6)

1.5 THE IMPORTANCE OF TESTING THE VALIDITY OF MY CLAIM TO KNOWLEDGE
McNiff (2006:157) refers to the importance of producing authenticated evidence that I demonstrated to myself the internal validity of my claim to knowledge. As I create my living theory, it is important to demonstrate that I have produced evidence to test and support my claim to knowledge so that the theory can be validated and legitimated. I outlined in detail how I worked towards explaining how I was transforming my ontological values into critical epistemological standards of judgement as I assess the validity of my work throughout this thesis and in particular in Chapter Four (see McNiff, 2005b). I have collected data to support my claim to knowledge. As I found aspects of data that was commensurate with the standards of practice that I have established from my value base, I have presented it as evidence. I have shared this evidence with other critical thinkers so as to have it validated in stringent terms and presented it to the wider public for legitimation purposes.

Was my research to remain purely at the level of narrative, however, my claims to knowledge would have little validity or significance. Conscious of the fallibility of my critical synthesis and the possibility of ideological bias and illusion, my research addressed the issues of truthfulness and meaning as the basis of the credibility, coherence and significance of my account. I emphasised the “dialectical reflexivity” (Winter, 2002:148) of the narrative, acknowledging the contingent nature of my understanding and the possibility of alternative interpretations. The collaborative nature of my research was fuelled by a dialogical engagement with the views, insights and perceptions of others – teachers, colleagues, students and young adults (Appendices 2 and 3).

Having indicated my epistemological and ontological values in earlier paragraphs, I stated at the beginning that I chose values, embodied in practice, as my living standards of judgement and explanatory principles. I claimed that my living theory and claims to knowledge originated from my practice and the advocating values underpinning it. My story served as a recounting and describing process by which I externalised my embodied tacit knowledge (Polyani, 1958) as explicit living theories of learning and practice.

I grounded my narrative and my claims to understanding my educational development in Polyani’s (1958:308) view of commitment and responsibility. He describes the principle determining heuristic choice in the course of scientific research as “a sense of growing proximity to a hidden truth” which emerges within the “framework of commitment … as a
sense of responsibility exercised with universal intent” (ibid:310). Recognising the hazards of self-set standards, I nonetheless aligned myself with Polyani when he states:

*The paradox of self-set standards is eliminated, for in a competent mental act the agent does not do what he pleases, but compels himself forcibly to act as he must. He can do no more, and he would evade his calling by doing less* (Polyani, 1958:315).

In this way, I was acting “expressively” – an act, according to Palmer (1990:24), taken to express a conviction, a leading, a truth that is within me, and an expression of my personal and professional integrity in the swampy lowlands (Schon, 1995) of practice. I drew on insights from Habermas (1987) and Lonergan (1972) to develop my criteria for social validity claims, which served as standards of judgement in fostering inter-subjective agreement and understanding. I have worked to ensure that my story reflects Habermas’ (ibid:2) validity criteria, viz. that it is comprehensible, that it is a true proposition, that it is trustworthy and is made with awareness of a recognised normative background. I embraced Lonergan’s (1972:20) “transcendental precepts” as a validity framework for my practice and research by being *attentive, intelligent, reasonable and responsible* (Dunne, 1985:60).

Finally, I turned to the ethical criteria influencing my action research. From the outset, my ontological and epistemological values were reflected in my decision to conduct my research *with* rather than *on* participants and to regard them as co-creators of their own living theories through a pedagogy of accompaniment rather than one that is didactic and propositional. My status of ‘guest’ rather than permanent member of staff in my practice settings in schools all over the country presented me with the ethical dilemma of fidelity to my values in contexts and settings that on occasion subscribed to different values and epistemologies.

The key ethical dilemma throughout my research was the struggle to avoid becoming a “living contradiction” (Ilyenkov, 1977), where my espoused values of respect, mutuality and inclusion would be denied were I to adopt a coercive, directive and propositional logic and strategy of educative engagement. As my story unfolded, I described how I addressed this dilemma by aligning myself with Schon’s (1995) ideas of a new epistemology and adopting “living logics” (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006:39) in developing a congruent epistemology of practice. As before, I drew on an extensive body of data to test and ground the validity of my claims to knowledge.
Embracing living logics was a risky business (ibid:40), a dynamic, transformative process that resists propositional finality, and accepts the impermanent, ‘for now’ nature of my research. How then can it be judged by the reader as a distinct contribution to existing knowledge of my field? Like Hartog (2004), I proposed the following questions as an approach in judging my work, in addition to traditional processes of critique:

- Does my inquiry account portray a living expression of Polanyi’s (1958) ideas of ‘commitment and responsibility’?
- Are Habermas’ (1987) social standards of validity and Lonergan’s (1972) ‘transcendental precepts’ reflected in my narrative account?
- Have I articulated my espoused values as my living standards of judgement – does my living theory account of practice demonstrate these values expressed in practice through collaborative, generative, inclusive and caring educative relationships?
- Have I expressed concerns about the ‘voicelessness’ and disenfranchisement of young people – did my theory and practices of inclusive participatory education demonstrate an effective intervention in addressing these concerns in an effective, original and ethically transformative manner?
- Does my story of my ‘lilies grow in muddy water’ provide a critical, congruent and reflective approach to understanding and improving my practice?

Writing and actively participating in this thesis reflected my capacity to imagine both a future where my values are realised and the practical, creative steps to bring it about. Introducing my thesis to the public domain reflected my commitment to having the validity of my claims to knowledge critiqued and validated.

1.6 SUMMARY

For a very long time I have been pondering how I could get my learners to participate in their own education. I decided to take action, but the cosy comfort zone in which I found myself reminded me of my limitations. Also, I lacked the confidence to make a difference. I realised that I was a slow learner, but when I went on this journey of discovery, I constantly reminded
myself to model graceful imperfections and that I should feel free to accept mistakes, to apologise often and, most important, to try harder the next time.

In this chapter, I outlined my concerns about the social exclusion of my learners and myself. My dedication and loyalty to my work compelled me to communicate my concerns. It is Eichhorst (2001) who articulates that it sometimes takes someone else to believe in you before you will believe in yourself. In the depths of winter, I finally learned there was an invincible summer in me. This compelled me to believe that each of us lives in duality; we are all bipolar people. We have a part that lifts us up and another part that pulls us down. We praise and criticise ourselves. Nobody will ever put us up or put us down as much as we do, because no one will ever think as much or as intensely about us as we think about ourselves.

In the chapter that follows, I articulate my own assumptions, beliefs and values regarding the social exclusion of learners at my school from full participation. I was challenged by this idea, because according to me it was a replay of a movie in which I was the lead actress so many years ago; the same script – only different actors. In my role as teacher and as researcher, it allowed me insight into my own inner world. In the following chapter, I analyse the milieu to my work in the light of current literature on three fronts:

- The practical issues of social exclusion
- Theoretical models of inclusion and exclusion
- PCS analysis (P-personal, prejudice and practices, C-cultural, reflected in the commonalities, consensus and conformity, S-structural, social division reflected in legal frameworks).
CHAPTER TWO
PATHWAYS FOR PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, and following the action research methodology I have adopted for writing this thesis, I propose reasons for my concerns. I set out the background to my research and the concepts that informed the formulation of my basic research question: How do I create learning opportunities for learners from impoverished communities who have been socially excluded from reaching their full potential?

In generating my living theory of inclusive educational practice, I also outline how, because inclusion is premised on a particular form of justice, my living theory of inclusive educational practice is grounded in a living theory of justice. Because my living theory of inclusion is inclusive, it includes concerns that emerge as factors that contribute to inclusive and just practices, such as a commitment to Ubuntu, respect for the individual’s ability to learn, and issues of social justice. It also includes consideration of which issues emerge as excluding factors, such as isolation and marginalisation. I consider these issues in relation to how I consider values, and which values can be understood as giving meaning to inclusive practices. I make my claims to knowledge in relation to how they are grounded in my values, and I test those claims by showing how they can be assessed in relation to the values, now articulated as living critical standards of judgement (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006).

I identify my own living standards of judgement as whether or not I can show how I develop inclusive educational practices that include all children, and I take as my lowest common denominator the idea that the most marginalised child will feel included and able to make a unique contribution and speak with his/her own voice. I judge the validity of my claim to knowledge in terms of whether I show that I test those claims against these articulated standards of judgement (Whitehead, 2003a; 2004a & b; 2005a & b); and I test the ethical validity of my practice against McNiff’s (2006b) idea that a practice that is grounded in a value can be justified when the value has been shown to be tested against its own potential defeat, and remains intact. My thesis demonstrates throughout my refusal to abdicate my value-based position, informed as it is by my own sense of responsibility that it is my job to
ensure that the marginalised are not marginalised in my context. I want to find ways of influencing wider educational practices, and the policy debates that inform them; thus ensuring that marginalisation, when it is seen as a normative practice, is questioned, and that those who question it are not intimidated by powerful institutional voices, or by the systemic structures that are maintained by those who speak in their own interests but not necessarily in the interests of others.

I began by describing my reaction when visiting colleagues’ classrooms in my capacity as Coordinator of the Staff Development Team (SDT), for the purpose of educator assessment. In the school context whilst completing my Master’s studies, I described the manner in which I worked (through dialogue and modelling alternative, inclusive and democratic practices and procedures) towards the implementation of a process where learners are recognised as key members of the school community. Learners need to be provided with a forum where their voice is heard and an opportunity is provided to contribute to improving the quality of life and relationships within their schools. However, the implementation of the above-mentioned study did not run as smoothly as I envisaged.

I was deeply disgruntled when I witnessed that teachers did not afford learners the opportunity to talk in their classrooms and express themselves. The educators tended to silence the learners, especially those who bore the evidence of impoverishment, such as an inappropriate school uniform. Teachers believe that they have better control over their overcrowded classrooms if learners remain quiet in class. A teaching methodology of top-down is implemented, in which educators are the sole providers of knowledge and information, thereby stripping learners of the opportunity to become participants in their own learning through self-discovery and critical thinking.

Freire connects the transfer of knowledge methodology with supporting ‘elite authority’ (Shor & Freire, 1987:76), which is coherent with ‘control from above’, which acknowledges the nature of power-constituted relationships that can exist in educational settings. Such links between power (in the form of dominance) and control can be seen in many teacher/student interactions (for example, where students must ask the teacher for permission to share their understanding and experiences). I was always part of such an elite authority, whether I was the one who received or gave the knowledge. However, as I evolved and became more conscious of these hegemonies, I realised that they did not have to continue to exist. Bearing
Shor and Freire’s (1987) ideas around control and power in mind, I believe O’Hanlon’s insights are helpful, as she pinpoints that the education system, and those who are part of that system, have a choice. As a teacher, I choose to curtail and perpetuate forms of injustice in the education system. I am now aware that my work involves choices between closing down learning processes for people or opening up pathways and opportunities for learning. Lynch’s writing is extremely helpful in emphasising this point.

The cultural hegemonies in education are not only class hegemonies, as suggested by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977); there are also gender and racial hegemonies. The gendered (and indeed classist, racist and ethnocentric) nature of knowledge is evident in what is omitted from schooling in its entirety, in the forms of knowledge and understanding that are left outside of formal schooling (Lynch, 1999:279).

I know that Grade 6 learners generally tend to talk almost ceaselessly. Perhaps the easiest way for educators to deal with this is to forbid speaking. Incredulously, there are educators in whose classrooms children are not allowed to talk, in which the aphorism “Children should be seen and not heard” applies most of the teaching day. I observed how these learners never interacted, silently staring at their educators from the corners; I called them the taciturn onlookers from the shadows of the blackboard whilst I was completing the teachers’ assessment forms in their classrooms. My reaction to these practices compelled me to take a deeper look at what I taught, how I understood learner participation in the classroom, and how I explained it to my colleagues and the parents of learners.

In this chapter, I unpack my educational and social values and how I saw these values methodically denied in my practice as a co-ordinator of the IBST and the SDT. This incongruity between societal values and my individual educational values was a new understanding for me, and in making these values unambiguous, I came to recognise that my professional values were embedded in ideas to do with justice and structures of knowledge. In society, values are socially shared ideas about what is “right” and “wrong”, “good” and “bad”. Values are general ideas – broad and abstract. They vary from one society to another, and one way to study a society, is to examine the values held by its members. Values are important, because it is from them that we derive the norms or rules that govern our everyday lives. Values help guide behaviour in unfamiliar situations and may lead to the formation of
specific norms. Generally speaking, we have a propensity to hold on to our values and are unlikely to compromise them.

South African society, although founded on aspirations of freedom and democracy, continues to reproduce forms of dominance and injustice that reinforce the marginalisation of people. According to Harber (2000) and Chisholm and Vally (1996), apartheid has left a legacy of poor physical conditions and serious shortcomings in the provision of resources, facilities and equipment in many schools in South Africa. Moreover, there is evidence that the educational system is still influenced by the ethos, systems and procedures inherited from the apartheid past (DoE, 1996). Chisholm and Vally (1996) have established that in many schools, relationships between principals, teachers, learners and parents are characterised by mistrust, conflict, dissatisfaction, isolation, poor communication and a lack of respect.

I analyse the discrepancy and the clash of values in my practice under these headings:

- How pedagogy influences my practice;
- Socio-cultural view of learning;
- The need for the effective implementation of life orientation in Grades 4 – 6;
- Holistic education;
- Consciousness and education;
- I say that children should be able to communicate and express themselves.

### 2.2 THE APPROPRIATENESS OF PEDAGOGY

The question of what constitutes good or effective teaching has challenged educational researchers since the infancy of formal education. After many journal entries, I concluded that competent teachers employed an array of teaching strategies because there was no single, universal approach that suited all situations. Different strategies used in different combinations with different groupings of students will improve learning outcomes. Some strategies are better suited to teaching certain skills and fields of knowledge than others. Some strategies are better suited to certain student backgrounds, learning styles and abilities.
This leads me to my next question: What is effective pedagogy and how can it influence and improve my practice?

Effective pedagogy, incorporating an array of teaching strategies that supports intellectual engagement, connectedness to the wider world, supportive classroom environments, and recognition of difference, should be implemented across all key learning and subject areas. Effective pedagogical practice promotes the wellbeing of students, teachers and the school community. It improves students’ and teachers’ confidence and contributes to their sense of purpose for being at school; it builds community confidence in the quality of learning and teaching in the school. It implies that an investment in education, targeted at the most disadvantaged people and communities, will assist them in breaking out of the cycle of unemployment, underemployment, marginalisation and reduced participation in our society.

There was mounting evidence that some learners in our school community were being left behind. The challenge was to ensure that those not doing so well did not fall further behind, resulting in a permanent underclass of disadvantage in a chronically divided society.

Every now and then it takes genius, and heart, to say what everyone already knows but cannot quite vocalise. Education needs to take learners’ needs and social circumstances into account. To help them through dialogue rather than enforcing top-down curriculums in order to fit them to the rhythms of the dominant socioeconomic powers; to challenge them to think critically about their place in society and the world (“conscientisation”); to encourage them to envision what they can do and where they can go. Paulo Freire did not just express these praiseworthy goals, but showed through his work how he actually helped accomplish them among people written off as inferior peasants with no voice in world affairs.

Classrooms still exist in which teachers dominate communication, whereas learners are allocated the role of passive listeners, speaking only in order to answer the questions posed by their teachers. In such classrooms, learners are unlikely to be encouraged to ask questions, even to seek clarification and understanding of the subject being taught. However, productive pedagogies have direct implications for how teachers should approach the task of managing student behaviour by means of two dimensions, namely (Hayes, Mills, Christie & Lingard, 2006:38):
Supportive classroom environment
Recognition of difference

Within a supportive classroom environment, teachers are expected to foster an environment in which students are self-regulating and able to influence classroom activities and how these activities are implemented. Supportive classrooms are characterised by student engagement in academic tasks and respect for the contributions of their fellow students, irrespective of their ability. From a traditional perspective, supportive classrooms are well managed and distinguishable by the time devoted to engaging students. By contrast, classrooms that are less supportive are characterised by constant verbal scolding by teachers and where students, it seems, need to be constantly coerced into engaging with the curriculum. What is important here is that discipline in supportive classrooms is achieved as much by the nature of teaching in those classrooms as it is by behaviour specific strategies.

The “recognition of difference” dimension encompasses the inclusivity of non-dominant groups. In classrooms that recognise difference, there is a genuine acceptance and tolerance of diversity. Indeed, diversity is considered a positive element within the classroom, which must be celebrated and used as a focal point for the curriculum. While the emphasis of diversity is typically on cultural differences and disabilities, implicit in statements about what constitutes non-dominant groups and students with “different backgrounds”, is the view that students who find it difficult to adjust to and meet the expectations of school in terms of appropriate behaviour, must also be accommodated and supported. According to Foucalt (1997), a good critical education would provide students with opportunities to understand the ways in which various “regimes of truth” have been constructed, thus encouraging learners to understand the intimate relationship between power and knowledge.

However, if students from impoverished backgrounds do not experience classrooms in which they are intellectually challenged, I am of the opinion that the exercise would constitute a matter of social injustice. When pedagogic disadvantage is combined with deficit thinking, that is, thinking that simply blames students and/or their families for students’ lack of academic success and fails to consider the contribution of schooling – then schooling fortifies and multiplies the broader inequalities in society (Hayes et al., 2006:37). A challenge for me in my classroom practice was to make the curriculum relevant to my learners’ experiential world. When I was able to do this, I established a bridge that motivated my learners to
connect with the learning process; a motivation that is often missing when the curriculum is divorced from the lives of the learners.

When I began to adopt a self-reflective approach in my work I considered the ways I related to the children in the context of realising their full potential and critically examining my own teaching style for discrepancies. I am reminded of the importance of the statement made by Hick, Kershner and Farrell (2009:38), that “Inclusive practice is concerned with actions and activities, the things that teachers do that give meaning to the concept of inclusion.”

Goodson (1992) advocates that because teaching is intensely personal, it is important that we understand the teachers as persons and the value they hold, because those values impact on their teaching styles. All aspects of our lives are intertwined; we are not one moment teachers and people with lives and histories the next.

Journal Entry, 13 May 2009:
My mother never read to me as a child neither did I witness her reading because she herself had very little reading abilities. Teaching a child to read was the responsibility of the teacher. I was never read to prior to me starting formal schooling. I learned the individual letter and then the sound. From there I moved to individual words, from words to sentences, to paragraphs, to pages, to stories. I learned to read by building up the parts, bottom to top. Specialists in reading would say I was a part-to-whole reader. However, I never loved to read. When my son was born visually impaired, I was forced to expose him to the written word more than was expected of me as an extra stimulant. I started reading baby books to my kids. I loved the story of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs and thought the Goldilocks story had been written for my eyes only. Here my love for reading really started: I was totally hooked on books. I could not resist a book, nor pass a bookstore without entering. Reading specialists would say my children, Aygan and Cara, are whole-to-part readers. They look at a picture of the puzzle first and only then put the pieces together. Do they love to read? Yes. Do they read for pleasure? Yes. Do they enjoy school? Yes. Can they do mathematics? Yes. Can they think critically and independently? Yes. Are they confident kids? Yes.

From early in my career, I was very interested in the different ways in which children learned, but in my personal practice, I never employed various techniques in teaching the learners in my care. It was only when I started my Doctoral studies that I went back to the drawing
board. I realised that my pedagogical path has many twist and turns along its surprising course.

My approach to learning comes from a pedagogical tradition that taught me that children learn with their minds. I assumed that learning was a cognitive process, and only a cognitive process. Wink and Wink (2004:8) declare that the face of love in a classroom can be a deep and abiding respect for people and for learning; it can demonstrate safety. It can radiate a freedom to think, to grow, to question.

It is recognised that current strategies and programmes have largely been insufficient or inappropriate with regard to the needs of children and youth who are vulnerable to marginalisation and exclusion. Where programmes targeting various marginalised and excluded groups do exist, they have functioned outside the mainstream: special programmes, specialised institutions, and specialist educators. Notwithstanding the best intentions, too often the result has been exclusion and ‘second-rate’ educational opportunities that do not guarantee the possibility to continue studies, or differentiation becoming a form of discrimination, leaving children with various needs outside the mainstream of school life and later, as adults, outside community social and cultural life in general (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), 1999a).

I approve of the value of respect for the capabilities and uniqueness of the individual in classroom participation. Conversely, there is incompatibility between the rhetoric of appropriate pedagogy and the practice of its rhetoric. I address this incompatibility in my research by working towards practices that endorse access and amplify participation by learners in their own learning. My actions are grounded in my own belief that each learner has distinctive potential, which is in keeping with my educational values. At the core of inclusive education is the human right to education, pronounced in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1949. Equally important is the right of children not to be discriminated against, as stated in Article 2 of the Convention on the Right of the Child (United Nations, 1989). A logical consequence of this right is that all children have the right to receive the kind of education that does not discriminate on the grounds of disability, ethnicity, religion, language, gender and capabilities. While there are also very important human, economic, social and political reasons for pursuing a policy and approach of inclusive education, it is also a means of bringing about personal development and building relationships between
individuals, groups and nations. The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (1994) asserts that: “Regular schools with inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discrimination, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all” (Salamanca Statement, 1994:Art 2). Teachers require the autonomy to design and implement learning environments that are appropriate to the needs of their particular students.

2.3 MY DEVELOPING UNDERSTANDING OF HOW EDUCATION SHOULD BE FOR LEARNERS WHO ARE SOCIOALLY EXCLUDED FROM PARTICIPATING IN CLASSROOMS

Epistemological reasons

I began my research for epistemological reasons when I experienced paradigmatic inadequacy in employing propositional and didactic approaches to inclusive education development and to learner disillusionment (Glavey, 2002). I struggled with the question, “How do I teach so that my learners will participate fully?” An initial review revealed the exponential growth of inclusive literature, with myriad definitions, prescriptions and descriptions ranging from the largely theoretical and descriptive (Engelbrecht & Green, 2007) to those that prescribe “tools”, “steps”, and “laws” of inclusivity (Swart & Pettipher, 2005:3).

Inclusion means we all belong; it means not having to fight for a chance to be part of a classroom or a school community; it means that all children are accepted (Sapon-Shevin, 1999:4). According to Hodkinson (2005:78), these definitions refer only to children whom society and institutions believe to have “special needs”. Children branded as having special educational needs were labelled and placed in settings. This resulted in their exclusion from both mainstream classes and society as a whole. Du Toit (cited in Engelbrecht & Green, 2007:3) states that it was genuinely believed to be in these learners’ best interests.

On the other hand, certain definitions focus on the diversity or social change perspectives: “Inclusion is not simply about reconstructing provision for learners with disability; it is a means of extending educational opportunities to a wide range of groups who may historically have had little or no access to schooling” (Dyson & Forlin, 1999:32). It is comprehensible that inclusion in education is a multifarious and complex concept. Inclusion is seen as much
more than a simple issue of placement; it is more likely to be understood as concerning the quality of learning and participation (Rouse & Florian, 1997; Mittler, 2000). Inclusion provides people with disabilities the opportunity to function in society on active levels and to enjoy equality, respect and the right to be different.

I am showing how it is possible to celebrate the capacities of children who are socially excluded due to their impoverished backgrounds, by explaining how such children could come to help themselves; to show how such practices could be approved and legitimised by teachers who have the will to pursue their own action enquiries; to reconstruct the curriculum as a means of emancipation for children who have been so labelled; and to encourage the development of a conversation of humanity (Geras, 1995). This can be done, but it can be done only when educators collaborate, when we as “insiders who know what oppression is, feel like speaking out for educational reform” (Walsh, 1991:16, cited in Soto, 1998). I learnt from Fehr (1998:181) that “You can act against oppression or you can be the oppressor, or you can abet the oppressor by being silent”. I am aiming to challenge and transform the influences of coercive forms of power that impose oppression and inequity, that violate human rights, and that continue to silence those who hope for educational equity and freedom for their children. In adopting critical pedagogy, I can ensure that “the learning process is negotiated”. Such pedagogical approaches contribute to efforts to “redistribute power not only in the classroom, between teacher and learners, but in society at large” (Cook-Sather, 2002:6).

From my experience, both as a teacher and adviser, I am convinced that values support schools in promoting an inclusive school ethos and the methods of working that raise achievement and help learners to raise their self-esteem and take greater responsibility for their own behaviour and learning. Overall, values enable pupils to examine the kind of life that is worth living and to consider what kind of life they want for themselves. Subsequent to encompassing these changes in my practice, I hope to show how I can potentially persuade and influence others to follow my lead. I begin this process by explaining how I developed a personal understanding of the socio-cultural learning, holistic education and consciousness-based education as I now describe.
2.3.1 Socio-cultural learning

The original meaning of the word “education”, according to its Latin roots, is to show the way out or bring forth that which exists within a human being. To truly educate is to encourage the unique and immeasurable possibilities that each child introduces into the world. I seek to encourage the idiosyncratic potential of the children in my care. Conversely, just as our perceptions of human development is accustomed and constrained by a culture’s worldview, education is always shaped by a culture’s perceptions of the child’s place in society, and of man’s place in nature and the cosmos.

The influence of broader political developments towards cultural diversity and democracy that is more widespread has reinforced the role of education in political socialisation, and facilitated active democratic citizenship. Apart from a broad spectrum of individual talents, education has to face the wide range of cultural backgrounds of the groups making up society. Education has to take on the difficult task of turning diversity into a constructive contributory factor of mutual understanding between individuals and groups. Any educational policy must be able to meet the challenges of pluralism and enable everyone to find his or her place in the community to which he or she primarily belongs and at the same time be given the means to open up to other communities. The International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century emphasises that education policies must be sufficiently diversified and must be so designed as not to become another cause of social exclusion and that schools should foster the desire to live together (UNESCO, 1996). South Africa should therefore work towards a deeper and proactive diagnosis of the content of the culture of its diverse peoples and find space for dialogue based on equity within the education system.

For the purpose of this study, I am working within a socio-cultural theory that lies at the heart of understanding human learning processes as social and cultural phenomena (Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev & Miller, 2003). Although social processes are viewed as the origins of learning, Vygotsky proposes that individual and social learning processes are interdependent.

Within socio-cultural theory, learning is seen as an ontological movement that is inextricably part of the learning process (Hodges, 1998:273). Both Hodges (1998) and Wortham (2004) contend that according to an ontological approach, learning changes not only what is being learned (which would be simply “epistemological”), but also the learner him-herself.
Learning through this perspective implies an ontological transformation: “To learn is to take up new practice, to change one’s position in a community. Thus learning can change identity and the self” (Wortham, 2004:716). An individual’s identity is therefore involved in constant transformation as one adjusts and adapts one’s actions to the benefits and constraints of the situations in which one finds oneself, and also changes the mediational means available to achieve one’s goals (Wells, 2004).

Geijsel and Meijers (2005:420) refer to the “identity learning” of teachers as the core business of educational change. Both learning and social identification happen as part of social practice and, according to Lave (1996), these processes should focus specifically on teachers’ changing conditions and their ways of participating in a community of practice. This implies that identity development is a learning process and not something that happens to one; it is actively constructed within a learning community with the help of culturally available tools (Geijsel & Meijers, 2005).

The urgency to address the needs of learners who are vulnerable to marginalisation and exclusion through responsive educational opportunities was also pointed out in the Dakar World Education Forum in April 2000: “The key challenge is to ensure that the broad vision of Education for All as an inclusive concept is reflected in national government and funding agency policies. Education for All must take account of the needs of the poor and the most disadvantaged, including working children, remote rural dwellers and nomads, and ethnic and linguistic minorities, children, young people and adults affected by conflict, HIV/AIDS, hunger and poor health; and those with special learning”.

Socio-cultural theories are of the proposition that learning is an active process and that the context has an important role to play in the learning process. Vygotsky (1978) suggests that learning is not just an individual matter, but that it develops within a social environment. Socio-cultural theories place the social environment at the very centre of learning, without which the development of the mind is impossible, as stated by Cole and Wertsch (2001:4). This is because learning is mediated. Vygotsky proposes that in the learning process, experts use tools to mediate learning. Cognitive development is not an automatic process; mediators must interact with the learner and use mediatory tools to facilitate the learning process, after which cognitive development may occur. These tools are “psychological” (Vygotsky, 1978:53) in nature, in that they are used to express thinking and include language, signs,
symbols, texts and mnemonic techniques. The most meaningful socio-cultural tool is language, as it is used as a teaching tool and is crucial in the process of developing higher psychological functions (Karpov, 2003). Mediating tools are first seen externally as the mediator teaches the learner how to use the tool, then internally, as the learner begins to use the tool in performing other activities. In the internalisation process, the tools modify and transform learners’ thought processes as they begin to use these new tools to express their thinking. Accordingly, the influence of the social environment on learning can be seen in that the mediator selects the mediation tools that will be utilised, and this affects the way that learners express their thinking (Cole & Wertsch, 2001).

The role of teachers is evident from the way in which they promote learning. This can be achieved with Vygotsky’s concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This concept describes the kind of environment that facilitates the learner to develop cognitive abilities and skills (see Figure 3.1). When the learner is faced with a new and unfamiliar challenge, he/she needs new or more mature psychological tools and mental structures to execute this particular activity (Chaiklin, 2003). The ZPD defines those functions that have not yet matured, but are in the process of maturation; functions that will mature tomorrow, but are currently in an embryonic state. These functions could be termed the “buds” or “flowers” of development rather than the “fruits” of “development” (Vygotsky, 1978:86, as cited in Doolittle, 1995:3). If the learning environment enjoys support from others, then learners can achieve maturity through their new tools as they learn to use them in this environment. The learners are then said to be “learning in the ZPD”. This situation not only constitutes the presence of mature people, but requires their willingness and ability to help the learners develop and enhance the particular psychological tools that are needed, and only when these learners are ready for this next stage of development. If these factors are all present, then the learners’ interaction in the social environment can enable them to achieve success in the learning activity, in a way that they could not have done without social support (Chaiklin, 2003; Karpov, 2003; Kozulin, 2003).

Drama in Education provides cultural and language enrichment by revealing insights into the target culture and presenting language contexts that make items memorable by placing them in a realistic social and cultural context. Permitting learners to read through and adding some of their own text, they become personally involved in the learning process, in a context in which it is possible for them to feel less unsure of themselves and more empowered to express
themselves through multiple voices (Vygotsky, 1987) of the differing characters. Socio-cultural learning allows students to interact with real-life experiences and construct mental structures that provide an understanding of their surroundings. In order for students to develop these mental structures, they must refine the skills needed to solve the problems they will encounter. Socio-cultural learning encourages students to pose and solve their own problems (Forcier et al., 2005). This method of teaching is especially helpful to students who experience difficulty in school. Minor changes in teachers’ practice can effectively convey to students that what they think and say matter and that learning depends on the learners and can give each learner great satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment (Watson, 2001).

Bringing socio-cultural learning into the classroom means that teachers will have to embrace a new way of thinking about how learners learn. The typical teaching model in most classrooms is direct instruction. The socio-culturally based classroom should be much different. The learners, rather than the teacher, must be responsible for organising information, exploring learning environments, conducting learning activities and monitoring their own learning. Teachers are required to focus on depth of understanding. They must also assume a supporting role, while the learners construct meaning for themselves and engage in critical thinking and problem solving (Iran-Nejad, 1995). Learners must construct new knowledge, based on their own individual experiences and understandings. Learners have to be provided with an environment full of sensory experiences. They will be able to respond to these experiences in a problem-solving fashion, building their understanding of the experiences. OBE was introduced to satisfy the public policy imperatives and directives enshrined in the Constitution of South Africa, 1996 (Act 108 of 1996). Amongst others, OBE strives to enable all learners to reach their maximum learning potential (DoE, National Curriculum Statement, 2003:7). In this system, learners are important and their questions are highly valued.

Good teaching and learning to me is about the quality of what happens in the classroom. It is about the intellect, it is about stimulating young minds to think, and it is about reflecting on thinking (Clarke, 2007:203). Creating a learner-centred classroom will allow the students to construct their own knowledge and develop their own understanding. Because constructivism can be implemented in classrooms of all ages and levels of ability, constructivist teaching is effective teaching. The value of this paradigm resides in the fact that every human being is in constant, dynamic interaction with his/her life world. Changing circumstances make acute
demands on people to manifest the kind of behaviour that will result in their effective adaptation. Using the emotional intelligence of learners poses a solution to this, because it focuses on the enrichment of human lives and on the empowerment of the individual.

**Effective implementation of life orientation in Grades 4 – 6:**

The RNCS (2002:4) states that the Life Orientation learning area’s purpose is to guide and prepare learners for life and its possibilities. Even though life skills have been closely linked to health related topics, life skills are not confined to a domain or subject, but represent cross-cutting applications of knowledge, values, attitudes and skills that are important in the process of individual development and lifelong learning. The World Health Organization has defined life skills as “**abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life**”. In particular, life skills are a group of cognitive, personal and interpersonal abilities that help people make informed decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, empathise with others, and cope with and manage their lives in a healthy and productive manner.

The skills referred to in the skills-based approach to health education include both the practical skills associated with specific health behaviours and life skills. A suggested framework for skills-based programmes could therefore aim at developing competencies in the following four areas: knowledge and critical thinking skills (learning to know); practical skills (learning to do); personal skills (learning to be); and social skills (learning to live together). The practical skills are the manual skills under learning to do, while the psycho-social life skills are the skills under learning to know, to be and to live together. A life skills approach to education is one that teaches an essential combination of the skills needed in a particular and specific context.

Depending on the topic, socio-cultural context and age group, the specific life skills needed for an individual at a certain moment and context vary enormously, and it is therefore not possible to draw up a definitive list of essential life skills. However, the importance of Life Orientation cannot be denied, because it has a very special place in the transformation of our country in general and of education specifically. There are, however, some cognitive, personal and interpersonal life skills that are generally considered particularly important. If
we wish to provide the learners, and in particular those who have been born into poverty and have no knowledge of any better alternatives to their circumstances, with life skills, then we must make the time for a subject that will have immeasurably more impact on their subsequent success in life than much of what is currently being taught in school.

**Journal Entry, 20 January 2009**

All teachers at my school have to deal with difficult learner behaviour in the classrooms, but this is exacerbated in my under-resourced school, where poverty strains family and community life. Many learners lack social skills and do not know how to handle their negative emotions. This often results in misbehaviour, which affects teaching and learning and is disruptive for the whole class. These learners may come from homes where families are experiencing trouble or conflict, or where parents or caregivers are not informed about how to discipline their children effectively. With the classroom environment frequently out of control, there is a lack of motivation in teachers and learners alike, resulting in high absenteeism and staff turnover rates, with many teachers leaving the profession as soon as they can. Teachers also experience enormous personal stress and often feel unsafe, due to verbal threats, violence and vandalism. Our school does have an IBST that deals with learners demonstrating inappropriate or challenging behaviours; however, educators find it extremely difficult to manage the team’s functions effectively, because they all have registered classes of 45-50 learners each. Lack of parental involvement in the functioning of the school as an organisation also enhances this problem.

The individual who, through personal development, discovers self-knowledge, an appreciation of his/her strengths and weaknesses, and who has used this knowledge to build his/her self-esteem, will aspire to make the changes that are necessary to improve his/her quality of life. These individuals will respond to the interventions and apply them successfully in their communities. These are individuals who have the determination and the courage to accept the realities of life for what they are, and not for what they think they are or should be.

With so many parents struggling with illiteracy and poverty, the learning environment at home and in the community is less than ideal. If we do not improve learner access to a decent education in South Africa, the next generation faces a very uncertain future. The *Education White Paper 6* (DoE, 2001a) acknowledges that many children experience barriers to learning.
Some of these barriers lie within the learners themselves (intrinsic), while some barriers are systemic, socio-economic and cultural.

2.4 EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE OF MY LEARNERS

Emotional intelligence demonstrates the potential or capacity that the individual has in terms of certain components that consist of specific knowledge, ability and skills in terms of emotional aspects (Blom, 2000:54). Alternatively, emotional competence shows the emotional competency of a person in terms of his/her ability to use his/her knowledge, ability and skills in this regard. A person who is emotionally competent has learned and is using emotions and emotional content. This means that emotional intelligence can be taught.

Our ability to view situations objectively and thus to understand ourselves and other people depends on balancing and integrating the head and heart. Emotional intelligence is the ability to sense, understand and effectively apply the power of emotions, appropriately channelled as a source of energy, creativity and influence.

Genuine fear warns and reminds us to stay alert and pay attention. However, if a fear is irrational, it threatens and jeopardises so that we cannot do the things we want to do. It can become generalised so that we experience an overriding feeling of fear with no real focus. For this reason, it is important to focus on and identify a fear clearly, so it can be seen in its true light and confronted realistically.

Melissa wrote in her journal:
I am too scared to voice my opinion – the children might not like what I say and then they will refuse to play with me. In the past, I had friends but I don’t know what happened to them but they aren’t here anymore. I am so angry at all and I don’t think they know how I feel inside.

Emotional intelligence is not a safety net that protects one from life’s tragedies, frustrations, or disappointments. Emotionally intelligent individuals go through bad times and experience sadness, anger, and fear, just like everyone else. But they respond differently than less healthy people to these experiences. During my educational career I have become increasingly aware of the humanity of my learners. Emotional intelligence gives you the
ability to cope and bounce back from stress, adversity, trauma, and loss. In other words, emotional intelligence makes you **resilient**.

**Resilience gives you the ability to:**

- Stay focused in a frightening or challenging situation;
- Experience moments of joy in the face of sadness and loss;
- Ask for and get support, when needed;
- Quickly rebound from frustration and disappointment;
- Remain hopeful during challenging and difficult times (Luthar, 2003:xxxix).

Emotions are the building blocks of every relationship in your life, and the power of those emotions cannot be overlooked. Emotions influence the way you relate and react to others, often without your awareness. If you are not keenly aware of the emotions you are experiencing internally and how you are communicating this externally, and similarly aware of the other person, you are apt to:

- Think that you are communicating one thing, while actually communicating something else;
- Create confusion, insecurity, and mistrust;
- Feel helpless and vulnerable when faced with conflict;
- Use humour in a way that is off-putting or distances you from others;
- Misinterpret what the other person really wants and needs;
- Appear unattractive to others because of the negative effect you have on them.

The ability to be aware of your own emotions and the feelings of others is the key to relationships that are engaging, exciting, fulfilling, creative and productive (Killick, 2005:5). Emotional intelligence keeps your relationships strong and healthy. Without it, your relationships will always stall and break down. I am concerned with the labelling of my learners by their educators as poor, for two reasons: it can lead to an erosion of personal identity and it can influence the development of their self-esteem. There are five pathways to emotional intelligence: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social competence. Fortunately, emotional intelligence is based on a set of skills that you can learn
at any time. However if my learners’ emotional intelligence is high, we will not allow labelling to become part of our identity formation.

**The skills of emotional intelligence help you to:**

- Build safety and trust;
- Capture the attention and interest of others;
- Respond to others with empathy and compassion;
- Send and receive appropriate nonverbal signals;
- Be more playful and creative;

The rewards of enhancing learners’ emotional intelligence include shared responsibility, immediacy, relevance and practicality of solutions, flexibility, mutual support and a caring environment, as well as individual capacity building (Ebersöhn & Mbetse, 2003). I want to reiterate the confidence Metcalf (2001:651) places in the “snowball effect” referenced in many therapeutic writings. This allows for the possibility that one change in an individual could lead to many changes in the entire educational cycle, because of the interactive rapport between different systems. There is increasing evidence that social and emotional learning in learners is linked to positive outcomes for academic achievement (Zins, Weissberg, Wang & Walberg, 2004) and also for resilience and well-being (Brooks, 1999). Emotional intelligence is usually construed as an individual trait (Goleman, 1995), whereas a core feature of emotional literacy, noticeably in the United Kingdom (Antidote, 2003), is an eco-systemic analysis of relationships. Individual knowledge and skills are seen as embedded within constructed contexts. Individuals and the systems in which they interact are considered mutually influential.

In order to empower the poor, life skills programmes should therefore be promoted which, among others, focus on the development of adaptability, inter-personal and intrapersonal skills, how to function effectively within a group, and skills related to the ability to influence others; in other words, the development of emotional intelligence (Ebersohn & Eloff, 2003:46-48). I want to ensure that the children in my care are successful and fulfilled and emotional intelligence is an important component of the realisation of this vision.
Any intervention designed to break the influence of ignorance on poverty must originate in primary education. Poverty evidently delivers emotional blows to children, who are the generation of the future. It is essential, therefore, to start the process of personal development as early as possible. Daniel Goleman writes as follows on emotional intelligence, “What I need is to follow the logic of prevention, offering my children the skills for facing life that will increase their chances of avoiding any and all of these fates”. Goleman suggests that, too often, interventions are introduced too late, at a time when situations are of epidemic proportions (Goleman, 1995:46). It is saddening to hear so much rhetoric about “save the children” and still to learn how little is achieved in improving their situation.

It is clear that learning must be a life-long process, but it also needs to be life-wide and life-deep: it must address the whole person and give individuals a breadth and depth of personality and personal skills in their preparation for life. I am hurtling into a knowledge-based e-world, but as everyone becomes an instant intellectual, in one way or another, I must not overlook personal and social maturity. As well as nurturing intellectual development, education must help individuals identify, and adopt, personal and social values that I can call on to guide the decisions I make, my relationships, work and life as a whole. It must help me develop a depth of character and a clear sense of my own identity, integrity and what I believe to be important in life. I must learn, and keep learning, about the rights I have as an individual, but also about the responsibilities that go with these and the values that are the building blocks of rights and responsibilities.

### 2.5 HOLISTIC EDUCATION

I believe that it is necessary to pay attention to the nurturing of the mind, body and spirit of a human being. This is one of the ways that will allow me to become an effective teacher amidst adversity, because the benefits of self-discovery through this process are endless. I am fully aware that successful education is based on respect for the intrinsic worth of each individual learner, and an understanding of the validity and relevance of their own life experiences.

*The highest function of education is to bring about an integrated individual who is capable of dealing with life as a whole.*

J. Krishnamurti
Holistic education is established on the principle that each person finds identity, meaning, and purpose in life through connections to the community, to the natural world, and to spiritual values, such as compassion and peace. Holistic education aspires to invite from young people an intrinsic respect for life and a passionate love of learning. This is organised not through an academic “curriculum” that reduces the world into instructional packages, but through direct engagement with the environment. Holistic education cultivates a sense of wonder of life. Montessori, for example, speak of “cosmic” education, in terms of which the young person is helped to feel a part of the wholeness of the universe, and learning will naturally be enchanted and inviting. There is no one best way to accomplish this goal; there are many paths of learning and the holistic educator values them all. What is appropriate for some children, in some situations, in some historical and social contexts, may not be best for others. The art of holistic education lies in its responsiveness to the diverse learning styles and needs of evolving human beings.

The purpose of holistic education is to prepare students to meet the challenges of living, as well as academics. Holistic education believes it is important for young people to learn:

- About themselves;
- About healthy relationships and pro-social behaviour;
- Social development;
- Emotional development;
- Resilience;
- To see beauty, have awe, experience transcendence, and appreciate some sense of “truths” (Martin, 1997:18).

When I started my teaching, I convinced myself that unless a child is ready and willing to learn, no amount of teaching could enforce learning. When the student is ready and willing, then they are also able to learn. Sadly, many children who are socially excluded have opted out before they reach resource teaching. Following years of failure and repeated putdowns by family, teachers, other pupils, and the rest of the educational community, at high personal cost, they decide they are unable to learn and so become unwilling to learn. Claxton’s view is that the experiences themselves become blockage to learning.
My goal as a teacher became how to encourage children to use learning to reach their full potential. My journal entry below illustrates my search to find solutions.

**Journal Entry: 2 June 2009**

*I am seeking alternatives to mainstream education. I am questioning the commitment to academic excellence that most schools and teachers have and work hard to actualise. I am conscious that just learning academics is not enough, and I witness young children in their communities suffering from a lack of needed learning and this permeates to the suffering of society too. I look at my society in which social problems seem to be getting worse; in which those regarded as successful are too often gluttonous, dishonest, and cruel; in which families and communities appear more and more dysfunctional; and I ask, “Why aren’t we as humans learning what we need to know in order to live good and meaningful lives?” I am of the opinion that children need to learn about themselves. The value of “knowing thyself” is so undeniable as to be a truism, but conveying to children that they are worth knowing about seems essential to healthy self-respect and self-esteem.*

One of the tools that holistic education uses to help children learn what they need to learn is “meaningfulness”. People of all ages find it difficult to learn things that are not meaningful to them and, conversely, they find that it requires much less effort to learn things that are meaningful. This means that a holistic school will respect and work with the meaning structures that a child comes with rather than begin from a perspective of what “should” be meaningful to a child. Events and dynamics (fear, conflict and friendships) are part of every child’s life and they are therefore interested in these things. These can be the starting point for learning any of the academic skills that every child needs to master.

Holistic education also uses the tool **flexible pacing** to help children learn. Not all children learn at the same speed, and no child learns at the same speed all the time. Learning is an inherently creative act, and it requires a system that can move with the individual meaning making of each child. When lessons are too slow, a child gets bored, and when it is too fast, the child gets lost and then loses interest in the subject. If children are seen and treated as individuals, there is no need to have groups move at some arbitrarily determined learning pace. All learners are to have access to the curriculum and the system has to be able to respond to and accommodate all their different learning needs (Engelbrecht & Green, 2007:98). Where the system fails to exercise and meet these responsibilities at the teaching
and learning level, some learners become effectively excluded from it, and consequently also from its opportunities, entitlements and benefits.

I have come to realise that in order for me to be an effective teacher, I must be a prophet (every prophet possesses brilliant intelligence, overall capacity of understanding and a pure soul). I am trying to prepare learners for a world thirty to fifty years into the future. With the empowerment of understanding the concept of holistic education, I want to refocus attention on the nature of the child, particularly on the creative, vital source of unfolding the personhood. I must guard against an education that neglects the deep creative source of selfhood, resulting in a deadening, mechanical routine of schooling that negates rather than honours childhood (Miller, 2006). Maria Montessori (1989:1) states unambiguously:

*If salvation and help are to come, it is from the child, for the child is the constructor of man, and so of society. The child is endowed with an inner power which can guide us to a more enlightened future. Education should no longer be mostly imparting of knowledge, but must take a new path, seeking the release of human potentialities.*

Holistic education is child-honouring education, since it respects the creative impulses at work within the unfolding child as much as, if not more than, the cultural necessities that conservative schooling seeks to overlay onto the growing personality. Holistic education is based on the assumption that children want to learn, and that if they are encouraged to learn in their own ways, and in their own time, they will be found to have immense potential (Martin, 1997:29). John Dewey is of the opinion that if we want to educate for a truly participatory democratic society and not one that is hierarchically ruled – if we desire a dynamic, progressive culture and not one that is rigidly fixated upon the past then the educational process must take into account the impulses that arise within the dynamically evolving life of each person. During my planning and implementation processes, I need to take cognisance of the fact that curriculum decisions and learning environments need to meet and accommodate the vital energies within my learners and not stifle them. This will empower me to promote a more active and engaged intelligence than that which is produced by forced and/or rote learning.

Miller (2006) proposes the following general features of a holistic learning environment:
Learning is more experiential, emergent, organic, cooperative and personal than in standardised school settings. Tests, grades, ranking, honours and other trappings of competitive learning are greatly reduced or completely absent. There is more open discussion and critical questioning in the classroom. Students are freer to pursue personal interests and passions, or a creative effort is made to present an established curriculum in ways that makes it more relevant, meaningful and exciting to students. Indeed, while the curriculum is pre-planned for an extent, its content is less driven by what corporate leaders and politicians determine that “every child needs to know” and more by educators with a philosophical commitment to well-rounded personal development and their own personal and professional sensitivity to the learning rhythms of their students.

There is a genuine sense of community among students, teachers and the parents involved in the school. People care about each other and take care of each other. Little authority is exercised solely for the sake of control or the impersonal enforcement of rules, although teachers and school administrators take their responsibilities for community functioning seriously. In the terms used by the feminist cultural historian, Riane Eisler (2000), a school oriented to “partnership” values would exhibit a “hierarchy of actualisation” (a management structure that empowers each individual to realise his/her potential) rather than the more traditional “hierarchy of domination”.

There is respect for students’ interior life and for ultimate questions. At the very least, a holistic learning environment offers periods of time or physical spaces of respite from the competitive materialism, constant noise, distraction and titillation of modern civilisation. Many holistic educators use the centering practices previously mentioned to help their students find calm. Moreover, students are encouraged to wonder about deeper questions, such as the meaning of life; their existential concerns are taken seriously. Kessler (2000) has thoughtfully observed the effects on young people of banishing “soul” from modern education and has eloquently argued that we need to honour their quest for meaning.

A holistic learning environment has meaningful connections to the world of nature. The principles of ecology and sustainability are implicit in the structure
and content of a holistic education, if not explicitly addressed; there is a deliberate cultivation of what Orr (1992) has called “ecological literacy”. The physical design of holistic schools and classrooms brings nature indoors, or invites students into the surrounding ecosystem. In these spaces, beauty is as important a concern as functionality. We would commonly find gardens, field trips, or other opportunities for contact with nature in the curriculum. These general principles are practised in distinctive ways by the various approaches to holistic education.

When education begins with this reverence, with this respect for the individual personhood of every learner, it cannot be standardised. It cannot be managed in undemocratic, authoritarian ways. It does not become obsessed with measuring “outcomes” or bureaucratically mandating what every child must know and be able to do. By sloughing off these deadening constraints on imagination, creativity and authentic growth, holistic education enables the “loving purpose” of the universe to work through the child and teacher’s feelings, thoughts and actions.

After a thorough investigation on this perspective of learning, I did some introspection on how I could improve my own teaching. I became aware that I needed to foster collaboration rather than competition in my classroom, so as to help my learners feel connected. Using real-life experiences, current events, the dramatic arts and other lively sources of knowledge in place of textbook information would allow me to inspire a love of learning. Encouraging reflection and questioning rather than passive memorisation of “facts”, would enable me to keep the “flame of intelligence” alive that is so much more than abstract problem-solving skills. Accommodating differences and refusing to label my learners as “learning disabled” or “hyperactive”, would enable me to bring out the unique gifts contained within each learner’s spirit. It took a lot of confidence on my path to admit to myself that I did not always know what was in the best interests of my learners, but I have found solace in knowing that I perform to the best of my abilities.

In my endeavour to balance freedom and structure against individuality and social responsibility, as well as to respond to each learning situation, any particular learner in any particular setting or cultural situation should be addressed in that moment, and not according to a fixed model meant to apply to all individuals in all learning situations.
2.6 CONSCIOUSNESS AND EDUCATION

It is widely accepted that education has enormous power to transform minds, particularly the minds of children.

From a holistic point of view, the mind is understood from the perspective of the paradigm of interconnectedness. The central task of education is therefore seen as that of developing each individual human mind to recognise and fulfil its role in the life of a greater mind the mind of a greater whole that is all creation (Martin, 1997:27).

The uppermost objective of education in every country is to produce ideal citizens, individuals who are competent to fulfil the goals of their own lives while upholding the interests of others, and the improvement of society as a whole. However this was not the case in South Africa under Apartheid, and continues not to be the case in any other instances, such as amongst the Aborigines of Australia, or the Basarwa in Botswana, inter alia. For this to become a living reality, education must actualise the full potential of the most precious resource of any nation, the human brain of every citizen, especially its children.

Research has confirmed the significance of specific types of experience in the proper development of the brain (Childs, 2007:129). For example, in the early stages of life, sensory experiences are critical for the development of the corresponding sensory structures of the brain. It has also been found that enriched sensory and motor environments in infancy contribute to the significantly enhanced development of the brain. Brain development is thus intimately connected with experience. From this perspective, the purpose of education, including early education in the family, should be to provide the appropriate experiences, at every stage of growth, that develop the full potential of the mind and body, based on the full development of the brain. Childs (2007:40) states that the emotions and experiences felt by a person depend on the circumstances existing at the time and the source which he or she believes to be the cause of activity. Analysing the process of human brain development is useful for suggesting the type of educational experiences that are especially important at different stages of growth. It is required of educators to select learning experiences that suit the state of sensory, motor, and cognitive development of learners. In so doing, they are in fact selecting the experiences most suitable for the children’s current state of brain development. Primary school education exercises language skills and the emerging reasoning
abilities of the child. At this time (age 6 to 8 years), the language areas of the brain are completing their development, and cortical association areas involved in higher brain functioning are maturing (Childs, 2007:129).

Consciousness-Based Education enables any school to accomplish this function by systematically developing the brains and unfolding the hidden creativity and intelligence of its learners so that, irrespective of their educational or socio-economic background they can experience increasing success and fulfilment every day. Education has conventionally centred first and foremost on what a learner studies, concentrating on learning areas such as mathematics, physics, art and literature. It is deficient in a systematic means to develop the full value of the consciousness of learners’ qualities, such as creativity, intelligence, receptivity, alertness and breadth of comprehension (Travis & Arenander, 2006). As a result, increasing academic demands on the learners are not accompanied by an increase in their capacity to learn. The inability of our education system to expand on learners’ “clay pots of knowledge” not only hampers the full expression of their inner intelligence but also leads to the accumulation of fatigue and stress and the behavioural problems so prevalent in our society.

Contemporary education focuses primarily on supplying the learner (the knower) with skills and information (the known) and does not provide the means to fully develop consciousness. The result is that learners become overwhelmed with information, suffer from stress and anxiety, and achieve only partial, fragmented knowledge of any particular discipline (So & Orme-Johnson, 2001). All of these factors contribute to fragmented brain development. So, while parts of the brain may be stimulated by studying a particular discipline, such as mathematics or language, education must add something to the curriculum that livens up the whole brain physiology to ensure that learners adjust by means of their total creative potential.

One of the veteran teachers who formed part of the teaming expressed that: In my teaching, I need something extra to help my learners feel better about themselves; everything I try failed helplessly in this regard. They needed something that gives them the confidence to participate; the ability to learn and to respect one another; and the capacity to respect themselves and to live healthy lives. Many learners came to school suffering from malnutrition, infrequent bathing, and inadequate care, which cause widespread health
problems, including skin infections, bronchitis, tuberculosis, rickets and chronic intestinal infections. But the loneliness and fear experienced by these children are the most painful afflictions of all. I want to nourish the mind, body and spirit of my learners and instill in them a sense of self-esteem and self-worth.

Through the performing arts, children discover new ways of spontaneous expression and transform it into creative activities. Creative expression also occurs through the visual arts. Paper maché (used to create masks and costumes) cutting and gluing, water colouring drawing, tie-die and batik are some of the crafts used to stimulate the children’s innovation. With the implementation of OBE and the redeployment of many teachers to different schools, many learning areas were reshuffled to make way for new, integrated ones. This also saw the end of many practical subjects such as woodwork, needlework, physical education and the arts. These subjects were branded a luxury that the new democratic government could not afford at the time; however, these are valuable skills that can no longer be taught to learners who need them desperately.

The primary source of all problems in schools is the lack of knowledge of how to develop the full potential of each learner. Children are born with a boundless capacity for knowledge, power, and inner happiness. They become frustrated when the education system limits them to only partial development. They struggle with poor home environments, underachievement, stress and dissatisfaction, which can express itself in all kinds of antisocial behaviour, even violence.

Transcendental Meditation claims that twice-daily group practice sessions held in terms of the Transcendental Meditation Programme, be added to the existing curriculum along with the study of consciousness. Over five million people of all cultures and religions worldwide have completed the Transcendental Meditation Programme, founded by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, the world’s foremost scientist in the field of consciousness. Transcendental Meditation is a simple, natural, effortless technique that allows the mind to settle to increasingly silent and orderly levels of awareness and experience the simplest, most expanded state of awareness, the full potential of the mind transcendental consciousness, the self of everyone.

As the mind becomes more settled and wakeful during transcendental meditation, the body gains a unique physiological state of restful alertness, which releases accumulated stress and increases the stability and flexibility of the nervous system. Regular experience of this
restfully alert state produces a broad range of benefits, which are reflected in the increasing ability to express full creative potential in daily life. Goals are achieved without strain, fulfilling the person’s own interests, while upholding the interests of others and society as a whole.

The fact that children in particular are being discriminated against and are victims of social injustice because their learning strengths are not adequately addressed in our system of education is, in my understanding, a form of social injustice. Griffiths explains the term “social justice” in terms of, “the good of the community which respects depends on the good of the individuals within it, and the various sectors of society to which they belong” (Griffiths, 2001:25). She reminds us that in the 1950s and 1960s, the term “social justice” referred to issues of social class, while in the 1970s and 1980s, the term included gender and race as areas of discrimination and exclusion. These continue to be the issues that inform most of the current theories of social justice (Griffiths, 2001).

Zappone (2002) is of the opinion that “there is a relationship between patterns of inequality in education (for example, excess to resource inequality) and income inequality” and that such educational disadvantage must be addressed. Her focus on educational disadvantage is on how people from poorer backgrounds are discriminated against in normative education systems. However, her underpinning argument that IQ + effort = reward is causing her concern, because it subscribes to the thinking that IQ alone is the key ingredient for learning. How could I foster a quality learning environment for my learners familiarising myself with the writings and interpretations of various authors on what social injustice means to them? I found the following newspaper articles extremely encouraging; they fuelled my enthusiasm to want assist my learners and myself even more.

The words of Aldous Huxley rang loudly in my ears and I could not ignore their significance at the specific place in time I was at that moment: Experience is not what happens to a man. It is what a man does with what happens to him.

Democracy in South Africa is supposed to be geared towards participation and engagement, and is based on a collective faith: Every human being is of inestimable and immeasurable value, each a unique intellectual, emotional, physical, spiritual and creative force. Every human being is born free and equal in dignity and rights; each is endowed with reason and
conscience; and deserves, then, a sense of solidarity, brotherhood and sisterhood, recognition and respect. As stipulated in our Constitution, I believe that our learners need to be able to think for themselves, to make judgments based on evidence and argument, to develop minds of their own. I believe they should ask fundamental questions: Who in the world am I? How did I get here and where am I going? What in the world are my choices? How in the world shall I proceed? Most important, I believe they should pursue answers wherever these may take them. Democratic teachers focus their effort not so much on the production of things as on the production of fully developed human beings who are capable of controlling and transforming their own lives; citizens who can participate fully in civic life.

Democratic teaching encourages students to develop initiative and imagination, the capacity to name the world, to identify the obstacles to their full humanity, and the courage to act upon whatever the known demands. Education in a democracy should be characteristically astonishing and mind-blowing – always about opening doors and opening minds as learners forget their own pathways into a wider world. Because poverty is a social problem, and social problems need social solutions, it is important to consider how vast social change has occurred in the past. History shows that significant social change requires the people who are most affected to be at the forefront of transformative efforts.

In general, approximately 50% of learners do not even make it through the school system and drop out before completion, with one recent study claiming only 32% of 2003 Grade 10s actually pass (Business Day, 11/01/2006). Surveys caution an overwhelming sense of sadness amongst the young unemployed and circles of doom that reinforce their marginalisation and lack of hope. Where learners should expect opportunities and assistance, they see their hopes and dreams crumbling before their eyes and face obstacles rather than ladders to progress and self-esteem.

This reflects the reality that education is failing some 80% of school age children, who find themselves trapped in sinkholes of unemployment and poverty rather than on the road to autonomy and possibility. At their worst, many township and rural schools have been described as sinkholes, where children are “warehoused” rather than educated. Education is contributing to marginalisation and inequity rather than social advance and cohesion for many, especially the poor and rural.
Educational efforts are not seen to lead to improved life prospects, where even access to further education and training becomes a financial and educational battle with poor prospects. The value of education risks rapidly losing its prestige. It is clear that education is in trouble, whether one uses the word “crisis” or not. The scale of marginalisation and drop-out is unacceptable. What happens at school level and within our classrooms is crucial. The future of the country and its children depends on making the education system work.

In the context of a wide range of social hinge points, unmet democratic expectations; unavailability of resources; social and class divisions; and dissatisfaction with the pace and quality of delivery, such failure of education could spell disaster for South Africa. I have chosen to empower myself on the above-named educational perspectives, because I understand them to be about enabling rather than disabling my learners; secondly, because they focus on the abilities rather than the disabilities of the individual; and, lastly, because I want to offer my learners educational opportunities so that they will begin to perceive themselves as fully capable and able to achieve anything they set their minds to. I hold values that have changed the way in which I perceive my context and that have assisted me in focusing my research aims. These personal values are:

a. Respect for *Ubuntu*, kindness, humanity, compassion and goodness, regarded as fundamental to an African approach to life.

b. Respect for the individual’s ability to learn.

c. Issues of social justice.

### 2.7 LIVING EDUCATIONAL THEORY

Whitehead refers to living educational theories as “explanations that individuals produce for their educational influences in learning. They are grounded in the relational dynamics of everyday life and explain the receptively responsive educational influences of individuals in their own lives. They are unique” (Whitehead, 2008:14).

This thesis contains my explanations for my learning. However, where I have made an original contribution to living educational theory is through my focus on teaching for inclusivity through educator teaming accounting for the “living” element of living educational theory. Throughout this thesis, I explain the nature of the autobiographical influence on my
learning. This takes our knowledge and understanding of living educational theory further than it currently is. Whitehead (2008) disputes that there are distinguishing qualities relating to a living educational theory methodology that is intended to enable an individual to explain the nature of his or her educational influence:

1. ‘I’ as a living contradiction;
2. The use of action reflection cycles;
3. The use of procedures of personal and social validation;
4. The inclusion of a life-affirming energy;
5. The use of values.

I have creatively engaged with these qualities in order to explain my own educational influence ‘I’ as a living contradiction. In order to explain my own educational influence I have focused on the importance of accounting for my own autobiographical experiences and the impact of these within my professional life. Through these accounts, I demonstrated the nature of the living contradiction that I am, not only professionally but also personally. Some examples will be found in Chapter Six, where I account for my learned helplessness at being the principal of a school in which inclusive education is not effectively implemented.

The use of action reflection cycles in Chapters Five, Six and Seven afforded me the opportunity to account for the nature of my educational influence and as a way of improving my practice. I understand action reflection cycles as moving through a series of steps repeatedly. It does not end when findings are determined and conclusions are arrived at; instead, the process begins anew. I recognised that I was working to improve what I was doing because of the values I used to give meaning and purpose to my life. I started with problem identification, (being part of the teaching and learning environment helped me in this regard), and my study demanded that I develop my research questions.

The action reflection cycles are both holistic in terms of relating to the whole thesis; within the thesis, there are also smaller, specific cycles referring to particular incidents. Within the whole thesis, the framing of my question at the start, the actions taken throughout the thesis accounting for and justifying what I have done, and the conclusions at the end all work as a long-term action reflection cycle. Within the thesis, the smaller action reflection cycles are evident in the following examples: The introduction of journal writing for learners as well as
educators, educator teaming between veteran and novice educators, and the importance of autobiographical writing for finding your own voice.

**Ontological reasons**

My epistemological reasons are closely linked with my ontological reasons. My practice is firmly rooted in my commitment to democratic practice. My research study describes how I have challenged what Fear et al. (2006:91) describe as “the hegemony of the dominant paradigm” in educative circles, where learners are essentially treated as passive recipients of others’ knowledge; are seen but not heard; are frequently voiceless, marginalised and disenchanted (Monaghan & Prendergast, 2002); and are regarded as “the future” of society, of universities and of organisations. I regard them as being very much part of our present. My account of improving my practice clearly demonstrates that I am not merely an advocate of an inclusive ethic that honours the dignity (Arendt, 1958) of learners, but that I am also an activist in unity with young people, encouraging their participation in the decision-making processes affecting them, enhancing their capacity to be subjects of their own future and, through emphasis on building community, facilitating their becoming “agents subjects-in relationship” (Groome, 1998:8) in their historical settings.

a) **Respect for Ubuntu**

I started a “critical constructivist research” (Kincheloe, 1991 in Laidlaw, 2002) by deconstructing what I understood as the two main strands in pedagogy: The technical engineering of methodology following educational theory and objectives of teaching and learning; and the teacher in the classroom – a human being with spiritual values – interacting in a variety of ways with her learners. True to the principles of action research, I described the educational tools and the principles that I want to employ to awaken my students’ interest in their own learning, impart the necessary knowledge and devise strategies to reach their full potential. But since the aim of my deconstruction of pedagogy is to show the shortcomings of our current education approach to education, my next task will lead me to an analysis of my teaching values and the learning values. I hope that my learners will create for themselves as worthwhile, characteristics such as academic honesty, personal truthfulness, critical moderation and objectivity, as well as an ever-present compassion regarding the plight of humanity in the twentieth century and in the present twenty first century.
The relentless shackles of poverty have bound many children in my school area to live the nightmares of starvation and homelessness. The same hand of fate placed some of us in our privileged middle-class home environments and shoved hundreds of millions helplessly into utter destitution. Humanity is not the first and only victim of poverty. Children are begging in the streets, families are living in shanties, and the sickly are dying of malnourishment. Endless numbers of learners turn up without having had anything to eat at all since they left school the day before.

*Ubuntu* is a traditional African philosophy that offers us an understanding of ourselves in relation with the world. According to *Ubuntu*, there exists a common bond between us all and it is through this bond, through our interaction with our fellow human beings, that we discover our own human qualities. Alternatively, as the Zulus would say, “*Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu*”, which means that a person is a person through other persons (White Paper for Social Welfare, 1997:24). We affirm our humanity when we acknowledge that of others.

It is the essence of being human. It speaks of the fact that my humanity is caught up and is inextricably bound up in yours. I am human, because I belong. It speaks about wholeness, it speaks about compassion. A person with *Ubuntu* is welcoming, hospitable, warm and generous, willing to share. Such people are open and available to others, willing to be vulnerable, affirming of others, do not feel threatened that others are able and good, for they have a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that they belong in a greater whole. They know that they are diminished when others are humiliated, diminished when others are oppressed, diminished when others are treated as if they were less than who they are. Conversely, the quality of *Ubuntu* gives people resilience, enabling them to survive and emerge still human despite all efforts to dehumanise them.

My learners live in systems that revolve around communal relationships, but they have not developed a deep respect for human values and the recognition of human worth. Learners in my care do not have a sense of self-identity, self-respect and achievement. They are able to deal with their problems in a positive manner by drawing on the humanistic values they have
inherited and carry on throughout their history of struggle and survival. I can count the numbers of learners at my school that fall in this category.

“For your action to be informed you need to be proactive in exploring your own motives and values so that you are clear about why you are acting as you do” (McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 1996:17;18).

*Ubuntu* means the essence of being human. Being guided in my daily teaching practice by my personal values promoting *Ubuntu*, democracy, social justice and human rights; I made a mental decision to challenge factors that would stagger my quest for finding solutions. It is part of the gift that I as an African woman will give the world. By adopting this approach, I will embrace caring about others and avail myself to go the extra mile for the sake of others. This stance will allow me to adhere to the Bill of Rights as stipulated in the Constitution of South Africa. I believe that a person is person through another person. That my humanity is caught up, bound up and inextricable in yours, as described by South Africa’s own Desmond Tutu. When I dehumanise you, I inevitably dehumanise myself. I will seek to work for the common good of my learners, because our humanity comes into its own in community, in belonging.

I aim to achieve this by finding answers to my research problem: **How do I create learning opportunities for learners from impoverished communities?** Our historical records regrettably always focused mainly on the rather desolate and backwards aspects of African belief systems, customs, values and culture. That approach served the interests of past historians. However, modern society has retrogressed in terms of its capacity for civilized behaviour, and we have much to learn from the oralate societies of the worlds, notwithstanding that they too are imperfect. It is time for a shift towards something holistic, wholesome and all-inclusive, in the true African spirit of respect for all. Hopefully, at the end of my research journey I will be able not to state that I built a school of inclusivity, but rather that I built an inclusive woman. I must realise that I must not outgrow the foundation of my house, because gradually the foundation will crack and the walls will collapse, but I must give myself time to grow.

Remarkable progress has been made in some areas of life for many citizens since the election into power of a democratic government in South Africa (1994), but poverty, injustice,
violence and ignorance remain. Increasingly, I see a fresh concept of learning as crucial to my progress and that of my learners and, indeed, survival. Education is being called on as a very important tool, not only to provide a nurturing life-line for the self, but also to pave the way to overall human development and well-being: to trail-blaze a broad path of learning for all, which begins in the cradle and never ends. On this new vision of learning, and consequently new levels of understanding and awareness, I have laid my hopes and aspirations for a world of peace, prosperity and harmony.

In order for me to translate my vision of learning into action, I must discover new frontiers of education (socio-cultural learning) and open rich new seams of understanding (holistic education and consciousness-based education). My educational journey demands that my understandings not only extend to the changing world around me, but that I first of all reach inwards to the unchanging inner self so that I can develop and grow as a whole human being, with a clear sense of self-identity and integrity, thereby realising my full potential. I wish to extend my horizon to encompass an advanced tomorrow, I must not overlook the fundamentals; learning is as much about truth and life as knowledge and living. The Treasure Within, the 1996 report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century (Delors et al., 1996) states: “Choosing a type of education means choosing a type of society”. Thus, narrow and shallow education will only lead to narrow and shallow minds and people; surely, our destiny is greater than this.

My learners and I will be equipped with four qualities that are productive of Ubuntu: humility; self-surrender; love; and compassion. From humility proceeds meekness and peacefulness; from self-surrender comes patience, wisdom and true justice; from love springs kindness, joy and harmony; and from compassion follows gentleness and forgiveness.

b) Respect for the individual’s ability to learn

The second value that informed my research was respect for the individual’s ability to learn. I wanted at all cost to shun the concerns of power and control that could reside in the relationships between teacher and learner; the perception that ‘teacher knows and learner learns’ is customary in normative forms of pedagogy. My research journey necessitated that I use a different perception of the teacher-learner rapport to address concerns of equality and freedom. In South Africa, inequalities resulting from apartheid and economic deprivation
have had a democratic impact on the entire education system, and also on those learners who face barriers to learning.

Education needs to become far more sensitive to the existence of different learning styles and multiple intelligences. This will produce better learners who, through being able to recognise their own strengths and weaknesses, will make better choices. Equally important is the need to focus on emotional intelligence:

- To work on emotions and feelings.
- To allow the learners to realise what lies behind their feelings, such as that depression is caused by anger or hurt and then to work through those feelings.

Classrooms should become a space wherein children learn to participate in everyday decision-making procedures, to understand school governance by being involved in rule setting, and to establish values for the classroom, the school and themselves as individuals. This provides the opportunity to build confidence and self-esteem. I wanted my research to avoid oppression and domination within the teacher-learner relationship because, as Young (2000:45) has reiterated, such controlling influences are the founding principles for the formation of injustice.

I had been caught up in my own prejudice for so long that I did not allow myself to see the feelings of my learners, neither their liberties. I was prone to judge and condemn them; I did not reconsider my own suffering when I myself was misjudged and misunderstood on the road I had travelled, when I had to gather wisdom and love from my own bitter experiences. However, whilst on this educational journey, I realised that life was full of new beginnings presented to me every day and every hour to better my understanding of my learners’ right to be educated by me. Most important, beginnings may be small and appear trivial and insignificant, but in reality, they are the most important thing in life.

*Have you ever missed in your aim? Well, the mark is still shining. Did you faint in the race? Well, take breath for the next.*

Ellu Wheelar Wilcose

I became aware that my difficulty in acknowledging respect for my learners’ ability to learn was not only contained primarily in the situation which gave rise to it (poverty), but also in
the impoverished mindset with which I regarded their situation. That which was difficult to my learners should not have been difficult to my mature mind to comprehend, but I allowed myself to fall prey to self-imposed limited thinking. To the untutored and undeveloped minds of my Grade Six learners, how great and apparently insurmountable would the difficulties in learning some simple lessons appear? How many anxious and laborious hours and days, or even months, their solution required; and frequently, how many tears were shed in helpless contemplation of the unmastered, and apparently insurmountable, wall of difficulty! Yet I came to realise that the difficulty lay in the ignorance of the children only, and that its conquest and solution was initially necessary for the development of intelligence and for the ultimate welfare, happiness, and usefulness of my learners.

What was the nature of my learners’ inability to participate in their own education? It was not a situation that was fully seized and understood in all its bearings. Unused energy must be accessed urgently to express and employ my latent powers and hidden resources. Without the difficulties that I am faced with, I know there would be no need to progress, and no unfoldment or evolution; stagnation would triumph and my learners would perish of tedium.

c) Social justice

In this research, social justice will be defined as equal participation in a democratic society, which allows for the equal distribution of resources to all its members, who must have a degree of self-determination and interdependence (Bell, 1997). In the context of education, social justice means examining why and how schools are unjust for some learners. Nieto (2000:183) asserts “it [a concern for social justice] means analysing school policies and practise that devalue the identities of some students while overvaluing others”.

Concepts such as freedom, equality, justice, personal autonomy, self-realisation and the growth of understanding are frequently cited as the aims of education. These are qualities to be realised in the way in which teachers interact with their learners and how they treat learners in the teaching and learning situation. I see teaching as an ethical activity and an appropriate focus for practical investigation and reflection. In my society, very little is being spent on educational resources divided to our schools, especially in the early years of schooling. This inequality caused by my learners’ birth and natural bequest, is undeserved and should therefore be balanced by giving more attention to those with fewer natural assets
and those born into less encouraging environments. Social justice is aimed at improving the long-term expectations of the less preferred. Educational resources must be distributed equally, to inspire the personal and social life of learners.

My learners’ right to social justice are being violated, because they are excluded from mainstream participation, challenging as they do the curriculum, academic outcomes and management strategies of mainstream classrooms and schools (O’Hanlon, 2003:13). Freire (1971) believes that dialogic education, in which the knowledge, perspectives and experiences of students and teachers are honoured, is central to the education process. In this process, students and teachers must become active citizens, challenging injustices from within, amongst themselves, and in the social world around them. Reflection alone is insufficient; active learning will help deepen learners’ understanding.

Kolb (1984) emphasises students bringing their lived experiences into the classrooms and being subjected to reflection and experimentation. Asking students to reflect on and debrief such classroom experiences through discussion can have positive effects. Coupled with knowledge content lectures, readings and other conceptual input, learners can develop a more abstract understanding of social life. That understanding can be tested outside the classrooms and in new situations. Thinking, talking and applying class concepts and acting upon these, all reflect engaged learning (Nagda, Gurin & Lopez, 2003:169) and may be brought back to class as content for further exploration and meaning making.

“What lies before us and what lies behind us are small matters compared to what lies within us. And when we bring what is within out into the world, miracles happen.”

Henry Thoreau (1817-1862)

Through my research I want to develop more just opportunities for my learners who are consistently denied social justice when they are perceived as not being good enough by the teachers who teach them. I am not only referring to an inclusive form of justice as teaching in ways in which my learners with their diverse abilities and/or disabilities will understand; neither am I talking about a form of justice whereby Individual Educational Plans (IEPs) are created. I am referring to a living form of justice that will ensure that the potential of my learners is recognised and valued by all who work with them and for them.
I want to reiterate why I am convinced that my learners have unrecognised capabilities. My stories are based on my personal experiences and on what I have heard and read about the lives of others who have succeeded in life despite challenging home environments.

During my research, a 12-year-old boy wrote to me that he found school extremely difficult and stressful. Dillon declared: *School is difficult for me becose (because) I don’t now (know) the wurk (work)*. He attributed his likely learning difficulty to confusion: *Like when the teacher are explaining something just a minute then she moves to something else and also when I get confused I do not know where to start or where to end. Also when this happen to me the other learners start to tease me and it seems to me the teacher also pokes fun at me at the same time.*

Samuel was also subjected to a lot of teasing and abuse at numerous occasions and he portrayed the sadness and loneliness that may be associated with the social isolation that teasing brings about: *The other big learners came to me and pulled me by my clothing and hit me and tear off my clothes and steal my pencils and if other children don’t want to play with me and then I want to cry and I don’t feel happy and I feel sad and are just not going to talk to anybody, not even my teacher* (20 July 2009, tape recording and transcript, in data archive Appendix 4).

Life has many happy endings, because it has much that is noble and pure and beautiful. Although there is much sin and ignorance, pain and sorrow and many fears, in this world there are also much purity and knowledge, many smiles, and much healing and gladness. No pure thought or unselfish deed can fall short of its fortuitous result, and every such result is a happy consummation.

A harmonious, nurturing home environment for my learners is a happy ending; a successful life is a happy ending; a task well and faithfully done is a happy ending. A quarrel put away, grudges wiped out, unkind words confessed and forgiven, friend restored to friend – these are all happy endings. However, I want to create opportunities for my learners to cherish their own vision, a lofty idea in their hearts that will one day be realised. Columbus cherished a vision of another world and he found it. Copernicus fostered the vision of a multiplicity of
worlds and a wider universe, and he revealed it. Buddha beheld the vision of a spiritual world of stainless beauty and perfect peace, and he entered into it.

My learners’ circumstances may be unfavourable, but they will overcome these if they perceive a positive ideal and strive to reach it. If my learners travel within themselves and enhance their self-concept, they will develop and flourish. In my mind’s eye, I see the myriad of learners I have taught over the years transformed into a young boy, hard pressed by poverty and labour. But he dreams of better things. He thinks of intelligence, or refinement, or grace and beauty. He conceives of a mentally built ideal condition of life. A wider liberty and a sense of a larger scope take possession of him; unrest urges him to action, and he uses all his spare time and means to develop his latent powers and resources. Very soon his mind has become so altered that poverty can no longer hold him. Poverty has become so out of harmony with his mindset that it drops from his life like a garment cast aside. And with the growth of opportunity that fits the scope of his expanding powers, he passes out of his improvement altogether.

Years later, I will see my learner as a grown man. I will find him a master of certain forces of the mind that he exercises with world-wide influence and almost unequal power. In his hand, he holds gigantic responsibilities; he speaks, and lives are changed; men and women hang upon his every word and remould their characters accordingly. Sun-like, he becomes the permanent and luminous centre around which innumerable destinies revolve. He has become the vision of his youth; he has become one with his ideal. This is what I envisage for all my learners.

Finding their own way of negotiating their difficulties

My research proposes to theorise changes in my practice. I want my learners to find their own way of negotiating their difficulties and I want to help them find the best way to achieve this. In this chapter, I have described contexts and concepts that militate against this. The descriptions and literature represent the muddy waters that engulf me and wrench my heart as I perceive the pervasive incongruity of everyday life in the society in which I live. The cardinal role of values in education is underlined by the publication of the “Manifesto on values, education and democracy,” initiated by a former South African Minister of Education, Kader Asmal (DoE, 2001b). What is important is that teachers’ values and convictions determine how they perceive, interpret and evaluate experiences (Butroyd, 1997:3; Manstead,
Zuber-Skerritt (2001:8) believes that all people develop a personal theoretical framework, or lens, through which they view the world and that guides their behaviour. However, it is not only individual values that play a role; researchers have established that deep-seated value systems or culture may also influence thinking and decision-making in a total system, such as a school and society. Problems occur when individual teachers’ values come into conflict with the culture of the school and the individuals within society; it is challenging to implement a programme of which the inherent values are not supported by the culture of the school or the surrounding societies (Abbate-Vaughn, 2004:229).

The concept of inclusion offers the possibility to teachers to transcend traditional liberal values to focus on the bond that ties people together in communities. Inclusivity entails much more than simply, not enduring social and educational differences; it entails recognising others’ individual worth as members of a larger community that is enriched by their contributions.

2.7 CONCLUSION

My learners are prevented from achieving according to their capabilities. I regard it as important that teachers instil within their learners a sense of destiny so that they will realise that they have immeasurable potential. Children are living letters that should stand as evidence to the future that the past made some level of contribution.

The psalmist David wrote a brief note that rings as loud as an atomic bomb in my consciousness. It speaks to the heart of man, about offspring: *If anyone knows the value of children, it is those who just left theirs in the ground. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth,* says King David, whose arrow they lowered into the ground (Psalm 127:3-5). The question resonated with me: Why did the psalmist compare children to arrows? It was for their potential to propel into the future. Perhaps it was for the intrinsic gold mine that lies at the heart of every child who is shot through the womb. Maybe he is trying to tell us that children go where we as adults aim them. Could it be that we as adults and teachers must be visionary enough to equip them with a bow that will accelerate or ensure their success and emotional well-being?
I gradually realised that my actions were rooted in my deeply-held belief in and valuing of each person as unique and gifted and embodying limitless potential and, in religious terms, a living expression of a creative God. By providing young people with an opportunity to “do” inclusively through reflective practice in school and community settings, I challenged them to give expression to their creativity and potential in life-affirming social practices. I also came to appreciate my research and practice as an expression of my spirituality (Personal Journal, 2009), with its accompanying values of Ubuntu and social justice.

My living theory will be to set free the potential of all the learners crossing my path on this educational journey. When God blessed the children, he challenged the adults to become as children. As “in loco-parentis” I am living out my own values based on Ubuntu, respect for the individual’s ability to learn, and social justice. This is done whilst undertaking a discovery journey, searching for answers to the recurring question: “How do I create learning opportunities for learners from impoverished communities?”
CHAPTER THREE
THE LEARNING OF SOCIALLY EXCLUDED LEARNERS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I examine and analyse situations in my practice in order to come to an understanding of the nature of learning by the learners that I teach who are socially excluded from participation. I show how the blending of artistic and scientific elements can promote and embrace reflective teaching. This thesis is an articulation of my living theory of inclusion, in which I offer descriptions and explanations of my practice as a marginalised teacher of marginalised children, as I transform my situation into one of celebrating my inclusive practices. These practices focus on how I can enable the children I teach to see themselves as worthy of inclusion in all the contexts of their lives as they celebrate their personal practice.

Through this journey I will scale up analytical ladders and drag the theoretical significance of my ideas, while I keep an inflexible rope tied to my participants who are on solid ground.

My understanding of learner participation does not exist in isolation; I comprehend it to be a nested arrangement of family, school, neighbourhood, communities and societies that work interactively to facilitate learner involvement (Donald et al., 2006). The types of relationships to which a child is exposed at home and in society may influence the development of his/her self-esteem and self-concept. Taking all these aspects into consideration made me realise that I would have to climb the challenging mountain of creating an inclusive classroom one step at a time. I made a decisive decision to go beyond what I had already mastered and allow myself to grow in this regard and not to lose sight of the inherent complexities of the realities of each of the learners in my care.

I have identified two key issues from my embryonic understanding of authoritarian theories of learning. My thoughts resonate with the views of the post-revolutionary Soviet psychologist Vygotsky, who contends that social constructivism is a variety of cognitive constructivism that emphasises the collaborative nature of much learning. Social constructivism was developed while a cognitivist, Vygotsky, rejects the assumption made by cognitivists such as
Piaget and Perry that it is possible to separate learning from its social context. He argues that all cognitive functions originate in, and must therefore be explained as, products of social interactions. He also maintains that learning is not simply the assimilation and accommodation of new knowledge by learners; it is the process through which learners are integrated into a knowledge community. Inclusive education requires schools to welcome children to participate as learners, without setting arbitrary boundaries based on social characteristics (Hick et al., 2009:52).

Social constructivism has often been called “child-centered” education, because it strives to be “developmentally appropriate” (that is, it respects human capacities and tendencies as these naturally unfold during childhood) and engages students fully in their learning. Its emphasis on community and collaboration also gives it a social dimension that often extends to a larger concern for social justice and participatory democracy. Hick et al. (2009:55) state that participation focuses on the ongoing learning activities involved in becoming a member of a particular community with its own language and norms. Participation, therefore, means becoming part of a greater whole.

Often a school, a community and a society loses focus of what should be its centre of concern. Erickson (in Meyer et al., 1997) states that experiences at each life stage are an effective preparation for the next. The continuity in the socialisation process provides a smooth transition from one stage to the next. The family, as a primary socialisation agent during the formative years, plays a crucial role in teaching children skills and attitudes that will enhance their social participation. Inadequate parents hurt their children more by omission than by commission. Parental emotional needs tend to take precedence, and children are often asked to be their parents’ caretakers, especially in households where parents die of AIDS. Children are robbed of their own childhood and learn to ignore their own needs and feelings. Because these children are unable to assume an adult role and take care of their own parents, they often feel inadequate and guilty. These feelings often continue into adulthood.

Educators need to realise that learners from impoverished backgrounds have often developed a range of valuable skills to get them through tough circumstances. Consequently, it is important to first stop and take stock. You may find that much of what they learned in their family is valuable. Many of the survival behaviours my learners have developed are amongst their best assets. For example, learners who grow up in impoverished families often have
finely tuned empathy for others; they are often very achievement-oriented and highly successful in some areas of their lives, and they are often resilient to stress and adaptive to change.

In contemplating the changes I would want to bring about in my learners, it is imperative that I should not lose sight of their good qualities. Educators must guard against a needs-based approach that has a strong focus on problems, deficiencies and needs; educators should also become *au fait* with the asset-based approach and focus on what is currently inherent to the individual and the environment (Ebersöhn & Eloff, 2003:10). The relationships that are developed whilst embracing this approach should be based on the strengths and talents of the individuals involved, not on their weaknesses and problems.

Any education system that claims to respect human rights must inevitably be inclusive in principle. In other words, it must recognise the right to quality education, not only of those with disabilities, but also of the many learners who currently do not benefit in any meaningful way from the education they receive (Engelbrecht & Green, 2007:5). The Inclusive Education Policy (DoE, 2002:22) does not refer to categories of disability, but rather to levels of support needed by the learners. Including all learners in education is seen as a process, rather than a destination one arrives at. According to Evans (2007:6), inclusive education is concerned with the participation all individuals and the removal of all forms of disqualifying practice in existing school systems.

Inclusive education requires educators to enquire into their own context to see how it might be developed and realising that it is a process of personal, social and professional growth. UNESCO (2005:15) defines inclusive education as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners and reducing exclusion, within and from education, in order to provide in all their basic human rights to education and the right to social membership. Inclusion involves making sense of life’s experiences in a professional sense and valuing the role of other human beings in that process. Hence, I must ensure that my research offers a practical approach to addressing these theoretical and epistemological issues.
3.2 LEARNING STYLES AND PERSONALITY

Educators today are often faced with overcrowded classes, and students with a variety of personalities and learning styles. To engage all learners in a meaningful way, educators should be equipped with a sound knowledge of learning and be competent in various proven teaching strategies.

In addition, educators should be informed of and be familiar with a variety of learning styles. There are different approaches learning; a learning style is a term used to describe the attitudes and behaviours that determine an individual's preferred way of learning. A number of researchers have attempted to break down the concepts and processes that underlie the term “learning styles”. At risk of over-simplifying a complex subject, learning styles are said to consist of three inter-related elements:

- information processing – habitual modes of perceiving, storing and organising information (for example, pictorial or verbal);
- instructional preferences – a predisposition towards learning in a certain way (for example, collaboratively or independently) or in a certain setting (for example, at a certain time of day or in a certain environment);
- learning strategies – adaptive responses to learning specific subject matter in a particular context.

Rather than representing a single concept, “learning styles” is therefore an umbrella term covering a spectrum of modalities, preferences and strategies.

Learning can be defined as a process leading to relatively permanent behavioural change or potential behavioural change. In other words, as we learn, we alter the way in which we perceive our environment, the way in which we interpret the incoming stimuli, and therefore the way in which we interact or behave. Watson (1925:251) was the first educationist to study how the process of learning affects our behaviour. He formed a school of thought known as Behaviourism, now a sub-category of learning theory. The central idea behind Behaviourism is that only observable behaviours are worthy of research, since other abstractions, such as a person’s mood or thoughts, are too subjective.
Other categories of learning theory include Social Learning or the idea that we learn through our interactions with society. In social learning theory, society plays a large role in the way in which we think about ourselves and the world and therefore how we interact or behave in the larger context of society.

According to Epstein (2002:4), learning is based on the following principles:

- Learning is an active process.
- Learning is a developing process.
- Learning involves language.
- Learning is a social activity.
- Learning activities involve thinking.
- Learning takes place in relation to existing knowledge.
- One needs knowledge to learn.
- It takes time to learn.
- The key component to learning is motivation.

The espousal of these principles by me and taking ownership thereof made me realise that learning is a relationship based on mutuality and reciprocity; children are partners in the co-construction of knowledge with adults and other children. Hence, I needed to take the following actions:

- I needed to mediate action to make learning an active process.
- I also needed to create the context, activate an interest, stimulate my learners, arouse their interest, instill confidence, invoke cooperation, and make them curious.
- I also needed to adopt an ethic of care so as to open up the possibility that children would be treated as unique others, rather than as instruments to be exchanged in predetermined educational outcomes.

The concept of learning style in education is important, because it incorporates all those human attributes that help to determine and characterise a person’s preferred approach to problem-solving (Child, 2007:404). Learning styles are the characteristic ways in which an individual acquires, perceives and processes information. “Style” according to the Oxford
Dictionary (Hawkins, Delahunty & McDonald, 2002) refers to a manner of doing something, as opposed to the matter with which a person is working. Style therefore has to do with personality and motivation, as well as the thinking tactics used for tackling problems. When we are in a classroom environment that matches our learning style, everything feels right: the teacher is stimulating, the material exciting, and the work enjoyable. But if the environment does not match our preferred learning style, we feel out of place, uncomfortable, and unable to do our best.

Educators are making judgements about their own affective qualities and about the qualities of their learners and the colleagues they work with on a daily basis. Personality factors also affect learning and performance. Defining personality is a very challenging task, because the total organisation of humans is very complex. One that is sufficiently comprehensive for my purpose is the more or less stable and enduring organisation of a person’s character, temperament, intellect and physique, which determines his/her unique adjustment to the environment (Child, 2007:375).

There are different approaches to personality. The Humanist believes that we react to the world as we believe it to be, and not as it really is. Lewin (1936) thinks that the behaviour of a person or group is due to the distribution of forces in the social situation as a whole, rather than the intrinsic properties of the individual. Maslow (1970) is of the opinion that personality is shaped by the individual’s reaction along the paths taken, while his/her needs are in the process of being satisfied. Understanding their own personality type can help students understand and appreciate diversity, read their teachers better, manage their studies more wisely, develop sounder relationships, and plan majors and careers more realistically.

Conceivably the best known Behaviourist is Skinner (1904-1990). Skinner collaborated much of Watson’s research and findings, but believed that internal states could influence behaviour just as much as external stimuli. He is considered a radical behaviourist, because of this belief. Currently, it is widely accepted that both internal and external stimuli influence human behaviour (Willan et al., 2007:47).

Behavioural psychology is basically interested in how our behaviour results from stimuli, both in the environment and within ourselves. Behavioural psychologists study, often in minute detail, the behaviours we exhibit while controlling as many other variables as possible.
This is often a gruelling process, but the results have taught us a great deal about our behaviours; the effect our environment has on us; how we learn new behaviours; and what motivates us to change or remain the same. Hick et al. (2009:56) contend that while behaviourist approaches work very well in enabling the attainment of certain skills and factual knowledge in a step-by-step way, they cannot be used exclusively in an education system that values social participation, creativity, critical reflection and understanding as learning outcomes.

3.3 HOW LEARNING IS CONCEPTUALISED IN MY SCHOOL: DOES IT VALUE THE LEARNER WHO HAS BEEN SOCIALLY EXCLUDED FROM PARTICIPATION?

Journal Entry of experienced teacher, 20 May 2009:

_Dammit Deidre, I'm an educator, not a social worker!_  
_I am not exactly in love with the field of education. I knew I would never be. My parents’ finances never allowed me to choose anything else. I don’t care what children in my class are thinking – I just teach what is expected of me. Teaching seems obsessed with breaking things down into stages and order and, quite frankly, it just makes me so angry to go through all this effort._

Education in my school is failing learners, for several reasons:

- Society is changing – that is, family values, level of respect for professional people, structure of families (e.g. blended families and shared parenting).
- Expectations of educators are growing, beyond what is realistic.
- Welfare issues and learners’ social values (many of which are learned outside of school) are significantly affecting their ability and willingness to learn.
- Parents and caregivers of learners are not able and/or willing to support the school in its endeavours to support their children’s learning.
“You may feel like a voice in the wilderness, but it is your voice we are waiting to hear. You are the determining factor.”

Neale Donald

After listening to the above response from one of my colleagues, I was toying with the idea of who needed more swift intervention – my educators or my learners? This brought me back to the theory of the ecological concept, which is based on the interdependency and relationships between the different organisms and their physical environment. These relationships are seen as a whole. Every part is as important as the other in ensuring the survival of the whole system, thus it enables the system to facilitate the development and display of positive individual characteristics, which in turn facilitates positive subjective experiences. Seligman (2003) accentuates the notion of greater facilitation and integration rather than just casual relationships between society, institutions and organisations.

Commencing from an ecological-transactional perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, 1989), it is relevant to consider the complexity and the interrelatedness of various overlapping contexts that encroach on children’s growth and developments, implying that not all systems may be positive and enabling. The school is a system with different parts, comprising staff, learners, the curriculum and an administration. The child is a system, living with a family and attending school and church. As an alternative, the outcomes of a child are the results of the relationship between the child and his/her context across time. The positive development of a child who is living within a context of multiple adversities may depend to a large extent on the continuous and dynamic relations between the child and the experiences the family is providing and his/her social context, with an emphasis on the effect on the child of the environment within which he/she develops (Sameroff, 1987:45).

Contained by a microsystem, the child influences and is influenced by the physical and material properties of his/her immediate environment (assets and necessities at home and school), the personal qualities of those with whom he/she interacts (parents, peers and teachers), and the activities, roles and interpersonal relations experienced by children in daily lives, together with the interrelationship of the various settings (Bukatko & Daehler, 1995). The type of relationship to which a child is exposed to at home and amongst important and
influential others may manipulate the development of his/her self-esteem and self-concept, as well as his/her flexible adaptive outcomes.

Jesse wrote in her journal 27March 2009:

My dad’s an alcoholic. I am always afraid to invite other kids over, because I don’t want them to see what my family is like. I never really get close to people, now I don’t seem to know how to let others get close. I really don’t know how to have a good relationship and most of the time I feel pretty alone and useless.

The Ecosystemic Child Emphasis refers to the integration of biological, developmental, intrapsychic, systemic, socio-cultural and historical variables that must be taken into account when addressing a child's functioning in the world, both at conceptualisation and intervention levels. A child’s microsystem ought to be a protective system through which he or she receives support and love. However, for many of my learners, it is a source that inhibits their development in their socially impoverished homes and in which patterns of interaction are psychologically destructive. According to the wisdom of Bronfenbrenner (1989), a microsystem is a gateway to the world, not a locked room.

At the mesosystem level, the child’s peer group, family and school systems interact with one another. The mesosystem is a set of microsystems associated with one another. Consequently, what happens at home or in the peer group can influence how children respond at school, and vice versa. Children who experience a lack of support at home may receive care and understanding from their peers and/or teachers. Even though lack of support may result in children being apprehensive and insecure positive relations with their peers or teachers over a prolonged period may transform their sense of insecurity. These people can act as mediators in children’s lives. Negative factors, such as cultural deprivation or physical handicaps such as a low IQ, deafness or brain damage, impose an absolute limit on a person’s intellectual horizon. Children from impoverished homes can be meaningfully helped not just to turn them into some sort of consumers of life, but rather into contributing members of society, whether as parents or employers.

Modifiability embodies the belief that cognitive ability can be changed; hence, people’s potential is determined by their mind's amenability to change. However, they can only undergo significant changes if they have a guide or mediator to identify the barriers that
obstruct their response to information and other stimuli and to help them circumvent them. Normally, parents, siblings and teachers act as mediators. Children that lack a supportive home environment or who suffer from physical or socio-economic handicaps need the services of trained specialists. The ecosystem level includes systems in which the child is not directly involved, but which may influence, or be influenced by, the people who have proximal relationships with him/her in his/her microsystem. For example the parent’s workplace might close its doors, which will have an effect on the child’s life.

The macrosystem involves dominant social structures as well as beliefs and values that influence and may be influenced by all other levels of the system. A cultural value may include developing obedience to authority and respect for the elderly in the community. This value would influence the child on all the levels with which he/she is interacting.

It is imperative that I become familiarised with the ecosystemic perspective so that I can see where I can change and develop my teaching strategies to accommodate fully the children put in my care and, if possible, allow these kids to be healed under my loving guidance. I must take cognisance that it is my responsibility as a teacher of children to be aware of situational features, including my presence, appearance and language, which may cause or influence my learners to behave in a certain way. In my practice, I became aware of my individual and collective learning needs and priorities. My sense of direction ebbed and flowed and my understandings were far from complete, I began to apply ecosystemic thinking to my developing research project. As a teacher, I knew my learners were alive and that the purpose of educating them was to stimulate and guide their self-discovery. It follows as a corollary from the premise, that I as their teacher should be alive with living thoughts.
I understand education to be ecological in nature (not linear lines that converge at greater distance and then reach a vanishing point) [see Figure 3(a)]. Education is open to dynamic opportunities (psychological and physical) and disturbing tensions incited by the constant interplay of relations between learners and teachers and between educating and being educated (merging the learner’s cognitive abilities and skills). Good teaching requires getting to know one’s learners personally, uniquely and individually so that a genuine conversation (self-concept and values that are imbued in the learners and myself) can exist between you and knowledge is mediated in a way that has a human soul (resilience and positive adaptation, despite significant life adversity). Was it not those very elements that motivated me to become a teacher? The challenge was how I could construct this atmosphere for my learners.

3.4 HOW LEARNING IS CONCEPTUALISED IN DISCOURSES AROUND ME

One way of explaining why there are differences in perception between policy-makers and the socially excluded is to see their experiences in terms of “power” and “discourse”. Discourse in this context is understood to be more than simply the meaning people give to language. It constitutes people’s internalised values and the way in which they behave. Individuals can become so embedded in their societal belief systems that they neither question the dominant
values nor realise how much they themselves are naturalised into them. Certain aspects of their behaviour may then become predictable and unquestioned within their own social circumstances. They are “normalised”. When providers also normalise the discourses of social inclusion, the result may potentially be one of continued exclusion for certain sectors of the population (Barry, 1998).

The current discourse on social inclusion does not sufficiently accept responsibility for causing the situation in the first place. Exclusion is not only cumulative; it is also perpetuated within the very infrastructure of society and its wider discourses. Power relations are complex and built on the effect of previous discourses and experiences. Their outcome could be to reinforce “otherness”. The sense of otherness could ultimately stimulate in some individuals or groups an unconscious “desire” to be excluded, in spite of their apparent desire for inclusiveness.

The discourse on diversity not only sees participant groups as capable of development on their own, but also as being already engaged in daily processes of self and community development. Rather than learning, planning and designing programmes for meeting the needs of different groups to outside experts, the diversity discourse allows for greater decision-making on the part of the participant groups. Educational programmes emerging from this discourse would therefore look for increasingly diverse solutions rather than propagating universal solutions for all. “Inclusion is not simply about reconstructing provision for learners who have been excluded; it is a means of extending educational opportunities to a wide range of groups who historically have had little or no access to schooling” (Dyson & Forlin, 1999:32). Inclusion is seen as much more than a simple issue of placement; it is more likely to be understood as concerning the quality of learning and participation (Mittler, 2000). Inclusion provides people who have been socially excluded with the opportunity to function in society on active levels and to enjoy equality, respect and the right to be different.

A deeper appreciation of how people develop such a picture of themselves will help educators provide effective learning programmes for those most excluded from the mainstream (Williams, 1998). Mainstream strategies for social inclusion must take account of individual differences and different social networks, rather than focusing on encouraging people to conform to a common norm. There is a need to take account of how people’s past histories
have been shaped and are shaping their current attitudes. In terms of their educational prerogative, individuals have been manipulated into accepting or believing that different social groups have certain kinds of educational rights. When new discourses eventually invite these social groups to claim learning for themselves, it is usually at the denial of their social or cultural identity, producing confused and fragmented participation amongst the excluded as they struggle to reposition themselves amid the changing discourses of inclusion. Measures to address new learning opportunities must recognise that new rationalities for participation need to overcome the more embedded arguments of past power relations and acknowledge people’s identities as an integral aspect of learning. Educational inclusion also means that we must recognise different ways of knowing and doing within our mainstream learning programmes.

Swart (in Engelbrecht & Green, 2001) declares that inclusion has its origin and is firmly grounded in the principles of equity, equality and access, allowing all learners the right to educational opportunity to develop to their full potential. Teachers are in a strategic position to promote these values and persuade other stakeholders to see themselves as an irreplaceable component of this rich kaleidoscope of human colours weaved together. Hence, they must understand and appreciate each child’s individuality and uniqueness (DoE, 2000).

In order to engage critically with how learning was happening in learners excluded from participation, I reflected on my understanding of the discourses around their learning. Many teachers at my school still believed that learners were clean, blank slates that learn through passive absorption in their classrooms. According to Miles (1999), inclusive education (satiated with curricula, multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate mastery, multimodal approaches to learning and high expectations for all children) has the potential to revolutionise learning for all students. However, South Africa, like several of its neighbours, experiences the major challenges associated with poverty (DoE, 2001a).

Too much learning in the classrooms takes the form of step-by-step verbal or numerical statements or formulas reproduced by learners on cue, but that they are unable to use in the outside world of which they form part. The direct instruction method is mostly implemented by teachers focusing on the teaching of basic skills (lesson broken up in small, easy-to-learn steps); teachers are in charge of decision-making, keep students on task and make use of positive reinforcements. Should learners show signs of not understanding the learning
material, the teacher gives additional explanations. The most popular component of this teaching approach for teachers at my school is the question-and-answer section. They still regard it is an indication of how well learners understand the work.

As learning is an active process, the learning context plays an important role. The context should be designed to help develop critical thinking skills in learners by using the types of tasks performed in the professional field of practice. Problem solving activities are felt to meet this requirement, as Jonassen (2000:63) has commented: “Problem solving is generally regarded as the most important cognitive activity in everyday and professional contexts”. Teaching and learning processes at my school often lack the flexibility to accommodate the diverse abilities and interests of the heterogeneous learner population. In my context, much of instruction and learning is based on rote learning, the meticulous following of textbooks, and copying. It is not surprising that the most capable learners are not adequately challenged, nor are the less advantaged learners supported.

- Starting with existing practices and knowledge. Centres of learning often have more knowledge than what they are able to put to use. The main drive has to be making better use of accessible expertise and creativity within any given educational context. This suggests a need to work alongside teachers in centres of learning in order to support them in developing ways of analysing their practices. Every time an individual uses his/her assets and capabilities, the system becomes stronger (Ebersöhn & Eloff, 2003:10). The Asset-Based approach has a strong internal focus, which means that problem-solving and mission development comes from within. Additionally, in examining existing practices, it is also necessary to consider whether aspects in these practices are in themselves acting as barriers to participation.

- Seeing differences as opportunities for learning. The effort to restructure schools to accommodate the diverse needs of all learners implies a process of reculturing learning and teaching in which teachers and schools have to shift from a set of embedded assumptions, values, customs and practices that encourage and preserves the status quo to one that promotes reform, including building a commitment to change, planning for change and providing support that promotes and maintains change (Engelbrecht & Green, 2007:140). Amending existing
arrangements seems to require a process of improvisation as teachers respond to the various forms of feedback provided by learners. Those who do not fit into existing arrangements can be seen as offering “surprises”; that is, feedback that invites further improvisation. This implies a more positive view of difference. It also requires professional self-confidence, which can be developed through continuous training and practice. Teachers are key to the transformation of schools and in order for them to lead reform efforts, they need to be offered expanded and enriched professional development opportunities.

3.5 TEACHING THE SOCIALLY EXCLUDED

Researchers draw implicitly or explicitly a set of beliefs or epistemological assumptions called paradigms to make sense of research information and to transform it into data (Briggs & Coleman, 2007:19). In order to teach in varied and diverse communities, not only our paradigms must shift, but also the way in which we think, write and speak. The engaged voice must never be fixed and absolute, but always changing, always evolving in dialogue with a world beyond itself. Babbie and Mouton (2001:42) affirm that a paradigm is the fundamental model or frame of reference we utilise to organise our observations and analysis. According to Creswell (1998:74), all qualitative researchers approach their studies with a certain paradigm or worldview, a set of assumptions that directs their inquiry. Creswell states that these assumptions relate to the following:

- The nature of reality.
- The relationship of the researcher to the person or subject being researched.
- The role of value in a study.
- The process of research (the methodological issue).

For instance, the curriculum covers more than just the syllabus. Child (2007:478) proposes that the curriculum process comprises all the planned experiences provided by a school to assist pupils in attaining the designated learning outcomes to the best of their abilities. The planned curriculum includes the knowledge and skills that are deemed important by the dominant groups within the community. However, it is only through interaction between teachers and learners that the intentions of the curriculum are achieved. Teachers have the vital role of lifting the curriculum “off the page”. They must assist learners in navigating
their way through the diversity of information and experiences that contribute to their development as citizens who can engage with their communities to shape and be part of a socially just world, at all levels local, state, national, and international. To do this, teachers need adequate resources, time and continuing and relevant professional development in a system that values cooperation and collaboration.

Those who argue for a new kind of curriculum suggest that the current ways of constructing knowledge and therefore the teaching of knowledge are value laden and designed to benefit only certain groups in society. Exclusion and inclusion, as well as power, are closely linked to what goes on in educational institutions; neither that which is taught, nor who studies what, are neutral issues. The cultural rules surrounding education are closely linked to the organisation and resources of teaching itself (Deem, 1996:51).

In other words, drawing on Foucault (1980), dominant power systems define who has authority to know and who determines what constitutes valuable knowledge. Only certain kinds of knowledge count as powerful and authoritative. The school disseminates the status quo of this power relationship, making it difficult for those already silenced to have their voices heard (Maguire, 2000:33). Whilst the conclusiveness of this theoretical perspective is not without its critics (Moore & Muller, 1999), it provides an explanatory rationale for claiming the need for the marginalised to be heard and made visible on their terms. Making the marginalised or excluded visible, often means developing curricula that are “off limits” from, for example, academic rules for disciplinary and authoritative texts. By looking at both the teaching relationship and curriculum, it can be argued that marginalised social groups can be helped to feel included. This applies across the whole process of developing a course at all levels of the education system. The aim is therefore to develop inclusionary methodologies that nurture respectful relationships (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006:25).

Teaching style is seen as an integral feature of engaging with the excluded. Teachers need to accept responsibility for all the learners on the register. In order to validate the marginalised voice, one must make use of an interactive teaching approach and address the need for more than simply the practical process of interaction between student and teacher (Engelbrecht & Green, 2007:150). Teachers and learners need to become more engaged with each other through the pedagogy that is being used. In this process, teachers are regarded as learners, too, and the students’ lived experiences are central to informing the academic material. The
nature of the teacher-learner relationship is central to ensuring an appropriate learning environment; the relationship encourages students to challenge what has previously been taught. Students want to be seen as whole human beings with complex lives and experiences rather than simply as seekers after compartmentalised bits of knowledge. The child will thus be enabled to have a window on the world that is by its very nature complex and, at times, uncertain.

**How do I improve my practice in 2009?**

Reflecting on the description of my pedagogy, I found that my manner in teaching exercised excessive control and did not place the responsibility for learning in my learners’ court. Putting into practice the action of personal analogies in my teaching I hope to create higher feelings of success in them to increase their self-esteem or focus on the obstacles they encounter in improving their performances in my discriminating manner towards the lackadaisical and the socially excluded.

**Figure 3(b): Introducing values in a Grade 7 class**

3.6 **CURRICULUM CONTENT**

It was imperative for me to look at my daily actions and duties in my classroom to better intervene and assist my learners. Therefore, I compiled a curriculum, knowing that a curriculum is a powerful inclusionary and exclusionary contrivance. The literature on
inclusive education repeatedly refers to the importance of a flexible curriculum (Engelbrecht & Green, 2007:122).

The idea of an alternative curriculum is seldom explored in the literature. It is mentioned by both Barnett (1998) and Cherryholmes (1988), approaching it in different ways. Barnett, however, still uses concepts of knowledge and discipline in order to advocate the extension of the curriculum, whilst Cherryholmes questions the very way in which knowledge is constructed in the first place. Barnett tries to contextualise the curriculum in a critical, reflexive learning experience, with the goal as the understanding of the role of the self, which is critical to learning how to contribute actively to a changing world. Cherryholmes (1988:13) more unambiguously investigates this notion of curriculum as a study of issues in the here and now, which are currently “disvalued and excluded”. Both perspectives have significance for those whose voices are hardly ever spoken for in education materials as they facilitate the opportunity to move beyond subject matter restricted by the limits of existing authoritative text.

I want to enrich the curriculum at my school for learners who are socially excluded from full participation. This is a positive shift towards a pro-active culture to ensure that the most vulnerable learners are supported. Benjamin (2002:50) asserts that inclusion in school is about changing segregated attitudes, practices, structures and policies through the participation of all the members of the particular community. According to the author, inclusion should be understood in relation to exclusion. Making inclusive education a reality within South African schools will be determined by the long-term professional development of educators (Swart, Pettipher, Engelbrecht & Eloff, 2002:175).

Research holds the answer to many of the challenges that educators face in their institutions, as it will enable them to best answer important questions such as how and what to teach, in addition thereto that they will play a more active role in the operational functions of their schools.

3.7 SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RELEVANCE

The belief that social exposure to various cultures expands a child's pool of knowledge seems reasonable. The more experiences that a child has, the richer his/her world becomes.
Developmental advancements, dependent upon the people and the cultural tools provided to the child, will help him/her to form perceptions of the world. Vygotsky’s theory suggests that there are three ways in which learning is passed on to an individual (Vygotsky, 1978). Imitative learning is the first, in terms of which the child simply copies another person. Second imitate a teacher and then puts it into play, and the third is collaborative learning give instructed learning, where a child recalls the direction. Collaborative learning happens when a peer group cooperates to learn or achieve a specific goal while working to understand one another. Children from homes in which the language and culture do not closely correspond to those of the school may be at a disadvantage in the learning process. Such children often become alienated and feel disengaged from learning. People from different cultures learn in different ways. Their expectations for learning may be different. For example, learners from some cultural groups may prefer to learn in cooperation with others, while the learning style of others is to work independently. Children learn about themselves and the world around them within the context of culture (Northeast & Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University, 2002). Students from minority cultures may feel pressured to disavow themselves of their cultural beliefs and norms in order to assimilate into the majority culture. This, however, could interfere with their emotional and cognitive development and result in school failure (Sheets, 1999).

Vygotsky believes that knowledge is socially constructed; however, he extends his view to highlight his understanding that knowledge and value are culturally grounded (Wink & Wink, 2004:32). Whereas Piaget was interested in the construction of knowledge in the mind, Vygotsky was more interested in the cultural and social factors that influenced the construction of knowledge. Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory is widely cited by educators even today, as they formulate plans on how to get the most from students, challenging them to reach their highest potential. Vygotsky believes that social interaction leads to increased levels of knowledge, but that it actually changes a child's thoughts and behaviours.

Culture is central to learning. It plays a role not only in communicating and receiving information, but also in shaping the thinking process of groups and individuals. A pedagogy that acknowledges, responds to and celebrates fundamental cultures offers full, equitable access to education for students from all cultures.
The increasing diversity in our schools, the ongoing demographic changes across the nation and the movement towards globalisation dictate that we develop a more in-depth understanding of culture if we want to bring about true understanding among diverse populations.

Maria Wilson-Portuondo

I decided to take a serious look at the curriculum, pedagogy, retention and tracking policies, testing, hiring practices, and all the other policies and practices that creating a school climate that were either empowering or disempowering those who worked and learned at my school. I realised that the curriculum should be integrated, interdisciplinary, meaningful, and student-centered. It should include issues and topics related to the students’ background and culture. It should challenge the students to develop higher-order knowledge and skills (Villegas, 1991). Integrating the various disciplines of a curriculum facilitates the acquisition of new knowledge (Hollins, 1996). Students’ strengths in one subject area will support new learning in another. Likewise, by using the students' personal experiences to develop new skills and knowledge, teachers make meaningful connections between school and real-life situations (Padron, Waxman, & Rivera, 2002).

Goduka (1998) in the South African context explains in some detail why learning materials need to be sensitive to cultural orientation if active citizenship is to be realised for everyone. He, too, asks for the students’ “lived experiences” to be integrated into the teaching strategies and learning materials and sees this process as essential for giving people a sense of self. The process of awakening one’s identity and voice is essential for the development of skills for critical engagement and participation. The connection between teaching style, curriculum content and a process of helping learners discover who they are is a recurring theme in literature that argues for a better representation of the minority voice (Goduka, 1998; McMahon, 1996; Hooks, 1994). This process is also regarded as integral to the wider educational goal of engaging in a more global education. In order to engage with global issues, Goduka argues, you need a strong sense of place and identity within the local sphere.

To make inclusive practices a reality, moral aspects need to be addressed in schools. Such challenges are best supported and achieved through discussion, debate and reflective action. In terms of engaging with those on the margins of formal participation, this task can be quite challenging, as educational power holders are already inscribed in the dominant value system.
A compromise somewhere between the ideal of pluralism and equality and a reality goal of inclusion may have to be sought. Potential interim ways of addressing these structural inequalities might be found through an outreach approach that develops different kinds of curriculum outside the system, but linking institutional education with the wider community. Coalitions between the school systems and the communities being served must be pursued and new ways of linking people outside and inside of the schools together must be created so that the school is not seen as an alien institution, but as something that is integrally linked to the political, cultural and economic experience of people in their daily lives. A person in interaction with his/her environment, resulting in both environmental and individual change as a consequence of the learning process, constructs knowledge.

While the movement towards inclusion could generate obvious improvements in the quality of education and the social lives of children who have been socially excluded, the implementation of the principles of inclusive education need to be adjusted to the needs of particular students in a particular social situation to ensure their full development. Regular class teachers need to know how to implement pedagogy within today’s inclusive schools. Teachers need a template for how learning will proceed, given the interaction between language, cognition and culture inherent in classrooms with diverse student populations. This problem needs to be understood within a suitable theoretical framework. Recently, the theories of Vygotsky and emerging social constructivist perspectives have made a strong impact in the field of education, as they focus not on an isolated individual, but on the interaction of individuals within their social and cultural contexts (Harry, Rueda & Kalyanpur, 1999). The aim of education now should be to create an educational system that will develop the potential of all children in society and recognise and value their differences.

Significantly, this theory has great potential to inform the practice and the policy of social exclusion, considering that Vygotsky’s major concepts “were conceived, formulated and elaborated upon within the special education framework and terminology” (Gindis, 2003:200). The challenge today lies in building social capital and social well-being in our fragmented and struggling schools. In order to guarantee success in my learners, I must recognise that infinite benefits may be achieved from what people give to each other, pupil to pupil, teacher to pupil, pupil to teacher, and teacher to teacher in an interactive school environment.
3.8 MY OWN LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

We can create our own characters and write our own script, if properly taught:

In a very real sense human beings create ‘themselves’ and school can be the stage on which children work through the plot, rehearse their roles, learn the cues, create social functions, try out their ‘ideal selves’ for size, play hero parts which demonstrate their capability for greatness.

Jerry Starratt

Vygotsky believes that learning begins at birth and continues throughout life. One of the most important ways in which advancements in development are achieved, is through what Vygotsky calls “ZPD”. Vygotsky describes ZPD as “... the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers”. Teachers who wish to utilise the benefits of ZPD often employ one of two strategies:

- **Scaffolding**: Scaffolding requires that teachers show by example how to solve a problem while controlling the learning environment so that students can take things step by step, expanding their base of knowledge without excessive frustration. Learners deserve a chance to succeed. Teachers using the scaffolding method must be flexible and should be able to wear a lot of different hats. Flexibility allows for trial and error. A teacher has to assume the role of parent, counsellor and disciplinarian.

- **Reciprocal teaching**: A highly successful teaching method, reciprocal teaching provides an environment of open dialogue between learner and teacher that goes beyond a simple question and answer session. By alternating turns leading discussions, students soon find themselves capable of assuming a leadership and instructional role. This proves to be very helpful, because teachers must find ways to open and support culturally responsive communication between school and home. Learners can be instrumental in ensuring this. Too often, low-income and minority families face sustained isolation from the school culture, which can
result in an “us versus them” mentality. Because of the change in the modern family (single-parent families and poverty have become more prevalent), it often takes a whole community to educate young people. The importance of dialogue cannot be overemphasised.

I heeded Vygotsky’s advice and exposed my learners to a variety of social situations, since each interaction is considered a learning experience. It is especially important to introduce children to people and ideas that operate above their knowledge level, giving them access to new ideas and concepts. Constructivist teachers encourage learners to constantly assess how a learning activity is helping them gain understanding. I navigated them to look for answers by emulating what they saw in others. Listening to instruction and working as part of a group all provided opportunities for them to expand their existing base of knowledge.

And if Vygotsky is correct and development continues until death, teachers, especially, may wish to look for opportunities to keep on learning and growing. But if I am to be a mediator in creating learning experiences for my learners, how would I know whether the form of my mediation is appropriate? I started questioning the value of my professional practice, my knowledge base of the teaching profession, and how I perfected this profession over 18 years of teaching in mainstream classes of which 15 years was spent in separate education (learners with special educational needs (LSEN) were educated separately).

I realised that all my learners could reach their full potential if allowed to become co-researchers in my research, and my learners and I investigated teaching methods and my learners’ learning methods. Papert (1993) states that a school should be imagined in which students further strengthen this consciousness and teachers excitedly and joyfully stretch themselves to their limits in pursuit of projects built on their own visions, not one that succeeds in producing apathetic students satisfying only minimal standards. All the above-mentioned theorists’ perceptions have highlighted my own belief that learners cannot adopt a passive role in their own learning. Within a constructivist classroom, learners ideally become expert learners. My learners will know how to learn.

I can no longer stand at the end of something I visualised in detail and plan backwards from that future. I must stand at the beginning, with clarity in my mind, with a willingness to be involved in discovery, calling me to participate rather than plan. This journey compelled me
to learn all I could about teaching from both theory and practice so as to generate my own living theory. I taught and reflected on my teaching. I had to become sensitive to the diversity of my learners’ needs and family backgrounds. I had to ask them basic but often difficult questions about the appropriateness and success of my teaching.

3.9 CONCLUSION

I must hone my consciousness as to how my actions influence others and why my learners act the way they do. For my action to be successful, I must plan it immediately prior to being taken. The shorter the delay, the more meaningful is the action, because of its immediate impact. My strength of mind to take action is reinforced by my beliefs about the likely corollary of success and failures stated in my personal values and the motivation to remain strong in adverse and unexpected situations.

I am not certain if I am in a position to carry out my intentions, but every intention I have will be a goal towards success for my learners and myself. I will ensure this by knowing before I act. Action is the blossom of thought, and joy and suffering are its fruit. I am growth by law, and not a creation by pretence. Most of my teaching time I was anxious to improve my circumstances, but very unwilling to improve myself; thus I remained bound.

I have made known how I perceive the learner as a living human interacting with his/her environment on different levels and explained learning as an on-going living dialogical and reflective process of not knowing and of coming to know (McNiff, 2002). A living form of theory is the best form of theory to explain learning for my learners who are socially excluded from participation in the teaching and learning process. I need to become involved in my own educational development in the context of my own workplace (Whitehead, 1993:133).

Within the practical context of my research, there are hindrances that prevent my learners and myself achieving our potential fully. I need to find ways of challenging and overcoming these hindrances. In the next section, I will explain how I found a practical methodology that includes a form of theory and logic corresponding with my value of respect for my learners and their capabilities.
CHAPTER FOUR
RESEARCH INVESTIGATION

“Having made a discovery, I shall never see the world again as before. My eyes have become different, I have made myself into a person seeing and thinking”.

Polanyi, 1958

How do I show the situation as it was and as it developed?

In the preceding chapters, I have spoken about the encouragements that guided me to initiate my research and the concerns that impelled me to take action to change my situation. Part of my aim was to find pedagogies that would enable children who have been socially excluded from full participation, due to their impoverished backgrounds, to realise their full potential. These choices involved decisions to change my practice and to change the form of theory by which my learning and the learning of children could be explained. In Chapters Five and Six, I produce data to show how my pupils and I were systematically disadvantaged. I also produce data to show that I have taken action to overcome disadvantages and to transform them into new forms of opportunity.

My journey towards a methodology in which I could develop educational and practical theory, from within my self-reflective action research epistemological and ontological frameworks, was difficult. It was difficult in that I needed to reflect, question and articulate personal reasons for my choice. This involved looking at myself so as to bring a frame of reference to the research process that would influence how my investigation would be done. I reflected, journalled and questioned myself. I realised that the most important aspect of my research was to present the stories of my learners in a respectful and accountable way. My personal questioning was recorded in my reflective journals at the time of my research (Appendix 4). The following questions guided my study:

• Is my research participatory and democratic? I identified my learners’ problems and decided to investigate if any intervention on my side could and did make a difference in reaching my goal.
● Is my research socially responsive? Is the curriculum I am using culturally sensitive to my learners’ home environments to ensure success?
● Is my daily practice making room for improvement?
● Are the perceptions of teachers and learners so as to enhance teaching and learning?

Figure 4.1: Guiding components

I employ these four reflective questions to frame Chapters Four and Five. In those chapters, I, in my dual role of teacher and researcher, consider what form of methodology can bring immediate change to the learning experiences of pupils who are socially excluded, when I ask, “Is my research participatory and democratic?” In the first part of Chapter Four I explain why I chose a new methodology for studying the field of social exclusion. In the second part of Chapter Four, I address validity issues within this methodology and the standards by which my research can be judged. That part of Chapter Four contains my response to questions two and three above and my explanation how I validate my claims to new knowledge in relation to the criteria that I have described as the standards by which I have created a living theory from within my practice. Chapter Five explains the data gathering and analysis processes of my research in response to the question, “Have I scrutinized my ways of working to ensure that they are my best effort to address the concerns
I have?” I examine if my research methods are commensurate not only with my stated research aims, but also with the epistemological and ontological stance that I have adopted.

Chapter Four: A self-study action research methodology.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Freire (1997:75) urges me not to postpone, engraving on my heart: “I must not leave for random tomorrow something that is part of my task as a progressive educator right now”. This focuses me on immediate application and not on the development of theory or the generalisation of application (Best & Kahn, 2003:20). Action research centres on the unique characteristics of my learner population with whom the practice of social exclusion is employed and with whom inclusive practices need to be taken (Mertler, 2006:2).

My research set out to improve my teaching of the learners in my care. I chose a self-study action research approach to study” “How I can improve my practice?” (Whitehead, 1989). I chose this approach, because it would enable me to address the core concerns that I spoke of in previous chapters. Firstly, I wanted to take action to change what I saw as failing situations in my teaching and in the learning of my pupils who were socially excluded from participation. An action research approach could facilitate this. Secondly, I sought ways to resolve the pervasive contradictions between the rhetoric of propositional theory and the lived reality of my practice and my pupils’ experiences of my practice. Thirdly, I wanted to find ways to address the epistemological concerns I had about the teaching of pupils from impoverished backgrounds. Fourthly, I wanted to act in ways that would address the clashes between the ontological and Christian values that I held, and what was happening in my practice. Again, an action research methodology could facilitate this.

These questions are not meant to serve a rhetorical function, but are pertinent to some of the significant issues that arose during my research, and that are intimately connected to the values of social justice and equality underpinning my research. My realisation of the fact that children who were socially excluded from participation did not seem to be accorded equal treatment with the majority group in educational institutions, that their cultural identity did not appear to be recognised or accepted within the school system, and that their experience of
education was often one of marginalisation and oppression, amounted to a “denial of my values in my practice” (Whitehead, 1989).

Following the completion of my Master’s study programme (Geduld, 2009), in which I began to investigate the role of SMTs in the implementation of inclusive education, I decided to undertake a Doctoral study programme in order to develop my understanding further. I have maintained this focus in my work, but have now deepened my understanding of what I am doing as contributing to children’s capacity to participate fully. I made a conscious decision to reflect on my actions and the consequences of those actions (Mertler, 2006:14).

The methodologies that I used corresponded with my wish to realise my embodied values of social justice and Ubuntu in my practice through transforming my learners’ experience of education into a positive and life-affirming one, while simultaneously achieving an improvement in my own learning. In the process, I developed a new living theory of practice, which incorporated my living epistemology of practice. I claim, that, through engaging in my research and in presenting an account of it in this thesis, I have addressed the issue raised by Somekh (2002), who has suggested that epistemology and methodology are interconnected in an action research approach.

Numerous recordings in my reflective diary are similar; it is concerned with the analysis of my learners’ data. They contain observations of what others and I were doing, but few reflections on what I thought, and they offer my suggestions as to what “ought” to be done. There is practically no evaluation, and little or no theorising. No reference is made to my ‘I’. I am isolated and intangible, and communicate in the voice of one who is observing and describing the actions of others. I now see that I could have learned far more from these episodes of practice, had I reflected on my learning from them and theorised my practice by offering explanations as well as descriptions, and without then using those descriptions as prescriptions for the practices of others. Alternatively, my initial focus was to gather data about the children’s behaviour, rather than accounting for my own practice. In looking for ways of improving what the children might do better, rather than what I might do differently, I failed to ask myself important critical questions, because I was not thinking inclusively at the time. I was not asking myself questions about why I believed that an intervention in my practice was necessary – why had I introduced Meditating Time in the first place? I can now welcome the fact that my values about Ubuntu and social justice influenced my decision to
adopt pedagogical strategies that would provide my children with greater opportunities for holistic learning.

I began by studying what happened as I engaged my students in a daily process of classroom meditation called Meditating Time (see below for an explanation of “Meditating Time”). I planned this aspect of my practice and faithfully recorded what took place during meditation and thereafter over a period of a year. This exercise would be implemented in both my Grade 7 classrooms and all my colleagues in the school. My Master’s studies were narrative inquiry; therefore I was vividly aware of the power of my stories as I recorded them in my journal and continuously took cognisance of Spanbauer’s (1992:90) comment:

*The only thing that keeps us from floating off with the wind is our stories. They give us a name and put us in a place, allow us to keep on touching.*

I love stories. For as long as I can remember they have filled my world with meaning and allowed me to enlist the assistance of others in building my life. My own stories also allowed me to interpret my past and served as a vehicle through which I could identify my shortcomings and limitations in my daily practice of exclusion.

The key characteristics of an action research approach as proposed by Mills (2007:11) are that it is persuasive and authoritative. A third dimension, ontology, is included, in the form of the researcher’s espoused values and commitments. In this chapter, I demonstrate how my choice of methodology was influenced by, and had an influence on, my ontological and epistemological values, and how my ontological, epistemological and methodological values came to be synthesised, transformed and articulated as my living critical standards of judgement.

However, at the beginning of my research, my values were only superficially expressed: no deep inquiry was undertaken into why I held them or how they might fuse into living practices and standards for judging my practice (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005). The link between ontological and epistemological values was not recognised, nor significantly analyse as living standards by which I could judge my practice.
Through my interaction with traditional research, I was aware of what was written in the literature on inclusive education, but I paid very little attention to exclusionary practices. Underlining assumptions were accepted by me as givens, and I reported the thinking of others in my writing, instead of thinking for myself. I now understand that my interaction with literatures means that I must demonstrate that which I read; I may comment thereon, and arrive at my own conclusions. I will be developing solutions to my own problems on what works in my classroom and will not be coerced by experts from the outside. Action research is relevant; I want to increase the predictability of what happens in my classroom to guide the outcomes I am out to achieve. My research findings will be very meaningful to me because they will inform my practice and lead me to more challenging results. They will allow me to embrace a problem-solving philosophy, instead of remaining part of the status quo of disempowerment.

4.2 POSITIONING OF RESEARCHER WITHIN ACTION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

I persisted in giving detailed accounts of my research and how changes came about in my practice and in thinking consecutively to address the concerns that I articulated so far. My research activities were given further momentum by unexpected yet unplanned events.

Through active interacting with my colleagues at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University and attending numerous workshops presented by Jean McNiff (renowned action research expert), I enjoyed exposure to the action research methodology which enabled my pupils and I to embrace and celebrate our personal knowledge. This method was in sharp contrast to how my learners and I were being methodically deprived by many existing methods for studying inclusive education, which was a almost a foreign term to most at my school.

When I examined the methods and methodologies of current research in the field of inclusive education, I realised that the positioning of the researcher was extremely significant, in that the teacher’s point of departure with regard to the nature of his/her study would be determined by the assumptions he/she made about the social context. This realisation occurred when I looked at my research question: “How do I improve my teaching of learners who were
“socially excluded from participation?” – through various methodological lenses, as I now explain.

To begin my explanation, I want to return to the metaphor of the lily that I mentioned in the introduction to this section. I positioned myself and the learners in my care in “muddy water” (see Chapter One), as I considered the research methods that I described when I implemented my interventions through Drama in Education.

As the coordinator of our Learner Support Team (LST), I have the authority to make decisions that impact on the teaching and learning of all learners at my school. I decided as part of my continued development to investigate the concepts of Holistic and Consciousness-Based Education and the effective implementation thereof through a Teacher Teaming Approach. In addressing my research question, I needed to formulate a plan of action to bring about improvement in my practice. McNiff and Whitehead (2005:22) suggest a methodology that validates and embodies my own values.

I need a research methodology that will not only guarantee success on my part but also growth and improvement for my school as an organisation. Teachers need to be au fait with the multiple methodologies that can be implemented to ensure that teachers change the way in which they accommodate learners who have been socially excluded from participation. To attain this goal, I have to situate my inquiry within the most suitable research methodology.

I need to unfold the body-mind relationship in educational research, as demonstrated by Hocking, Haskell and Linds (2001) who suggest that reality cannot be held as external from the researcher. Miller and Nakagawa (2002) introduce perspectives of soul or spirit to body-mind relationships. These opinions hold true for me, because my research is located in the reality of my classes and the reality of my learners, who are socially excluded. Daily, I need to reflect on my teaching and the areas that need improvement. What concerns me right now is that my living reality is in constant fluctuation: Am I adapting fast enough to facilitate these changes?

I need a research methodology that recognises the importance of values to research. In view of the fact that the educational process is generally regarded as value-laden, it seems reasonable to assume that educational research should also reflect this quality. A value-laden
approach has particular relevance for my research, in that my embodied values of social justice and *Ubuntu* underpin my research, and that these values, in turn, inform the living critical standards of judgement for evaluating the research. Carr and Kemmis (1986) are well-known advocates for a value-laden research approach.

In so far as education is a practical value-laden activity, it seems that any educational theory worthy of the name cannot rest content with providing value-neutral theoretical accounts, but must be able to confront questions about practical educational values and goals (Carr & Kemmis, 1986:99).

In similar element, Kincheloe (2003), in supporting the view of educational research as value-laden, highlights the consequent inappropriateness of a positivist approach as follows:

*Positivist research is of little help to such practitioners (who must make moral decisions about the ‘right’ thing to do) because it assumes that research exists only to describe and help make predictions and, of course, has no value dimensions. It is unequipped to evaluate educational purposes or to assess various strategies for improving schooling* (Kincheloe, 2003:80-81).

My research requires a systematic approach to contribute to the advancement of new knowledge for my teaching and learning practice. Therefore, I want to agree with Giroux and McLaren (1992:170), who propose that knowledge and reality involve lived commitment. Reality is living and changing and cannot be considered as being out there. Reality can be moulded in accordance with our needs, interests, prejudices and cultural traditions (Beck, 2004). However, experience must be matched with evaluative skills to improve the practising environment (Craig, 2009).

Data must be collected through me using different methods of data collection, such as tape recordings, interviews and probes to help me decide on the effectiveness of my intervention programmes. A cyclic process to refine my interventions, improve on it and/or maintain my teaching strategies needs to be followed. My research did not start from an initial question to the formulation of data collection, analysis, and conclusion, however, the process began with problem identification, as experienced within my school community.
(1988 version of a Jean McNiff model: A generative transformational evolutionary process)

I cannot continue my study without emphasising the words of McNiff and Whitehead (2009:41), in which I so strongly believe:

_We all have the potential to be more than we are. Who we become depends on who we are now, and who we decide we want to be (provided, of course, that politics does not intrude, which it tends to, and distorts those potentials). We have the potential to create ourselves. Research has this capacity for self-regeneration._

## 4.3 THE NATURE OF RESEARCH

_It is teachers in the end who will change the world of education, by understanding it (Stenhouse, 1983)._

I examined the methodologies of current research in the field of social exclusion and inclusive education in relation to the positioning of research participants. I also considered whether empirical or interpretive research approaches, as described in Bassey (1990 & 1999) and Borg _et al._ (1993), could address the processes of learning, change and the value base that informed my research question. According to Bassey (1990:13-20), action research is a “systematic, critical and self-critical enquiry aiming to contribute to the advancement of knowledge”. Creswell (2005) describes action research as a dynamic and flexible process, whilst Hendricks (2006) emphasises the concept of continuous reflection.
At the beginning of the school day the whole school has a reading period of 50 minutes long. Every Tuesday morning my class and I do our journal entries. My Grade 7’s and I had just returned from touring KwaZulu-Natal Province and the Drakensburg Mountain Range 1200 km from where we live. A girl *Kelly was so energised when it was her turn to do abseiling that she could not wait to have her gear put on. When it was time for her to start moving she was totally frozen and it took a very long time for her to complete her 7 metre challenge. In her journal she wrote: “Do you want to know how I eventually complete my climb?” This was one of the most important phases of my research; the ability of my learners to verbalize what they have learned (Journal Entry, 30th July 2009, Rafeequ).

4.3.1 The positivist research paradigm

Philosophers of science can and have provided appropriate frameworks for my position (science as discovery, invention, empirical investigation, etc.). It is epistemologists who have provided the framework for learning theory, and, as I quite rightly note, instructional design is a discipline whose aim it is to facilitate learning. Furthermore, there are numerous other contributions from philosophy, which should not go unnoticed in our discipline, and I fail to see the point of a research study that only satisfies academic requirements. Within my research methodology, I need the respected space to grow and develop as best I can.

The positivist aspect represents a faith in scientific progress and the perfectibility of mankind. Finally, the “quantitative” aspect stems from a reliance on measuring variables and analysing the relationships among them with descriptive and inferential statistics. Subscribers to this paradigm believe in a separate, material reality that exists apart from the beliefs of individuals, group, or societies. Following E.L. Thorndike (well known American psychologist), they believe that if anything exists, it can be measured. They seek to explain changes in aspects of reality through controlled experimentation. Detachment from the phenomena under study is preferred in order to maintain objectivity. Mathematical analysis and statistical significance are held in the highest regard. Such is the rock upon which I cannot build my research.

Can my learners’ experiences be explained orderly and do these experiences have discoverable causes? Can I write from within the positivist research paradigm? Kincheloe (2003) appears to be arguing the case for teachers to engage in inquiries into their own
practices, on the basis that their knowledge of such practices could be superior to that of outside researchers: *Researchers from a positivist background fancy that the environment of the objects they study will stay constant. We know as teachers that the learning environment of the children is constantly changing (Kincheloe, 2003:80).*

A distinctive feature of an action research approach for me was the fact that theory and practice were not perceived as separate entities, but could be integrated in the research process. Dewey (1966) appears to be arguing for a unity of theory and practical experience:

*An ounce of experience is better than a ton of theory simply because it is only in experience that any theory has vital and verifiable significance. An experience, a very humble experience, is capable of generating and carrying any amount of theory (or intellectual content), but a theory apart from an experience cannot be definitely grasped even as theory* (Dewey, 1966:144).

An empirical methodology for my research would focus mainly on the development of abstract theory, whereas I sought to focus on the development of pupils’ learning, and my understanding of learning is that it is a personal, on-going process of creating new knowledge. My research question is not suited to a positivist paradigm, because I am seeking ways to enable my learners and myself to celebrate our personal knowledge while incorporating our factual knowledge. I found an appropriate research method in the reflective journals of my pupils and myself. Now I required a methodology that could integrate this method and that was commensurate with its underpinning values.

In agreement with the arguments of Dewey (1966), I recognised my research to be an unremitting process of fusion of theory and practice. I decided to undertake my research within an action research framework; I was able to integrate theory and practice in my research by theorising my practice of social justice as equality of respect for all, and my practice of inclusion as respect for diversity. In this manner, I suggest that I was moving beyond abstract theorising, and was incorporating propositional theory into my living form of theory.

In the light of the contexts and issues I described in the previous chapters, an interpretive and ethnographic or case study methodology would be equally unsuited to the aims of my research, because these methodologies generally position the researcher outside the field of
study. My research question, “How do I improve my teaching of pupils who are socially excluded from participation to reach their full potential?” contains a dual focus on my pupils and myself; both processes of learning must be accounted for through the form of research I choose. Ethnographic research approach is a commonly accepted form of qualitative research in educational settings; they position the researcher as an observer of the field of enquiry and would be at odds with my values around social justice. I will now explain this.

Spradley (1980, cited in Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995:17-19) uses the metaphor of petroleum engineers and explorers in search of oil to explain the thinking behind positive and interpretive paradigms. Both groups of people, he states, work in linear, sequential methods and have prior knowledge in terms of what they seek (research question); how to look for it (methodology); and what to expect (significance). Conversely, dissimilarities between their approaches are positioned in their answers to the question “What did you find?” The engineers would define their new knowledge as an object, whereas the explorers would have found a description, or new knowledge about something.

Positivist philosophy suffers from several limitations, especially when applied to social sciences. First, this approach, based on the inductive statistical method, generalises a universal statement of truth from the observation of a certain number of positive instances. The strict inductionist approach is often inappropriate, because speculation and creation of an a priori hypothesis are essential for a systematic procedure of theory building (Robson, 2002). Second, the empiricist approach is based on the notion of pure observation, which is impossible in research, especially in social sciences, since observations are always subject to measurement errors (Kaplan, 2004). Finally, this approach assumes that knowledge is derived from an objective interpretation of assumptions, without any of the subjective biases or a priori knowledge of the scientist coming into play. Thus, the empirical approach emphasises rigour and holds that all sciences must imitate the methods that have led to progress in the mathematical and natural sciences.

The positivist approach has very little bearing on what is going on in schools within the South African context in general and within my classroom specifically. The positivist paradigm requires strict discipline and procedures to satisfy academic expectations with little relevance to my teaching and learning. Positivistic science has its place and purpose pertaining to objectivity, generality, replication of research and falsification of competing hypotheses and
theories. It is not my concern to discover causal explanations or make predictions about an external, knowable world. I need for my learners to create their own knowledge from within themselves. I want them to free themselves of feelings of isolation, separation, loneliness, anger, fear and pain. Positivist methods assume an unbiased and passive observer who collects facts but does not participate in creating them and the separation of facts from value.

My work challenges the silencing of my learners; I encourage them to challenge norms enforced upon them, prescribed from the breeding grounds of poverty. This could be understood as counter-positivist. Canagarajah (2002:58) maintains that scientific research is apolitical; it both adds to and benefits from a favourable set of socio-political, material and historical conditions and therefore “encourages the supremacy of Western civilization and its knowledge tradition”. He cautions, “unprejudiced positivism serves ideological interests”. These concerns are innermost for me and suffuse this thesis, because I have come to understand how the same grip over what counts as valid knowledge and who constitutes a knower, has traditionally served to silence the voices of teachers and children by downgrading them as “units of enquiry” to the limitations of educational and social scientific research. They have also been downgraded to the fringes of public discourses, and this public marginalisation has denied them the right to be seen as theorists and knowers in their own right.

This elucidation emphasises, for me, in the case of educational research involving young learners’ time, energy and commitment to being researched that they cannot or should not remain passive and unaffected. I was concerned that educational research – regardless of whether it was within an empirical, interpretive, social science or other paradigm – might not be educational, in that it did not benefit the participants. This would, for me, be a denial of the living voices of my learners and of respect for them as humans.

The positivist paradigm does not satisfy my needs for action and change, I am left with the “lingering” two which, according to Bassey (1990:13), are the interpretive paradigm and the action research paradigm. I will now take a closer look at the interpretive paradigm to establish its appropriateness for my research questions.

4.3.2 Interpretive paradigm
“In art and literature, the stylistic conventions of one generation are often made to be broken by the next. It seems likely that as we become more self-conscious about the rhetorical techniques used in research, some individuals will begin to test them and look for new ways to break the mould” (Firestone, 1987).

The interpretive paradigm is reliant on accounting, in embracing the interdisciplinary methodology of interpretation, to recognise the controversies surrounding the methodology. The online Webster Dictionary (1999) defines interpretive paradigm as “the study and systematic recording of human cultures; also a descriptive work produced from such research”. Parker and Roffey (1997:217) state that the interpretivist “focuses on the ways in which research subjects make sense of their world”. The interpretivist research is an interdisciplinary tool. Traditionally, we associate it with the field of anthropology and studies of difference in various communities and cultures around the world.

In research conducted in the post-modern paradigm, the researcher is encouraged to take an explicitly critical and political stance in relation to discourses that are portrayed as ultimate truths and that serve to maintain oppressive power relations (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003:20). Bogdan and Biklen (2003:31) summarise the four core beliefs of post-modern philosophy as follows: Reality is socially constructed; realities are constituted through language; realities are organised and maintained through narratives and there are no essential truths.

As Brueggenann (cited in Viljoen, 2001:9) states, “A perspective has the power to make sense out of the rawness of experienced life, even though it cannot be ‘proven’ or absolutely established”. In this school of thought, there is no ultimate truth; post-modernism embraces a more interpretive approach to knowledge. In this approach, there is no right or wrong, but an acceptance that there are multiple representations of truth. This then leaves space for questioning and personal preference to surface. In this process, a space is created in which all stories are valid and there is a shift in focus from asking, “What is truth?” to asking “Whose truth?” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003:31). Any study then that hopes to create a platform for participants’ voices and experiences to be honoured, needs to “respect the ways in which participants construct their knowledge of the world they live in, the way in which they see ‘truth’ and how their social processes of language sustain these knowledge” (Viljoen,
I want to test my claim by asking you, my reader, to judge if my claims to knowledge may be accepted as valid in terms of their methodological and epistemological rigour. In addition, whether, my account, in the form of the communication of my emergent living theory, may be legitimised through establishing that it is comprehensible, sincere, truthful and appropriate in that it demonstrates awareness of the normative assumptions of my contexts (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005).

Postmodernist researchers seek alternative methods for evaluating their work, including emotionality, personal responsibility, an ethic of caring, political praxis, multivoiced text, and dialogue with subjects (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003:31). Researchers’ own theoretical and ideological views are powerful; however, their perspectives are also shaped by what they learn from interacting with their informers. Bless et al. (2006:12) state that theory needs to be advanced so that deeper understanding of social phenomena can be achieved and to ensure that knowledge does not become stagnant. This requires that any arguments made should be substantiated with relevant evidence. I have to formulate my own interpretations and claims as a reflective practitioner. The researcher’s perceptions will therefore, continuously undergo change generating new ideas about how things can be done, and why (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006:1). If I observe an improvement in my understanding of learners who are socially excluded from classroom participation, I need to provide the data and evidence to validate such a claim.

Donald et al., (2002:45) provide a useful comparison to understand ecological theory: a spider’s web. The spider’s web is a whole, which indicates that anything that happens in any part of the web is felt in all the other parts. Researchers using the interpretive paradigm recognise human behaviour to be excessively diverse and complex to not regard it as fixed, static or even replicable. As in all interpretive research, the focus is on meanings or viewpoints but in my case, the emphasis needs to be on the development of understanding. The realities of my learners’ social network and experiences cannot be elucidated in terms of statics, deductions or conclusions. Both my learners and I need action to become more capable of self-transformation and thus more creative, more aware, more just and more sustainable (Torbert, 2004).

The interpretive paradigm has emerged in the social sciences to break out of the constraints imposed by positivism with its emphasis on the relationship between socially-engendered
concept formation and language. Containing such qualitative methodological approaches as phenomenology, ethnography and hermeneutics, it is characterised by a belief in a socially constructed, subjectively-based reality, one that is influenced by culture and history. Nonetheless, it still retains the ideals of researcher objectivity and the researcher as passive collector and expert interpreter of data. I realise now that my theory and understanding of my practice is provisional, still emerging and developing in a dialectical relationship with my values, which themselves are constantly evolving in my practice and in my life.

An interpretive analysis of my study was needed to get at the why of the participation decision-making behaviour and the mechanics of the how, within a particular context. However, this was not sufficient in itself to commence the theory building process. As part of this process, I asked myself as a researcher how I could improve my research models, methodologies and perspectives so that the results of my work would be of greater value to policy-makers and practitioners.

The research that has influenced inclusive education policy in South Africa has most probably been carried out with outsider and researchers, with little or no practitioner researcher involvement in, or ownership of, the research. This renders teachers powerless. Lynch and O’Neill (1994:244), who propose that professional researchers in the social sciences often exacerbate the powerlessness of those they study, accept this. They argue that, “without intent, researchers ... become colonisers ...”. The authors state that such research know and own part of people’s world about which people themselves know very little; that there are now people who can claim to know you and understand you better than you understand yourself: there are experts there to interpret your world and to speak on your behalf. “They take away your voice by speaking about you and for you” (Lynch & O’Neill, 1994 in Lynch, 2001:243-244).

However, from my perception, I would maintain to know only what I know, and even this is often unfinished and tentative. I do not believe that I have the right to claim knowledge of what other people know.

Mark Twain once said that if the only tool one had was a hammer, then one would tend to treat everything as if it were a nail. Whereas a hammer is the best choice for driving nails, it becomes less useful for a bolt or screw and basically useless for a twist tie or tape. Twain’s
logic especially applies to the research methods used in education. For years, education researchers have hammered with one research paradigm (social sciences) as if all topics of inquiry were nails. Currently, the tools for realising the full potential of inclusive education research remain locked in the toolbox. Kincheloe and Berry (2004) appear to agree when they explain how important it is to:

... abandon the quest for some naïve concept of realism, focusing instead on the clarification of [one's] position in the web of reality and the social locations of other researchers and the ways they shape the production and interpretation of knowledge (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004:2).

Interpretive classroom research has centred the importance that would be attached to teacher's role in the generation of knowledge about teaching. What is missing from the knowledge base for teaching are the voices of the teachers themselves, the questions teachers ask, the ways teachers use writing and intentional talk in their work lives, and the interpretive frames teachers use to understand and improve their own classroom practices. Limiting the official knowledge base for teaching to what academics have chosen to study and write about has contributed to a number of problems, including discontinuity between what is taught in universities and what is taught in classrooms, teachers’ ambivalence about the claims of academic research, and a general lack of information about classroom life from a truly ambitious perspective.

Exclusion practices, which were the status quo in my school, forced me to realise that the development of internalised oppression by practitioners could also lead to teachers’ exclusion. I now understand how teachers have traditionally been positioned by the academy as “Other”, as practitioners upon who studies could be carried out in the interests of developing propositional theory. It is possible that teachers have contributed to their own exclusion through their failure to claim their voice and by allowing others to speak for them. When they allow others to theorise on their behalf, to interpret their words and actions for them, they are effectively colluding in the widespread understanding that they have no voice or theory worth listening to.
A teacher from within her lived practice in the classroom can generate educational theory as a living form, as clarified by Whitehead (1989). Fien and Hillcoat (1996:27) are of the opinion that knowledge is the result of individual cognition and consciousness, which means that knowledge is internally constructed and can therefore not be offered by an interpretive paradigm. McNiff and Whitehead (2006:65) allude to the way in which academic elitism has traditionally discouraged practitioner research, largely through presenting theory as an abstract discipline (Pring, 2000) and through communicating messages that practitioners are unequipped to research (McIntyre, 1997). I agree with what McNiff and Whitehead’s suggestion, and I also believe that self-styled elitist academic groups can create “soundless oppression” within practitioners (Tappan, 2001).

4.4 REFINING MY ACTION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Stenhouse (1975) suggests that research entails critical and self-critical enquiry, conducted in a systematic manner, which can contribute to the development of knowledge. Beginning a critical exploration of my educative practice and developing my own living form of theory (Whitehead, 1993:54) necessitated a search for an appropriate research paradigm. Bassey (1990) defines this as a network of coherent ideas about the nature of the world and the function of researchers, which also requires evaluative criteria to test the credibility, validity and reliability of the researcher’s theory and knowledge claims, given that the generation of theory or knowledge is not value-free, but is in fact a highly politicised act (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005).

This thesis explains how I monitored the nature of my educative influence in my practice, and how, in the process, I generated my own living theory of inclusive education. I trace the development of my knowledge, the origins, influences and events that have contributed to its development, and the challenges and refinements that subsequent experience, cognition and critical consciousness have visited upon it. I then address the transformative potential and significance of this synthesis of embodied knowledge in my educative settings.

The teacher inquiry movement focuses on the concerns of teachers and engages teachers in the design, data collection and interpretation of data around their question. Termed “action research” by Carr and Kermis (1986), this approach to educational research has many benefits (Fitchman & Yendol, 2003:4):
Theories and knowledge are generated from research grounded in the realities of educational practice.

Teachers become collaborators in educational research by investigating their own problems.

Teachers play a part in the research process, which makes them more likely to facilitate change based on the knowledge they create.

McNiff and Whitehead (2005b) perceive action research as a form of narrative inquiry and describe knowing as a holistic practice (McNiff, 2002), in which the boundaries between theory and practice merge as they interact with one another in a movement towards better education. I am drawn to this idea of theory as a form of practice and practice as a form of theory as it co-exists in a living dialectical relationship. As I make my claim to knowledge here in this thesis, I am aware that I am drawing my living theory from my practice and I see that my practice is the living expression of my theory. My practice gives rise to my theory and this theory, in turn, influences my practice, as both theory and practice interact in a mutually shared manner.

Though sharing a number of perspectives with the interpretive paradigm and making considerable use of its related qualitative methodologies, some researchers feel that neither it nor the positivist paradigms are sufficient epistemological structures under which to place action research (Lather, 1986:15; Morley, 1991:257). Rather, a paradigm of Praxis is seen as where the main affinities lie. Praxis, a term used by Aristotle, is the art of acting upon the conditions one faces in order to change them. It deals with the disciplines and activities predominant in the ethical and political lives of people. Aristotle contrasted this with Theoria, those sciences and activities that are concerned with knowing for its own sake. Both are equally needed, he thought. That knowledge is derived from practice, and practice informed by knowledge, in an ongoing process, is a cornerstone of action research. Action researchers also reject the notion of researcher neutrality, understanding that the most active researcher is often one who has most at stake in resolving a problematic situation.

A firm belief in the capacity of people for inclusive education, and a steadfast commitment to developing pedagogies that would sustain those values and allow them to emerge in a living form in my practice, influenced me to begin this study. By adopting a self-study action
research methodology, I have found an approach that enables practitioners like me to offer their living educational theories as they seek to account for their professional practices. This approach is well documented in literature (McNiff, 2002; Whitehead, 2004a, 2004b; Whitehead & McNiff, 2006), and has influenced the transformation of existing social and cultural practices (Lohr, 2006; Naidoo, 2005; Pound, 2003). I hope that my thesis will contribute to this growing body of knowledge by changing the way teachers look at certain things. Teachers can plan and prepare for success and striving to go beyond temporary gains in achievement scores to create lasting, meaningful improvement in learning.

An action research methodology supports the idea of “teacher as theorist” (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005), an advancement from the proposal of “teacher as reflective practitioner” (Schön, 1995) and “teacher as researcher” (Stenhouse, 1975). Efron (2005) contends that the educator Korczak, questioned the traditional positioning of teacher as a transmitter of knowledge and implementer of others’ theories. For example, Efron states that Korczak was:

... suspicious of the theorists’ presumption to guide educators in their practice, and he resented the view of teachers as passive transmitters of knowledge, authorised from above. He mocked the pretentious “expert” whose theoretical principles have limited value for the daily struggles of teachers (Efron, 2005:146).

Efron also suggests that Korczak appreciated the need for practitioners to investigate their own practice and interrogate their values:

...[He] appreciated that the uniqueness and mysterious nature of the human soul requires subjective, context-related, and intuitive perspective ... Korczak’s ideas are still relevant to the current educational discourse and may stimulate new insights into the role of the educator as a researcher and knowledge producer who is an active advocate of change and reform (Efron, 2005:146).
I found this approach attractive, because I have always seen the potential of my classroom based work for personal and social transformation. Now, by placing my thesis in the public domain, I hope that I am contributing to the development of a growing body of scholarship of educational enquiry that enables teachers and other practitioners to come to see how they can do this for themselves.

I prefer to take a more holistic approach both to my work practices and to my research. I bear Gage’s (1989:148) warnings about “paradigm wars” in mind and take heed of his advice that educational research is “no mere spectator sport, no mere educational game” and that it has moral responsibilities in the form of a need for better education for children and that what happens to children is our concern. I am concerned about what happens to my learners and wish to improve where there is a need for it. I believe that I “belong” (Bohm, 2004) in my classroom, I “belong” in the theory I am developing and I “belong” in my research methodology. In other words, I am a “living I”, who is central to the research (Whitehead, 1993). I believe that my research will be of value to other practitioners, because it is embedded in the everyday activities of a primary school classroom. Schmuck (1997:28) defines action research as an attempt to study a real school situation with a view to improving the quality of actions and results within it.

The purpose of action research is also to improve one’s professional judgement and to give insight into better, more effective means of achieving desirable educational outcomes (Mertler, 2006:10). Zuber-Skerrit’s critique reverberates with me in that action research techniques are embedded in such a small scale investigation that they may be inadequate to lead to new insights or that they may be too small-scale to be legitimate or that they may be too complex to be practical (Zuber-Skerrit, 1996:17). I am also aware of the opinions of Cohen et al. (2000:33), who pointed out that giving action researchers a small degree of power to research their own situations “has little effect on the real locus of power and decision making which often lies outside the control of the action researchers”. These opinions lead me to formulate my own evaluation:

- I share my thinking and invite dialogue at both a practical and theoretical level with other practitioners as I engage in the design of inclusionary practices for primary school teachers.
I am also hopeful that my research will not only influence teacher colleagues but that it will also influence future interpretations of the curriculum and will make a contribution to the education of social formations (Parsons & Brown, 2002).

I have found that traditional research methodologies do not address my research purposes adequately; therefore, because the perception of people as objects of study directly contradicts my ontological values around Ubuntu and the acknowledgment of the humanness of the person. Instead, I am developing my own approach to my research; one that is commensurate with my ontological and epistemological commitments and one that emerges from the research. Like Mertler (2006), I suggest that teachers must be encouraged to become continuous, lifelong learners in their classrooms and with respect to their practice.

I am drawn to the ideas of McNiff and Whitehead (2002) who perceive knowing as a holistic practice. I perceive research also as a holistic practice, where the practice informs the theory and the theory informs the practice as a self-generating spiral that can inspire and promote new educational theory and practice. Johnson (2005) highlights that research is often used to develop theories that eventually help to determine best practices in education. Frequently, there exists a gap between what is learned by researchers, who conduct and report their research on educational topics, and practicing classroom teachers. However, action research provides one possible solution to bridging this gap by creating a two-way flow of information. Research findings offered from researchers can still be used to inform best practices and to better understand what is happening in classrooms. Concurrently, the data collected and analysed by practicing teachers in their own classrooms can be used to inform theories and best practices (Johnson, 2005). This two-way flow of information is effectively clarified by Parsons and Brown (2002:7), who state that “teaching decisions are not only shaped by theory and research, but in turn help give shape and new directions to educational theory and research”.

4.5 IS MY PRACTICE PARTICIPATORY AND DEMOCRATIC?

Life and learning experiences and periods of evolution come in many waves. I am now in such a period of wonderful evolution. For too long, I was totally subjected to the whims and beliefs of men. I was told what I could do, when to do it, and how to do it. As a little girl, I was taught to walk two steps behind a man and to look up to him and ask: “What do I think,
and what do I do?” I was not told to do this literally, but I watched my mother and that is what she did, so that is the behaviour I learned. Her background taught her to show complete obedience and subservience to men. She accepted this, and so did I. We accept and repeat the behaviours and beliefs of our parents. It took me a very long time to realise that such behaviour was not normal, nor was it what I as a woman deserved. As I changed my own inner belief system and my consciousness, I began to develop a sense of self worth and self-esteem. Today, I want to help my learners become all that they can be and help them to find a place of equality in this world. I want to see that my learners have self-love, self-worth, self-esteem and the ability and opportunity to influence society. The advertising outside world has targeted Africa, taking advantage of our lack of self-esteem, due to colonialism and other factors in order to get us into buying their concepts, products and ideas. The bottom line of most advertisements is: “You are not good enough and you can only fix yourself if you buy into our ideas”. We have allowed advertisers to target us because we believe that there is something wrong with us that need fixing.

The Meditating Time is an effort to allow my learners openness. According to Houston, Blankstein and Cole (2008:29), openness is a state of mind that involves letting things in, especially things you don’t want to hear, and letting things out. I strongly believe that the thoughts we think, the words we speak, and the beliefs we hold are very powerful. They shape our experiences and our lives. It is almost as if every time we think a thought and speak a word the universe is listening and responding. So if there is something in our life that we do not like, then we have the power to change it. My learners and I have the power of thought and words. As we change our thinking and our words, our experiences also change. Fridays are journal writing days for my learners and me. Since we started the reading period every morning on a Friday, we record a positive idea or thought that hold meaning to us that we gained through reading of the week.

My classroom is well stocked with autobiographies by persons whom I think are good role models to my learners; I do not make the excuse that such literature is too difficult for their understanding. Initially, diaries were intended only for themselves to read; however, we later used our diary entries as a collective and collaborative learning and empowering exercise.

In one of our books in the classroom, we came across the word Neoropeptides. This word, coined by Candace Perth in her research on brain function, refers to the “chemical
“messengers” that travel throughout the body whenever we speak a word or think a thought. When our words are angry, judgemental or critical, the chemicals they produce, depress our immune system. When our thoughts are loving, empowering and positive, the messengers carry other chemicals that enhance the immune system.

Action research is fragile and fraught with challenges. The ambiguity in definition and design, the complexity of issues associated with its facilitation, the critique of its rigour, and the difficulties associated with reporting progress or “outcomes” are just a few of the multitude of issues contributing to the fraught and fragile descriptor. I want to focus on just one facet, that of helping myself as an action researcher to develop open interactions with my learners.

Respectful, trust-based and open relationships are at the core of action research effectiveness. However, these terminologies are unknown to my learners, for they have very little to no experiences of these words.

Figure 4.2: Educative pathway towards full participation (Geduld, 2009)
In my research, I did not want to take action in support of my learners. Informed by the values of justice and their right to form their own identity, and out of respect for my learners’ uniqueness and their potential to learn, I sought to influence my learners to take action for themselves. Any educative pathway needs openness; dialogue and bilateralism (shared control, shared thinking, shared evidence, shared planning and monitoring). Through my research methodology, I was seeking this pathway to empower my learners.

In developing my own theory of the nature of action research, I have come to see it as a spontaneous, self-recreating system of enquiry (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002:56). My learners enjoyed the drama and impromptu performances we staged. These differed from their normal learning area lessons in that they were not very structured, but more important they created the opportunity for my learners to express themselves in a safe, non-judgemental environment. In celebration of Heritage Day, we staged a play wherein all our favourite story book characters were invited to a High Tea organised by the king and queen of our village, everybody was invited. On the day of this prestigious occasion, the prince arrived in traditional Khoi-San attire, which consisted of a little animal skin covering his private parts only. The entire class erupted in delight. This play offered a great opportunity for my learners to communicate on different perspectives and to experience motivating their stance.

The following perspectives were expressed by my learners:
Marco is of the opinion that a prince wears boots, a waistcoat, belt and a white shirt. Hadley, maybe where you come from, but not where I come from. In my culture, a prince had to wear what was available in nature.

Cultural diversity forces us to learn more and to be open to others traditions and respect them. Bruner’s (1960, 1986, 1990) ideas about communication and learning reverberate loudly in my ears as well as Vygotsky’s (1962) ideas about scaffolding learners and about how learning occurs in social situations.

Participating in discussions with peers can also offer children the opportunity to reconsider their own opinions in the light of the beliefs and experiences shared by others. Action research stands for the realisation of human needs towards autonomy, loving relationships and productive work; the urge towards freedom, creativity and self-recreation (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002).

In the dialogue from this experience, Marco actually said: *As a matter of fact I have changed my mind, I disagree with myself and my one-sided opinion. I learned something new today that I knew for a long time but has never made it relevant to other cultures.* My data show children engaging critically with and developing each other’s ideas. Including this paragraph in this chapter is a deliberate attempt to highlight the type of research methodology I choose to use.

This echoes with Bohm’s (1998:2) understanding of a “spirit of dialogue” or “a stream of meaning flowing among and through us and between us”. Dialogue, as it turns out, is a very old idea revered by the ancient Greeks and practised by many “primitive” societies, such as the American Indians. Yet, it is all but lost to the modern world. All of us have had some taste of dialogue – in special conversations that begin to have a “life of their own”, taking us in directions we could never have imagined nor planned in advance (Senge, 1990:239).

Bohm explains how it is possible for new understanding to emerge from dialogue, which can enable people to create and share meanings together. His analogy of these shared meanings has great significance to me, because it acts as a sort of social stepping-stone on the pathway towards full participation. Dialogue seeks to inform and learn, rather than persuade. It is a
conversation animated by a search for understanding rather than for agreements or solutions. One is concerned not only about oneself and one's own position, but also about the other party and the position that that party advances. Participants focus on their relationship and the joint process of making sense of each other, rather than on winning or losing. Dialogue has no fixed goal or predetermined agenda. The emphasis is not on resolving disputes, but rather on improving the way in which people with significant differences relate to each other. The broad aim is to promote respectful inquiry, and to stimulate a new sort of conversation that allows important issues to surface freely. While opponents in deep-rooted conflict are unlikely to agree with each other's views, they can come to understand each other's perspectives (Banathy & Jenlink, 2005).

Robinson, Absolum, Cardno and Steele (1990:2) are of the belief that:

> a disclosure of our views together with the evidence of logic that led us to those views ... to enhance the freedom of others to express differing views and to make uncoerced choices about courses of action, including about how to resolve impasses.

My learners’ evolution of their knowledge leads to an evolution in their practice. I know that the way to social change for my learners is through their hearts and minds. O’Brien (2000) speaks of the process as “one heart at a time”. Like Alexander (1995), I believe that “the most basic test of the rightness of one’s teaching is the degree to which it is true to the educational values, which the teaching claims to manifest” (Alexander, 1995:304). Like Dewey (1966), I do not regard education as a preparation for the future. Education is growth, the continuing reconstructing of our experience, undetermined by any outside aim. Such unlimited growth can lead to endless possibilities. The educational process has no end beyond itself. Its aim is not optimum scores in state examinations, preparation for the workplace, or maximum storage of facts. The only goal of education is more education. Like Dewey (1938), I, too, view education as a process that is life affirming, and invitational in nature.

Two-way dialogue endowed me with feedback and judgement that was data based and specific and created an environment where weaknesses, problems and gaps, along with their
causes, could be openly admitted. When challenged with problems, most of my learners adopted defensive (control or avoidance) responses. There are many manifestations of defensiveness (Cardno & Piggot-Irvine, 1997:44-47) but essentially, as Argyris (1990) says, it is an anti-learning process that leads to misunderstanding, distortions and self-fulfilling processes. In action research, the non-defensive, productive, approach is required in order to help participants to establish open, bilateral, trust-based interactions. Action research does not involve problem solving in the sense of trying to find out what is wrong, but rather a quest for knowledge about how to improve.

4.6 RESEARCH DESIGN

I would like to explain how action research can achieve high levels of rigour, without sacrificing the responsiveness and flexibility that some situations require.

A scientific claim is an assertion, not a fact. What makes it scientific is that, in the words of Phillips (1987), quoting Dewey (1938), it is “warrantable”. In the course of a typical change programme, very many assertions must be made. The difficulty is to make them adequately warrantable. An assertion is an interpretation of evidence. The evidence is drawn from the data in the study, and from the literature. To be warrantable, I assume, the interpretation must have been reached only after attempts to exclude other interpretations. Further, it must account for the evidence, as well as, or better than, the alternative interpretations.

An interpretation can only be as good as the evidence on which it is based. The evidence must therefore be an adequate sample of all the evidence that might have been collected. Research must address this, while observing the “givens” of the situation. First, in each cycle the researcher may try to disconfirm the emerging interpretation. The use of many short cycles allows more chances to disconfirm. Second, in each cycle, the methods used can be critiqued and refined. Third, data collection and interpretation can be included in each cycle. Thus, both data and interpretation can be tested in later cycles. Fourth, divergent data can be specifically sought out. This increases the chance that any piece of data or interpretation will be challenged by other data (to some extent it may also make a partial asset of the participation by the client group). Fifth, the literature can be used as a further source of possible disconfirmation. The researcher who has deliberately sought disconfirming
literature, and failed to find it, has a more warrantable assertion than could otherwise be claimed. Sixth, the planned changes which emerge from the program are derived from the data and the interpretation. That change offers a further opportunity for disconfirmation. Where flexibility and participation are required, and the situation is complex, any research methodology faces serious threats to validity. I would claim that action research better meets those threats in these circumstances than conventional research.

My research was undertaken in three main contexts, which changed over time, as I outline below.

My first research context was as a mainstream teacher. My M.Ed. research was undertaken in response to my fundamental discontent with my current practice and an aspiration to develop it, to render it creative, spontaneous and responsive to pupils’ needs. I became progressively more aware that I was engaged in didactic forms of teaching, focusing on a technical, rational form of knowledge, preparing children to assimilate vast quantities of unrelated and largely irrelevant facts that they would regurgitate at examination time.

I would like to reiterate that the significance of that study lay in its attempt to explore the perceptions and experiences of a group of SMT members and how they could implement and maintain inclusive education. Educators at the sample school as well as their learners who experienced barriers to learning would ultimately benefit from that process. Educators needed to be developed into a competent, confident, critical and well-informed corps. Whether they were highly qualified to deal with inclusive education or not, they should have been supported by government structures and if that failed, they ought to know that they are fully capable of succeeding on their own (Geduld, 2009).

My classroom practice therefore was a direct contradiction of my values of justice, democracy, inclusion and respect for the heterogeneity of pupils. There was little interaction amongst learning partners. Achievement was measured in terms of a narrow band of abilities, which favoured linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligence (Gardner, 1983). I wished to move from this situation of teacher dominance to a situation based on the more emancipatory values of respect and equality. Due to the fact that I work in the field of education and knowledge production, I needed to begin with an inspection of the very assumptions that
underline what I do. These assumptions shaped my teaching and in particular what that teaching entailed.

My second research context was my work with socially excluded learners. I became acutely aware of the injustices perpetrated upon impoverished learners by an education system of which the cultural norms were vastly different from those of the impoverished population. A growing awareness of the discrimination and oppression experienced by these children motivated me to pursue my research. My research participants included learners, whom I taught as a mainstream teacher.

My third context included children that accessed of my services in my capacity as a support teacher and co-ordinator of our school’s LST for LSEN. My concerns included what I considered to be was a lack of respect and recognition for these children as persons, inadequate institutional facilitation of their needs, and system failure to recognise their disability. Disability was defined in terms of functional deficiencies, and children’s own views on their situation and experience were largely ignored (Lodge & Lynch, 2004:86-88). This grouping consisted of between twelve and fourteen learners per year. The needs of the members of the group were very diverse. I regarded all contexts as related, linked by issues of injustice and marginalisation. The underlying concerns were identical. Children were disadvantaged because of their cultural background, intelligence profiles, or socio-economic status. They were regarded as the Other (Beauvoir, 1974), outside the social and cultural norm. Traditionally, there has been a fear of otherness in South Africa, based on its Apartheid history, but we now inhabit a pluralistic society where difference continues to become a growing reality (Tynan, 2002) and requires a response from education professionals.

My vision for these children was, and continues to be, a search for justice in and through education. Although my research developed as my contexts changed, it articulated throughout the need for education systems to recognise and respect the dignity of the individual and their creative capacity for knowledge creation. I believe that teaching methodologies and the organisation of the curriculum can and should support such a vision, and I examine the role of appropriate pedagogy as I work to create my own living theory of practice. This view has real implications for current scenarios in education, in which children from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, including socially excluded learners, form a large part
of mainstream classes. The inclusion of children with special educational needs in mainstream teaching is now compulsory within the South African context.

However, in-egalitarian assumptions are deeply ingrained in our ways of thinking and are encoded in our laws, policies and practices in ways that silence discussion about their very existence, and the barriers to such change cannot be underestimated (Lodge & Lynch, 2004:102-103). Innovations that challenge an established culture tend to be resisted by the established culture, which will use its power to maintain its own status and privilege (McNiff, 1995b:2).

Within our schools, we need teachers engaging with each other in such a way that they and their learners raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality pertaining to inclusive education. Teachers need to articulate and develop a vision for inclusive education that is appealing and inspiring to their followers. Teachers with inspirational motivation challenge their followers with high standards, communicate optimism about future goals, and provide meaning for the task of implementing and maintaining inclusive education. Just as there is safety in numbers, there is also strength in numbers. The important factor is that the leadership must buy into it, completely. Followers need to have a strong sense of purpose if they are to be motivated to act. Purpose and meaning are the energy that drives a group forward. It is also important that this visionary aspect of education provides assistance by communication skills that allow the teachers to articulate their visions with precision and power in a compelling and persuasive way.

I wished to create opportunities for equality of access and equality of opportunity for all the children who had been marginalised in different ways and for different reasons. My overriding aim was to “create lifelong and autonomous learners, students who value learning as an empowering activity, who want to learn independently and who have self determination, self-direction and respect” (Fisher, 1995:viii). The challenge, however was how to convince my colleagues that such marginalised children, in particular children with special educational needs, actually did have the potential to make their own significant contribution to the school and to the wider social world.
I now go on to consider whether my research is socially responsive, and whether the curriculum I am using is sufficiently culturally sensitive to my learners’ home environment to encourage success.

**4.6.1 Is my research socially responsive?**

South African children were disadvantaged because of their cultural background, intelligence profiles, or socio-economic status. They were regarded as the Other (Beauvoir, 1974) outside the social and cultural norm. Traditionally, there has been a fear of otherness in South Africa but we now inhabit a pluralistic democratic society in which difference continues to become a growing reality (Tynan, 2002) and requires a response from education professionals. My vision for my school was, and continues to be, a search for justice in and through education. My research articulates throughout the need for education systems to recognise and respect the dignity of the individual and his or her creative capacity for knowledge creation.

I am of the opinion that teaching methodologies and the organisation of curriculum can and should support such a vision, and I examine the role of critical pedagogy as I work to create my own living theory of practice. This view has real implications for current scenarios in education, where children from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, including impoverished children, are forming a large part of mainstream classes. The inclusion of all children in mainstream teaching is now compulsory. However, undemocratic assumptions are deeply ingrained in our ways of thinking and are encoded in our laws, policies and practices in ways that silence discussion about their very existence, and the barriers to such change cannot be underestimated (Lodge & Lynch, 2004:102-103). Improvements that challenge an established culture tend to be resisted by the established culture, which will use its power to maintain its own status and privilege (McNiff, 1995b:2).

I wished to create opportunities for equality of access and equality of opportunity for all my learners who had been marginalised in their own ways and for different reasons. My overriding aim was to “create lifelong and self-directed learners, learners who value learning as an empowering activity, who want to learn independently and who have self determination, self-direction and respect” (Fisher, 1995:viii).
The notion of social responsiveness embodies the following goals articulated in the National Plan for Higher Education:

- To meet national development needs through well planned teaching, learning and research programmes, including the challenges presented by a growing economy, operating in a global environment;
- To support a democratic ethos and culture of human rights through educational programmes and practices conducive to critical discourse and creative thinking; and
- To contribute to the advancement of knowledge and scholarship, in particular, addressing diverse problems and demands of local, national, Southern African and African contexts (University of Cape Town, 2008).

In my teaching and learning, I did not recognise that my young learners needed to be provided with an environment aware of and responsive to their developmental needs. I cannot articulate that I am proud to have procedures in place that ensure the following:

- A personalised environment that supports each student’s intellectual, social and physical development.
- Access to comprehensive services to foster healthy physical, social, emotional and intellectual development.
- A teacher that fosters curiosity, creativity and the development of social skills in a structured and supportive environment.
- A curriculum that is both socially significant, and relevant to the personal and career interests of young adolescents.
- An interdisciplinary approach to reinforce important concepts, skills, and address real-world problems.
- Opportunities to develop citizenship skills, to use the community as a classroom, and to engage the community in providing resources and support.
- Age-appropriate, co-curricular activities to foster social skills and character and develop interests beyond the classroom environment.

Successful schools ensure that all students master reading, writing, mathematics, and science. They also foster a good understanding of history, literature, arts, foreign languages and
diverse cultures. However, most educators, parents, students and the public support a broader educational agenda that also involves enhancing students’ social-emotional competence, character, health, and civic engagement (Metlife, 2002). In this study, it became apparent that I also had to produce learners who were culturally literate, intellectually reflective, and committed to lifelong learning. High-quality education should teach young people to interact in socially skilled and respectful ways; to practise positive, safe, and healthy behaviour; to contribute ethically and responsibly to their peer group, family, school and community; and to develop basic competencies, work habits and values as a foundation for meaningful employment and engaged citizenship (Jackson & Davis, 2000; Learning First Alliance, 2001; Osher, Dwyer, & Jackson, 2002).

I immediately instructed my learners to close their eyes and visualise the community hall in which we have our Diploma Ceremony. See yourself walking up to the stage. Look at all the familiar faces smiling at you. No one in the audience wants to see you fail; they are all there just to support you. Breathe and inhale all the power that is within each person present. Let it become your power, claim it for yourself. Denton (2007) states that when our language is direct and authentic, learners learn to trust us. They learn that their teachers will not use words to trick or manipulate them.

My classroom was not an apprenticeship in democracy so that the next generation can experience democracy in a socially responsive, inclusive and participatory classroom and graduate into socially responsible, vibrant and caring societies. However, Tomlinson (2004:65) states that highly effective school leaders encourage the creativity of staff to find better solutions to school problems. As a school we had to cope with our external adaptation (including learners with special needs into mainstream classes) and our internal integration (teacher identity of assuming that they cannot teach LSEN in mainstream classes). We therefore had to survive and grow through developing viable assumptions about what to do and how to do it. Consequently, I acted as a catalyst in creating learning environment for both teachers and learners. Harris and Lambert (2003:15) state that it necessarily involves building the capacity within the school for learning and improvement to take place.

One of the enduring truths about teaching is that to teach children well, we have to know them: what they are passionate about, what worries them, where they are in their
development. We also have to understand something of their family culture that world outside the school that has such a huge effect on how well the children do in school.

The increasing diversity of learner cultures means that more than ever, we need to be attentive to how students’ family cultures can be very different from the dominant culture of the school. No doubt this can be hard work. It takes time and effort to learn about unfamiliar cultures. It takes stretching our powers of empathy and creativity to adjust teaching practices to fully include families of different cultures. Helping children learn to take better care of themselves, of each other, and of their classroom is not a waste of instructional time. It’s the most enduring task that teachers do. How can my learners learn to become democratic citizens and critical thinkers about society? How can they connect inquiry in school to the outside world? I need to develop a curriculum that engages students in social justice and democratic citizenship issues throughout the school year. So many youth feel alienated due to a culture that focuses on power, privilege and material wealth.

4.6.2 Is my classroom culturally responsive?

Culture is central to learning. It plays a role not only in communicating and receiving information, but also in shaping the thinking process of groups and individuals. A pedagogy that acknowledges, responds, and celebrates fundamental cultures offers full, equitable access to education for students from all cultures.

Culturally responsive teaching is a pedagogy that recognises the importance of including students’ cultural references in all aspects of learning (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Some of the characteristics of culturally responsive teaching are:

- Positive perspectives on parents and families.
- Communication of high expectations.
- Learning within the context of culture.
- Student-centred instruction.
- Culturally mediated instruction.
- Reshaping the curriculum.
The teacher as facilitator.

I realised that my learners came from homes in which the language and culture did not closely correspond to that of the school which might disadvantage their learning process. These children often become alienated and felt disengaged from learning. People from different cultures learn in different ways. I noticed that children from impoverish homes did not have high expectations for learning. For example, learners from some cultural groups preferred to learn in cooperation with others, while the learning style of others was to work independently. To maximise learning opportunities, I set out to gain knowledge of the cultures represented in my classrooms and to adapt lessons so that they reflected ways of communicating and learning that were familiar to my learners.

The basis of my action research is my attempt to live in the direction of my educational values. I am committed to values of justice, inclusion and equality, but find these values are denied in most of my work contexts. Marginalised children are expected to conform to normative standards and normative measures of intellectual achievement, as measured by standardised tests. I struggle to practise in a way that is congruent with my values and assess the quality of my work in these terms. Therefore, while seeking to live my values in my professional practice, I often experience myself as a living contradiction, in that my values are often denied in my practice (Whitehead, 1989). Whitehead claims that “propositional forms of theory are not capable of containing a description and explanation for the educational development of an individual who exists as a living contradiction (Ilyenkov, 1977) in their practice” (Whitehead, 1994d:2).

School cultures can be defined as “moving mosaics of beliefs, values, understandings, attitudes, norms, symbols, rituals and ceremonies, preferred behaviours, styles and stances and power structures” (Day, Harris, Hadfield, Tolley & Beresford, 2000:20). Scheim (1985:24) suggests that it is about the deeper levels of assumptions and beliefs that are shared by the members of an organisation, which unknowingly define their institution’s view of itself
and its environment. Whilst defining our school culture, I came to realise that it was not for the faint-hearted. It takes a lot of courage to look at oneself analytically. For the purpose of this study, I will refer to culture as the underground flow of feelings and folkways wending its way within schools in the form of vision and values, beliefs and assumptions, rituals and ceremonies, history and stories, and physical symbols (Jerald, 2007:23).

Swart and Pettipher (as cited in Engelbrecht & Green, 2007:107) highlight the fact that in order to become an inclusive, caring community that celebrates diversity, an all-embracing school culture that communicates and lives a philosophy based on the principles and values of equity, social justice, respect, acceptance, belonging and dignity is required. I do not have the capacity to respond to challenges in supporting my learner population by being spontaneous and flexible. Risk-taking does not come spontaneously to me; I was very comfortable in the traditional roles conferred on me by the teaching profession and assume a problem-solving approach (Schaufer & Buswell, 1996:59).

The principles of inclusive education are supported by values such as human dignity and respect (Swart & Pettipher, 2005:3). The implementation of these principles require a paradigm shift away from intimidation to a more pro-active and positive approach in the establishment of an inclusive community. This paradigm shift leads to a greater undertaking towards social justice for all learners. This new focus is placed on the development of autonomy, rather than on the protection thereof (Dyson & Forlin, 1999:28-30). However, in all my years of teaching I knew the value of that which is being said but the application thereof never applied to me in my classroom environment. For a long time, though, in spite of appreciating my values as the steering principles of my practice, I acted in accordance with what was expected of me, in an attempt to deliver the curriculum.

Gay (2000) defines culturally responsive teaching as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences and performance styles of diverse students to make learning more appropriate and effective for them; it teaches to and through the strengths of these students. Gay (2000) also describes culturally responsive teaching as having these characteristics:

- It acknowledges the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups, both as legacies that affect students’ dispositions, attitudes, and as approaches to learning and worthy content to be taught in the formal curriculum.
• It builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences, as well as between academic abstractions and lived socio-cultural realities.

• It uses a wide variety of instructional strategies that are connected to different learning styles.

• It teaches students to know and praise their own and each others’ cultural heritages.

• It incorporates multicultural information, resources and materials in all the subjects and skills routinely taught in schools (p29).

The literature I use in my classroom does not reflect multiple ethnic perspectives and literary genres. Ladson-Billings (1992:382) explains that culturally responsive teachers develop intellectual, social, emotional and political learning by “using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes”. In a sense, culturally responsive teachers teach the whole child (Gay, 2000). Holistic education has been neglected in my classroom, because I focus only on the curriculum and what it prescribes to me. Hollins (1996:13) adds that education designed specifically for students of colour incorporates “culturally mediated cognition, culturally appropriate social situations for learning, and culturally valued knowledge in curriculum content”. Culturally responsive teachers realise not only the importance of academic achievement, but also maintaining cultural identity and heritage (Gay, 2000).

My learners do not behave like members of an extended family assisting, supporting and encouraging each other. Neither are they held accountable as part of a larger group. It is not everyone’s task to make certain that each individual member of the group is successful. By promoting this academic community of learners, teachers can respond to the students’ need for a sense of belonging, honour their human dignity, and promote their individual self-concepts (Gay, 2000).

I did not enable my learners to be better human beings and more successful learners. Empowerment can be described as academic competence, self-efficacy, and initiative. My learners do not believe that they can succeed in learning tasks, neither do they have motivation to persevere. I do not demonstrate ambitious and appropriate expectations and exhibit support for my learners in their efforts toward academic achievement. I only do the bare minimum of that which is required of me; I forever have excuses about the limited
resources within the school. Individual and collective accomplishments are hardly ever celebrated by me or my learners.

Shor (1992:15) characterises empowering education as a critical-democratic pedagogy for self and social change. It is a student-centred programme for multicultural democracy in school and society. It approaches individual growth as an active, cooperative and social process, because the self and society create each other. The goals of this pedagogy are to relate personal growth to public life, to develop strong skills, academic knowledge, habits of inquiry, and critical curiosity about society, power, inequality and change. The learning process is negotiated, requiring leadership by the teacher, and mutual teacher-student authority. In addition, the empowering class does not teach students to seek self-centred gain while ignoring public welfare.

I ignored one of the most successful efforts in enhancing my learner participation. I did not reach out to their families and to the community as a whole and fully involve them in making decisions that would affect their children’s future in school. Actively inviting families to the school, visiting families in their communities, soliciting their input and taking their concerns seriously, and treating families with respect, were never on my obligation list. I educated my learners in isolation, ignoring the valuable information waiting for me to call on. I did not utilise what was there already, neither did I understand the resources I had right there at my fingertips.

Learners from poverty bring with them the “hidden rules” of their culture, which are distinctly different from the hidden rules of middle class culture (Payne, 1998). Because school culture is based on middle class norms and values, students and families who do not come from middle class backgrounds need to be introduced and acclimatised to school culture and expectations before effective teaching and learning can take place. I must make parents part of charting my goal setting for my learners’ participation in reaching their full potential.

Armstrong and Moore (2004:134) emphasise that collaboration, along with participation, practicality, empowerment, politics, reflection and social processes make inclusion less scientific or clinical, but rather centered in humanism. Through this process of self- or organisational development, the school is afforded the opportunity to plan, to act, to reflect, to further plan, and so on, in cycles of self-reflection. Only when I was presented with the
opportunity to investigate, in a reflective mode, my individual and shared value systems and the possible effect of the choices that I made a new paradigm of positive inclusivity function effectively in my classroom.

A conversation between Shor and Freire (1987) illustrates the fact that my misunderstanding in relation to best pedagogic practice for the oppressed and marginalised was not unique. Shor (Shor & Freire, 1987) admits that, early in his teaching career, he began teaching correct usage to working class students because he wanted to transfer his own knowledge to them, not understanding at the time how to situate education in their experience. Grammar and correct usage were the ladders Shor himself had used to reach the pinnacle of intellectual study, and he mistakenly thought that this should also be the way forward for his students. Freire (Shor & Freire, 1987) describes how he avoided this pitfall in his early teaching career: *I learned that beauty and creativity could not live with a slavish devotion to correct usage. This understanding taught me that creativity needed freedom. So I changed my pedagogy as a young teacher towards creative freedom* (Shor & Freire, 1987:20).

### 4.6.3 Investigating my daily practice and making room for improvement

The purpose of my investigation was to have my own pre-understanding challenged, enlarged and transformed and find expression in my practice. My experience of living and working as a teacher in disadvantaged and deprived areas of my country, and my current work with teachers in educational contexts, have heightened my awareness of structures and practices that disenfranchise and disempower the very people they were intended to help. The development of inclusive school communities requires a shift from exclusion, individualism and isolation to an emphasis on belonging, alliances and mutual support, which also form the basis of collaboration and participation (Engelbrecht & Green, 2007:178. One of the insights emanating from the classroom-based period of my research in school contexts was the degree to which my learners were essentially disenfranchised and disempowered by structures and ideologies of control and dominance.

My aim was to develop myself as a reflective practitioner and to identify how I taught my learners who were socially excluded from participation. The following extract from Kinsella (2001) encouraged me to follow this route of self-discovery and self evolution.
Reflective practitioners think about their experiences in practice and view them as opportunities to learn. They examine their definitions of knowledge, seek to develop broad and multifaceted types of knowledge, and recognise that their knowledge is never complete. Reflective practitioners are concerned about the contexts of their practices and the implications for action. They reflect on themselves, including their assumptions and their theories of practice, and take action grounded in self awareness. Finally, reflective practitioners recognise and seek to act from a place of praxis, a balanced coming together of action and reflection (Kinsella, 2001, in Procee, 2006:237).

The female voice in my school’s management and leadership was significantly muted if not markedly absent from general discourses of power. According to Maguire (2000:33), feminist and action research share a declared purpose to work for democratisation and social justice. The aim is therefore to develop inclusion methodologies that nurture respectful relationships (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006:25). This view is supported by Fiornza (in Viljoen, 2001:17), who is of the opinion that for research conducted within the South African context, feminist ideologies which tend to be inclusive of the oppressed and the marginalised provide a “theoretical framework and intellectual space for transforming kyriarchal knowledge’s and deeply inculcated values of oppression”. Feminist inspired research aims to create a platform through which marginalised groups are able to articulate their points of view and to pierce the culture of silence among these groups and, in so doing, to challenge the status quo (De Vos, 2002:465).

This paradigm sees injustice as being entrenched in the political-economic structure of society, which results in economic marginalisation and exploitation, and denial of access and equity (Patton, 2002:129). The policy on inclusive education has done very little for learners from impoverished backgrounds, because the culture of schooling has not changed so as to ensure that learner diversity is recognised and valued. Educational and curriculum implementations have remained unchanged and therefore do not accommodate a wide range of needs that do exist within schools. Schools are still based on the postulation of homogeneity and uniformity.

In feminist-inspired action research, the emphasis is on researching aspiring leaders. According to Patton (2002:129), this entails using research to help all those taking part in the study to gain a better understanding of their situation and to move to do something to change
their situation. Research is then a process that allows people to get together around shared current concerns, problems and issues in a way that will allow them to achieve accord about how to deal with or address these challenges. This view is supported by Reinharz (1992:177), who is of the opinion that engaging in this type of research process enables the researcher to “learn from people and not just about them”. Maguire (2000:35) aligns herself with this view, emphasising the importance of feminist inspired research that has created a platform for the voices of educators and for diverse positions, strengths and experiences of educators that operate in an intricate web of historical and cultural settings to be celebrated.

McKenna (1994), in her work entitled “Not Counting Women and Children”, reflects on the “neglected stories” that challenge dominant theory and interpretation, while Gilligan (1993:173) suggests that the inclusion of women’s experience brings an expanded perspective on relationships and constructs of interpretation, leading to deeper relationships of interconnectedness, responsibility and care and an understanding of knowing as a process of human relationship. The qualities of an ethic that balances power and caring include connection, particularity of responsibility, commitment and reciprocity (Sernak, 1998:10).

Personal experience, the insight I have gained from my previous Master’s studies and engagement with feminist critique of conventional masculine interpretations and structures revealed that such inclusion contributes to discourse. I began to reflect on the contribution to my own living theory and practice that insights from a feminist critique of inclusion might make. My aim in including both masculine and feminine perspectives was not simply to – “compare and contrast”, but to draw on the wisdom of complementary modes of being to develop a more human and inclusive approach as an expression of the “new sensibility” (McFague, 1987). However, Grace (1995:16) asserts that a feminist reconstruction of the concept of an educational leader is necessary. Such leadership would involve a move away from notions of power and control over others towards a leadership defined as the ability to act with others. Leadership would involve being at the centre of a group rather than at a hierarchical distance from it.

One of the major barriers to parental involvement, the issue of poverty, must be highlighted. If one considers poverty to be a multifaceted condition that has both psychological and material effects, then the impact on the learner at school is immense. Smit and Liebenberg (2003) illustrate how schools become barriers to parents, as they feel disempowered, with
little say in the education of their children. In my teaching, I was out of touch with the reality of how poverty affected these families. The stress arising from poverty causes a strain on parent-child relationships and further inhibits parental involvement. In my classroom context, I speak of mothers’ involvement, because the majority of my learners come from single-parent households headed by mothers. Two-parent nuclear families are the exception rather than the rule.

The role of the mother or grandmother is highly significant in the success of the child in school. Belenky et al. (1986) offer the metaphor of teacher as midwife; someone who helps the birthing of new life. “They needed to know they already knew something that there was something good inside them”. As the head of my class, I had to emphasise to mothers how irreplaceable they were in the education of their children. The power I possess within my classroom could now be assessed as a process of interaction rather than a quality possessed by any single individual; one of power as mutual influence replaces a paradigm of power as domination; relational power leads to collaboration rather than competition, and diversity is experienced as enrichment. Fischer (1988:139) suggests that new metaphors of power are needed in which dominative power using hierarchical metaphors (ladder, pyramid) is replaced by images of mutuality and reciprocity (webs, cycles and networks) and power ‘over’ becomes power ‘with’ and power ‘among’ (Cady et al., 1986:7).

Palmer (1998:50) declares that good teaching is an act of hospitality, which continually reweaves the social fabric of mutual dependence, in sharp contrast of the objectivist approach, which resists the development of communities of shared meaning and significance, in which each person can, in Wheatley’s (2005:159) words, “co-evolve towards mutual sustainability”.

4.6.4 Investigating perceptions of teachers and learners to enhance teaching and learning

“What is the significance of my shifting reality to the wider community?” I was guided by this question to conclude my research study for this section.

I am concerned that my research should have significance for others, because the metaphorical mirror cannot reflect my learners or me in isolation. We are positioned against the milieu of our school, my teaching colleagues and the other learners. Neither my teaching
colleagues nor the learners exist in isolation; they are in constant relationship with others. So I am choosing a research methodology that is not based on the kind of propositional theories that inform policy or provision, but in the personal relationships within which new knowledge can be created in education.

I used metaphors to assist me in reaching my goal. Metaphors were used to describe teachers, learners’ understanding, and experiences pertaining to inclusive education and why they are participating effectively in the educative process. Metaphors by definition are a very active process because they are at the heart of understanding oneself, the others around you and the world at large.

Metaphors originated from the Greek word “metaphora” meaning “transference”, serve as a bridge, threshold (limina) to another reality and involves a shift in beliefs, values or relationships. A metaphor has generally been understood as a figurative expression that interprets a thing or action through an implied comparison with something else. Aristotle, who is usually considered the originator of “comparison” theories of metaphors, describes metaphors in the Rhetoric as elliptical similes comparisons of “things that are related but not obviously so” without using “like” or “as”. According to Aristotle, the best or “most well liked” type of metaphor transfers its meaning from one subject or “register” to another through the principle of analogy. As Aristotle observes in the Poetics, these metaphors often depend on logical relationships between multiple terms (Hartmann, 2003).

According to Armstrong (2000), iso means the same, and morphic means to structure. An isomorphic metaphor is a story with a similar structure to some other event, perhaps as a way to offer solutions for educators’ problems. We explore the creation and use of isomorphic metaphors in our personal development.

Isomorphic metaphors can be used to coach educators to access their unconscious resources, to help educators find important goals, to find blocks and solutions and to identify potential consequences. Isomorphic metaphors also help educators identify and voice their objections and resistances.

Essentially, I knew teachers and learners learned best when they learn from each other, how to translate their experiences to their colleagues and, very important when to find resources
within themselves or from their community to better themselves. Stories can cross-
genenerational and cultural boundaries; they can offer a common point of entry into an
experience. Telling stories is a natural part of life, and individuals all have stories about their
experiences to tell others. “In this way, narrative research captures an everyday, normal form
of data that is familiar to individuals” (Creswell, 2008:511). The “story of a life is also more
than the life, the contours and meaning allegorically extending to others, others seeing
themselves, knowing themselves through another’s life story, re-visioning their own, arriving
where they started and knowing ‘the place for the first time” (Richardson, 1997:6).

The benefits of the use of metaphors were very powerful and emotional revelation for me.
The SMT used metaphors for reflection and dialogue as a tool for their own learning. Easton
(2008: xliii) contends that metaphors assist people in identifying their beliefs. The challenge
for us as a group was to look intensely at our beliefs and find commonalities amongst them
that served as motivation for the group to adopt and to build on to. Metaphors possess the
qualities of immediacy and transcendence. Because metaphors raise doubt about their precise
meaning and points beyond the current context to another order of reality, the reader is teased
into active and expanding contextual analysis.

Let me exemplify this. A central theme of my title of my thesis, “Lilies Grow in Muddy
Water!” at first glance seems contradictory and paradoxical. The story narrated in Chapter
One raises an alternative scenario where dominant perspectives prevented the Lily from
becoming what he/she was born to be. As a personal epistemological tool, I use this metaphor
of practice to remind me of the humanness of the young learners I work with, to help them
attain their highest potential through an ethic of Ubuntu and inclusivity, embedded in my
practice.

I experienced through my research investigation that the nature of metaphor fostered
dialectical reflexivity – an essential quality of action research – because of its ability to
uphold multiple interpretations. I use metaphor and narrative as forms of dialectical and
living logic, to bring participants to the threshold of new understanding and insight, but
participants have to make their own judgements and decisions to fill the gaps in the data
supplied. Dialectical engagement will allow the participants to assess the correctness and
accuracy of their judgements and assumptions. However, this engagement in turn has the
potential to move researcher and reader beyond experience, understanding and judgement to
decision, commitment and action. Metaphors respect participants’ freedom to respond and participate by going beyond linear propositional Aristotelian logic (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002), a nucleus value of my research and practice. Metaphor and story must be appropriated in freedom, a freedom rooted in the uniqueness of every person in order for it to valuable and operational.

Ricoeur (1976), cited in O’Murchu (1997:14), suggests that we use metaphors to disentangle “the surplus of meaning”, the deeper meanings of our lives. Concentrating on questions of meaning, e.g. the “Why?” question, makes available an incentive for the creative imagination and expanded consciousness by expanding the horizons and limitations of understanding. Supporting the metaphors and stories with the “What if?” question, consistently served as an answer to moments when I did not know the answers, when I was uncertain, and when I experienced contradictions in my practice. The use of metaphors and narratives as an empowering instrument allowed me to encourage emergent meaning and significance, while ensuring the positioning of values and practice within inclusive education. This method lead teachers in recognising the tension inherent in learning – the way that deep aspirations, if they are held and nurtured, can overcome the current reality of people’s lives (Senge, 2000:391). Teachers were therefore, assisted to look at their own personal vision and to set forth on a path towards navigating the required skills, knowledge and mindset they needed to alleviate learners’ exclusion.

Fitchman Dana and Yendol-Silva (2003:14) state that teaching requires teachers to make sense of the interaction between the following five elements simultaneously: the child, the context, the content, the acts of teaching, and the teachers’ own beliefs or dispositions.

Metaphors have epistemological and ontological validity as an educational research method. One of the underlying assumptions of any research endeavour is that it is an attempt to understand better the environment being studied. In attempting to make sense of the research context, the researcher has the desire to improve it, change it, or somehow get to know it better. To achieve this, researchers and participants often draw on pre-existing knowledge and practice to account for current experiences. This is exactly what metaphors accomplish. Metaphors enable the connection of information about a familiar concept to another familiar concept, leading to a new understanding where the process of comparison between the two concepts acts as generators for new meaning.
Hermeneutic methods such as narrative inquiry define as follows that voices and language exist within the participant’s social reality. Within this paradigm, I realised that what I heard and understood was also a reflection of the participant’s involvement in that educational reality. There is the base assumption that participants use language and all its devices for social reasons, because there is the root desire to have the participant and the researcher involved in the same social community. Thus, through metaphors, I was able to enter into the inner world of the perceptions, understandings, and experiences of the participants. As Greene (1994:456) stated,

Metaphor is at the centre of language and it is the cognitive capacity that allows human beings to construct alternative modes of being and to envisage what might be if things were otherwise. It is metaphor that enables us to make creative sense of what is around us and what we carry in our memories.

Doing this exercise at my school required enormous energy, considering the teaching culture. However, this project has contributed to my effectiveness as a teacher. Using metaphors created the structure I needed to examine what I considered the most important factors in facilitating the effective implementation of inclusivity.

In this chapter, I recounted how I worked with children who have been socially excluded from classroom participation and their teachers and learned from them all in different ways. However, my greatest challenge, and triumph, was still to come. This I recount in Chapter Five.
CHAPTER FIVE
SELF-REFLECTION INVOLVING THE LEARNERS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I demonstrate the importance of action research, define as follows by Craig (2009:8), “Action research promotes collaboration and encourages community amongst all parties involved in a specific learning situation leading to results that have the potential to improve conditions and situations for all members of the learning community.”

I make a claim to knowledge relating to what I have learned about the teaching and learning of learners who are socially excluded from participating in classroom settings. In the previous chapter, I set out a methodology that my learners and I used collaboratively. In this chapter, I focus on offering explanations and justifications for my choice of methodology. We learned how to become open-minded by developing our capacity for self-critique through action research. My learners were motivated and eager to do their action research, at the same time as I was doing my own action research. I now demonstrate how I arrived at my beginning, where I allowed myself and my learners to make heard our previously marginalised, unspoken voices.

In Chapter Six, I explain how I have generated a living theory of learning to integrate learners who previously did not participate fully in classroom practices into an inclusive education classroom. I produce evidence to support my claim that children’s awareness of how they learn can enhance their learning. They learn that hands-on-learning create the most meaningful learning experiences. I shall explain and analyse how, by providing opportunities for the children in my research to have a voice in their own learning, I have helped them to see themselves not as passive recipients within the school system, but rather as confident and capable learners. In child-centred practice and enquiry, the intention is to try to keep the interests and well-being of children central to the process. To do this, I have had to engage with my learners and involve them wherever possible in the issues that concern them.
5.2 DATA GATHERING PROCESS

In keeping with my chosen action research methodology, I began to observe and evaluate my practice and gather data about what I was doing and whether I was influencing my learners’ learning. Through observation and conversations with my learners and colleagues, I became aware of occurrences of unjust or discriminatory treatment and instances of exclusion, but also of meaningful learning experiences and of significant events. This was done in an effort to live out my values of social justice and equality. I supported my learners in evaluating all aspects of the school environment and their experiences at school. This was an effort on my part to help my learners unlearn much of what they had experienced earlier. My learners thought that all they had to do was to sit passively in the classroom, somehow absorbing enough information to constitute educated or learning.

I introduced a range of pedagogical interventions in an effort to promote a more positive, participatory and socially just model of education. However, I knew that the adoption of innovative teaching practices would not be enough therefore, I introduced a new collaborative and collegial culture, one committed to the growth of both the learners and the teachers at my school. I made every effort to encourage a sense of ownership of and responsibility for my own learning, as well as a sense of belonging within the school community. Doors need to be opened up for new possibilities for both teachers and learners. I developed initiatives for them to function independently and collectively during the hours they spent in school. I have continued with these programmes, and my teaching colleagues (see Appendix 5) have designed some.

Teachers at my school need to be convinced of the value of creating that sense of community reflected in the maxim “it takes a village to educate a child”. Teachers need to create a conclusive environment and possibilities for success. My greatest comfort came in the fact that there was strength in numbers. As a school community, we realised that progress depended on the choices we made today for tomorrow, and on whether we met our challenges and protected our values. We realised that we could start by doing more to facilitate effective learning for all.
I had been systematically reflecting on my own practices for a period of at least four years. I carefully monitored whatever I was doing in relation to the children I was teaching. I also monitored what they were doing in response to my work with them (see Appendix 8).

I used the following data gathering methods:

- My reflective diary, learners’ reflective diaries, and reflective diaries of critical friends from my school and the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University;
- Commentaries from all participants on audiotape, and also as recorded in my field notes;
- Semi-structured interviews with children, parents and colleagues.

I also collected data from the following primary sources:

- Research literature;
- Feedback from all research participants;
- DoE circulars and policy documents;
- Curriculum handouts and policy documents;
- The South African Schools Act, No. 84 of 1996.

The only sensible rule for selecting any particular method of data collection is that it enables you to find out what you want to know better than other methods (McNiff & Whitehead, 2009:155). In my journal, I charted the progress of my action research, as well as my thoughts and reflections on it.

Throughout I was able to monitor and document my cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting (McNiff, 2002b); remembering the words of McNiff and Whitehead (2009:144) that monitoring is a more complex process than simply collecting data about how you perform something. The authors emphasise three distinct operations:

- Collect data about that action so that it enables you to produce the clearest possible description of what has happened;
- Interpret the data you have collected so that you can develop a tentative explanation of what has happened;
Evaluate what you have done so that you can explain the significance of your actions, and re-plan in the light of your evaluation for further action.

For this study, I kept separate data boxes and files for my learners, teachers and parents. All the data that I have gathered, is in my data archive.

5.3 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

As previously noted, I wished to ensure that this research study would display and honour my values of equality, participation and social justice. In choosing an action research methodology, I included all participants in the research as equal in status and worth. I included myself as a participant, and not external to the research field, in line with the thinking of Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), who speak of action research as research with rather than research on others. In this chapter, I shall explain how I involved my learners in their own action enquiries. I encouraged them to perceive themselves as included in their own learning. I was encouraged to do so by the realisation that young, primary school learners are themselves capable of being reflective, action researchers – albeit at a modest level. (Holderness, Bold, Henry and Wood, 2008)

Other research participants were colleagues with whom I worked at a number of schools. They included a principal, a deputy principal and coordinators of LST. In the next chapter, I shall discuss how I have managed to influence the learning of some of these colleagues to the extent that they also have adopted emancipatory practices in relation to themselves and further their educational qualifications.

In an effort to improve on social learning within my school, I constituted an enlarged SMT, who acted as critical friends. I did not formulate the constitution of this group, but the teachers were identifies on the basis of their years experience within the DoE. According to guidelines set up by the Department, they are classified as master and senior teachers. This prohibited the possible argument that the SMT is a privilege inner circle constituted to serve my research objectives. My objective in this was to gather data on the reciprocal relationship between my learning and their learning actions. They also acted as co-presenters of theme work that focused on our collegial inquiry. I invited my colleagues to observe and participate in my work at different stages. Colleagues visited my classrooms from time to time, for
varying periods, making notes of their observations of class discussions and group interactions. My critical friends maintained research journals (their comments and extracts from these journals are available in Appendices 12 and 13). Comparative studies of the Gauteng and Kwazulu-Natal tours were analysed by my colleagues to evaluate possible growth in my learners, looking at pre-tour and post-tour attitudes of my learners.

The companionship of a critical friend, "Lynn, was particularly significant throughout since she is also an educational psychologist. Lynn regularly deemed it necessary for me to re-evaluate my opinions and face the reality of my actions. She helped me to achieve a critical perspective even when this challenged some of my most cherished assumptions (McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 2003:85). I showed her my writing at regular intervals.

I assembled a validation group, who provided critical feedback on different aspects of my research. Some critical voices among my colleagues were especially valuable, since they challenged every aspect of my research. Presentation work done by me in Germany having to explain the methodology I used and motivating my choice of methodology not only challenged me, but also assisted my further growth. This form of critique made me pay close attention to the issue of methodological rigour, and ensured that I articulated my critical living standards of judgement in such a way that as little ambiguity as possible would interfere with the processes of validating my claims to knowledge.

Parents also participated in the research from time to time. They acted as learning partners to support their children’s learning, and aided in the provision of resources. They gave input lessons, class presentations, and participated in the provision of validation letters to support my claims to have improved the quality of my teaching in relation to my and their children’s learning.

5.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this section, I explain how I claim to have acted ethically, not only as a teacher but also as a principal of a school. Honouring my values of inclusivity, social justice and the right of the individual to learn has compelled me to involve my learners as co-reflective researchers in their own learning.
Designing action research projects raises complex ethical issues that are not present in traditional research. Alderson (1995:60) suggests that the empiricist tradition displays a low level of concern for ethics. People are regarded as objects of the research, not as worthwhile individuals in their own right. My research involved children, and as such needed to be conducted within stringent ethical parameters. Consideration had to be paid to how the learners in my study have been treated, the level of honesty and openness afforded to my learners, and the manner in which results are treated (Mertler, 2006:26). The main points I considered were as follows, in line with the recommendations of McNiff et al. (2003):

1. Permissions/Informed consent

Informed consent is one of the principles of respect for persons in the planning and execution of research projects. Because my research involved schoolchildren, I appended great importance to ensuring that the research was conducted within stringent ethical parameters.

My research topic and methodology involved learners aged twelve to fourteen years as research participants, important ethical issues arose about securing participants’ informed consent and the protection of the identities of these research participants. I believe very strongly in respect for the individual, based on my value of social justice, I abided by with what Bassey (1990:18) describes as a good research ethic:

*The research ethic of respect for persons focuses on the value judgement that a researcher, in taking and using data from a person, should do so in a way which respects that person as a fellow human being who is entitled to dignity and privacy.*

I negotiated permission to do the research from the following persons:

- The principal at the school at which I am teaching
- The School Governing Council of the school at which I am teaching
- The DoE
- The parents of learners involved in the research
- The learners involved
- Interested colleagues and members of committees.
All gave their written permission. These written permissions have been retained in my research archive (see Appendix 1). All were informed of the nature, purpose and scope of my research. All received an ethical statement (see Appendix 1) prior to the commencement of my research.

2. **Protecting confidentiality of participants, information and data**

I aimed to uphold the principles of anonymity and confidentiality in all aspects of my research. In my reports, I used pseudo names for my participants rather than their real names. I promised confidentiality and did not name my workplace as learners or other individuals could be identified from the disclosure of that piece of information. This is included in the permission forms in Appendix 1 and any documents of a confidential nature to make sure that participants’ anonymity was protected in my archives. I promised to discard all data when the research was concluded.

I gave my participants the undertaking that I would report only information that was in the public domain and within the law. Should I intend to use any information that was in any way sensitive, I would first seek their permission.

3. **Withdrawal from the research**

I continuously checked to make sure that participants were comfortable with procedures and were in full command of their involvement. I explained to all participants that they had the right to withdraw from the research at any stage; all data involving them would be destroyed. I also undertook to use any data collected only for the purpose of this research, in agreement with the guidelines suggested by Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (1996), at the end of which the data would be disposed of in a responsible manner.

4. **Truthful feedback**

I encouraged freedom of opinion and expression, and I promised honest feedback on all questions and issues raised.
5. Keeping good faith

If any misunderstandings arise, I undertook to write down what I was hoping to do and get approval for it. I promised myself that I would not neglect myself nor leave myself open to abuse in any way – because I had a duty to protect myself. I vowed that I would definitely go ahead and publish this work as my contribution to the body of knowledge on inclusive education in South Africa and the world.

6. Good professional and academic conduct

If any misunderstandings arise I assured respondents that I would not tape-record anything without their permission and I informed my participants on how the data would be used and I kept to my commitment.

I followed the above-mentioned principles in accordance with my ontological and epistemological values. I not only spoke about these values (McNiff & Whitehead, 2009:79), but I demonstrated them in my teaching and learning. I remained aware of the values that were the driving force of my teaching and my life to construct a meaningful life for others and myself. With this action research project, I realised the good. I created a new mythology of active engagement with my present self and my future self. I left behind patterns of thinking that limited my human possibility.

5.5 Research locations

The research took place within the context of my classrooms and selected locations. These varied from working within a mainstream class situation to working at a youth centre, and in different provinces whilst take my learners on tour to have them experience other parts of South Africa.

My research as a class-based teacher covered the years 2007 to 2011. Subsequently, I was appointed as acting principal of my school in 2010. While much of the data refers to children’s experiences within the mainstream classroom, the children themselves also referred to incidents that took place in the wider school environment. Amorphous school time provided sites for the discrimination and marginalisation experienced by the children. The
way that institutionalised oppression and marginalisation infused the entire experience of schooling, as manifested through school policies of curriculum and pedagogy, proved a source of deep distress for the children. I deliberately tried to extend my own understandings of children’s experiences by learning more about their home lives, and their social and cultural backgrounds. Conversations with parents, both within and outside the school environment, were also a source of invaluable information and insight for my research.

5.6 STRUCTURE AND PROCESSES OF MY RESEARCH: SHOWING THAT I HAVE TAKEN ACTION TO OVERCOME METHODOLOGICAL DIFFICULTIES

I decided that playing Russian roulette with the lives of my learners was not something that made me comfortable. It was thus incumbent upon me to develop a means that would make success not failure the most likely outcome for my learners. Being a reflective practitioner was one way of enabling me to teach for inclusion. The following quotation concerning the traits of a reflective practitioner guided me in the process:

*Reflective practitioners think about their experiences in practice and view them as opportunities to learn. They examine their definitions of knowledge, seek to develop broad and multifaceted types of knowledge, and recognise that their knowledge is never complete. Reflective practitioners are concerned about the contexts of their practices and the implications for action. They reflect on themselves, including their assumptions and their theories of practice, and take action grounded in self-awareness. Finally, reflective practitioners recognise and seek to act from a place of praxis, a balanced coming together of action and reflection.*

(Kinsella, 2001 in Procee, 2006:237)

I start at the beginning, with my own experiences of transforming my self-imposed exclusionary practices. My continuous inner dialogue convinced me that I was hopeless at assisting learners to become more participatory in their own learning. Most of the limitations I had, were self-imposed, based on how I chose to see myself or how others saw me.
I illustrate this point by way of an oral discussion I had in Germany whilst visiting the University of Oldenburg as an exchange student (5 November 2009, taped conversation and transcript, original in data archive Appendix 6).

My stay in Germany was characterised by considerable confusion and anxiety as a person, as I tried to make sense of who I was and what I was supposed to be doing. I can see now, as I reflect on my practice, that I was struggling with issues of how a range of factors, had influenced me, including dominant theories and normative assumptions, as communicated through the literatures, and how these had come to form my social understandings and my values.

Sachs citing Kondo (1990) argues that identity is often context dependent:

*In times of rapid change identity cannot be seen to be a fixed thing, it is negotiated, open, shifting, ambiguous, the result of culturally available meanings and the open-ended power-laden enactment of those meanings in everyday situations.*

(Kondo, 1990:24 in Sachs, 1999:5)

I found this reading particularly relevant to the education context within which I found myself. I was thousands of kilometres away from home trying to bring together my identity as an educator from South Africa and my impressions of the Germany education system. I struggled with moving from a practice of obedience and rote learning, by trying to fit my practice into a predetermined framework set by others, to the participatory practice that was practised within German classrooms, where I saw my practice as emergent and in relation to my own articulated educational values.

I found myself living with one foot in the past and one in the future, in a house built over an imperfect procession. Up until then I had lived in a world of givens and unquestioned assumptions that directed me. I had to find a way of getting rid of the old stories I was feeding myself. I recalled a story my father enjoyed telling us as children. He told us that when a snake started shedding its skin, its eyes would turn milky white, leaving it temporarily blind. The creature then turns into the familiar darkness of its burrow, waiting for its new skin to grow. I decided that if was to make it through this time of shedding, I needed to be guided by the wisdom of all natural creatures. I needed to reclaim my comfort with the unknown, moving beyond the fear of my own imagination.
I looked hard at what I was doing and reflected on what I was thinking to seek creative ways to improve not only my situation, but also that of the teachers and learners. Stenhouse (1983) motivated me by his claim that research is systematic enquiry made public. Briggs and Coleman (2007:15), reiterate that that research is a systematic, critical and self-critical enquiry that aims to contribute to the advancement of knowledge and wisdom. McNiff and Whitehead (2010), go further, emphasising that action research is systematic enquiry made public with educational intent.

To begin with, I generated data to show that I had taken action to overcome the systemic disadvantages my learners and I had suffered. I showed how I had transformed that disadvantage into new forms of opportunity. I explained how I selected data from the monitoring of the teaching and learning processes of my everyday work. Data refer to the information I gathered about my research as I proceeded with my research project (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010:42). I showed how I had gathered data from continuous questioning of my work and my learners’ work and monitoring what I did (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010:43).

5.7 HOW I GATHERED DATA AND HELPED MY LEARNERS AND MYSELF COME TO OUR OWN UNDERSTANDINGS OF HOW WE LEARN

Over the course of my seventeen years of teaching, I hold more than my share of wonderful moments. Yet nothing came close to the experience I am about to explain; at least, nothing had engendered so strong a response from me (my Journal Entry of 27 July 2009).

In 2009, I was on extended sick leave from school following major surgery. I had taught my register class since they were in Grade 5 then, and they were in Grade 7. Irvine was a very slow learner; having joined the school two years earlier (in Grade 5). His reading ability was very poor, which impacted negatively on the outcomes on his achievement in his other learning areas. During our daily reading activities, Irvine would never read, and all his classmates knew that he did not read aloud in front of others. Our school curriculum is not flexible and does not meet the learning needs of children with different abilities. All children are expected to follow the same lessons, disregarding differences in learning abilities and needs. This enhances the deterioration in learners’ performance levels.
For a prepared oral assignment, I instructed that each learner had to find an article, magazine or story and read a full page for an assessment mark. I went through the alphabetical list, calling each name. When it was Irvine’s turn, my initiate impulse was to skip him, but I noticed that he was holding a magazine. “Are you reading now, Irvine?” I asked. He proceeded to read aloud from the magazine, so fluently that the class and I were stunned.

**What has happened was my immediate question.**

Irvine’s verbatim response as tape-recorded and transcribed by me:

> My father helped me. I wanted to be part of our reading programme, because I know that teacher will not lie to me on the importance of reading. I wanted to surprise you when you came back and show you that I can (14th August 2009).

It is so important to engage with learners and to trust them. I experienced in my own learning how difficult it is to remain positive or to have reverence if you are not trusted. Supreme to everything else, trust demands a sense of openness, of possibility, of acceptance, of detachment. Hart shares her research, focusing on a teacher named Julie:

> Julie realises that she cannot just rely on her own observations to make accurate judgments about how students are responding. She encourages dialogue with them in order to find out what is going on in their heads.

(Hart, 2003:227)

This links very much with my own ideas of the importance of having a dialogue with learners. I realised how important it was to talk with learners and get to know them. This realisation had a profound impact on my relationship with my learners for the rest of my teaching career.

Dialogue practice I have learned, shifts the focus of education from what the teacher says to what the learner does, from learner passivity to learners as active participants in the dialogue that leads to learning (Global Learning Partners, 2006c). A dialogue approach to education views learners as subjects in their own learning and honours principles such as mutual respect and open communication as key (Vella, 2002). In engaging with my learners on reflective
practices, I draw energy from Dewey’s (1933) “routine action” and “reflective action” to clarify how much of what we do in our teaching and learning is made up of routines based on tradition, instruction, or imitation.

When I modelled openness as a teacher, I began to develop a climate of openness in my classroom. Creativity started to thrive, and my learners became happier and more spontaneous. I invited my learners to engage actively with the content learned rather than being dependent on me as educator for learning. I presented ideas to learners as open questions they must reflect on and integrate into their own context (Vella, 2004). My aim was that this should result in meaningful learning that impact on my learners’ behaviour. This allowed me to reflect upon and celebrate the role of my learners and myself as contributors to and participants in the principles and practices of educational research (Briggs & Coleman, 2007:32). This to me was a most significant reward of my teaching profession. I saw a seed – and the ground was fertile and ready for it to grow.

Irvine suffered from being ridiculed by his fellow learners on a daily basis. He never participated in the discussions we had in the classroom. He would just sit there smiling at everyone, intimidated and fearful that they would attack him verbally. Often when I looked at Irvine, it brought back my own childhood experiences when I felt the odd one out, when I was the centre of my fellow learners’ mockery. To this day, the thought that one human being would take advantage of another because he or she is able to, because of superior age, size, strength or wealth is an enigma to me.

I believe that these childhood memories have influenced how I observe and relate to people. I feel very strongly that nobody should exert power over others, whether by virtue of position, age, size, colour or creed, and that nobody should feel demeaned because of his or her position, age, size, colour or creed. Experiences such as these reinforced my beliefs about justice, inclusivity and Ubuntu. I was determined to never deliberately humiliate or belittle anyone. I set out to value people for who they were and I tried not to make assumptions of what people were thinking or feeling.

I have always had a high regard for children, for their views and their feelings, which in turn has had an impact on the way I have brought up my children and my relationship with children and young people as a teacher. Apartheid in South Africa was also a very destructive vehicle that brought with it endless forms of pain and isolation. Today, many of us still bear
the emotional scars. However, the concept of Ubuntu embodies the concept of mutual understanding and the active appreciation of the value of human differences (DoE, 2001, 16).

As I developed a teaching philosophy, I realised that my passion for teaching was intertwined with my passion for reading. My goal as a teacher was to help my learners become lifelong learners, able to think critically about the world around them and create and to articulate their own ideas. I hoped that by sharing my love for reading with my learners, I would help them express the thoughts and opinions that were important and meaningful to them.

I envisioned my classroom filled with eager children who loved to read and who could not wait to share their ideas with the rest of the class. Huberman (1993:136) declares that teachers are artisans working primarily alone, with a variety of new and cobbled together materials, in a personally designed work environment.

Reading is so many different things to so many different people. Similarly, there are many different ways to teach it and many different ways to learn it. Nevertheless, I was unaware of how to manage and teach children with learning difficulties and or disabilities. I lacked motivation, awareness, knowledge and skills on inclusion and quality education. I was accustomed to the lecture method of teaching. However, I was reminded of Schon’s (1983:50) words, which had so profoundly influenced teacher education. He commented: In daily practice, every competent practitioner 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. I was interested only in what would work for my learners, and not in why it worked.

5.7.1 Value of story telling

Reflective thinking involves personal consideration of one’s own learning. It considers personal achievements and failures and asks what worked, what did not, and what needs improvement (Given, 2002). It asks the learner to think about her own thinking. There is a need for human beings to tell the story of their lives as they have experienced it, to narrate this lived experience, and the inevitable intellectual need to make meaning of it (O’Connor in Pithouse, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2009:43).
"Reflection is the key that opens the door to understanding ourselves in relation to core ethical values" (Beland, 2003:15). Similarly, Lickona states that "moral reflection is necessary to develop the cognitive side of character – the important part of our moral selves that enables us to make moral judgments about our own behaviour and that of others" (Lickona, 1991:229). This type of reflection enables learners to gain self-knowledge, to demonstrate their understanding of worthwhile moral values, to take on the perspective of others, to reflect on why some actions are morally better than others, and to consider alternatives and consequences of actions. Whether reflection is verbal, written or drawn, it is a key strategy for learning and a major tool for character education.

In my teaching, reflection was encouraged through journal writing, keeping a daily diary, essay writing, drawing, and talking in pairs. Reflection often followed a peer discussion or dialogue in pairs. I had my learners form a row, and grouped in pairs; the first two children seat themselves and role-play dialogues of their different roles. On a signal, they had reverse roles and adapt their dialogue according to the topic of discussion, which was linked to the theme of exclusionary practices.

Possible discussions during this pair dialogue:

- Principal and worrying learner.
- Parent and child.
- Weirdo (rebel) and priest.
- Sports coach and struggling athlete.
- Business owner and worker.
- Own idea.

Reflection assisted my learners in bridging the struggle and gaining an understanding of the ideas and reasoning of others. My learners were aided through their own reflection to make connections between the moral and social issues in the dialogue, the struggle of the characters, and their own struggles to lead a moral life.

Reflection occurred in response to academic work and as a follow-up to a cooperative activity when learners were asked to reflect upon how well their group did, or did not, work together. Reflection was used to review the day, as a follow-up for class meetings, as part of goal
setting, and as part of a service learning activity. Learners reflected upon authentic issues faced by them and the school community, such as the impact of MXit on youngsters (communication via cell phones), consideration for others, or improving sportsmanship. Problem solving was the basis of the dialogues, to challenge learners to look at what was taking place in order to find clues to the resolution of conflicts.

I modelled reflection by sharing my own learning regarding a moral issue. This showed my learners that character development was a life-long journey and that, in this pursuit, it was the effort and the striving toward an ethical life that was important. (Beland, 2003:16).

5.7.2 How my learners reflected on their learning: Showing the realisation of my values as my research methods

There are two basic goals in teaching discipline:

- Creation of self-control
- Creation of community

5.7.2.1 Creation of self-control

I strived for the creation of self-control in my learners as a first goal in improving on my classroom management. This purpose summarised in the following quote from Dewey: “The ideal aim of education is creation of the power of self-control” (Dewey, 1963:64).

Charney (2002) identifies “power” as the key word in Dewey’s quote. Power, states Dewey, is the ability to “frame purposes, to judge wisely” (Dewey, 1963:64). The power of self-control is the power to assert oneself in a positive way. It involves the capacity to regulate oneself, to anticipate consequences, and to give up immediate gratification to realise a long-term goal. It includes the ability to make and carry out a plan, to solve a problem, to conceive of a good idea and act on it, to sift alternatives and to make decisions. For children, it is the ability to enter a new group and say “hello”, to make new friends, to choose activities, and to hold fast to inner thoughts and beliefs. This is not an innate power, according to Dewey, but one that is “created”. My learners were playing an active part in the selection of my methods, demonstrating the value of the right to learning and participation.
Shriver and Weissberg (2005), are of the opinion that “Social and emotional learning is the process through which children learn to recognise and manage emotions. It allows them to understand and interact with others, to make good decisions, and to behave ethically and responsibly by asking questions to demonstrate their willingness to participate and respect learning of themselves and others. The best social and emotional learning programs engage not only children, but also their teachers, administrators and parents in providing children with the information and skills that help them make ethical and sensible decisions - to avoid bullying, for instance, or to resist pressures to engage in destructive or risky behaviour, such as substance abuse.” I showed respect for my learners and other role-players in their education by building an awareness of the value of collective decision-making and Ubuntu.

5.7.2.2 Creation of community

In the fast-expanding modern world, it is particularly urgent that we extend beyond the domain of self and apply the lessons of self-control. We need to find connections to others and to feel ourselves members of many groups – intimate groups, community groups, and a world group. These connections and responsibilities must also be taught. We need to teach children to care as well as to receive care. We must help them learn to contribute, and want to contribute. Inclusion is a means of extending educational opportunities to a wide range of groups and emphasises the quality of learning and participation.

We all have an inherent need to be useful and helpful to others. However, because this need is inherent does not mean that it automatically flourishes or is tapped. In society there are people who suffer from a lack of meaningful work. Children, too, can suffer from a partnership of neglect and indulgence that could result in a lack of meaningful responsibilities. These children are not expected to demonstrate care and are not accustomed to take care of others. Creating community means giving children the power to care not only for the interest of the self, but for the interest of the larger group.

Consequently, the best methods, the most carefully planned programmes the most intriguing classroom centres, and the most exciting and vibrant materials are useless without discipline and management. The children can either hurl the Lego set or crash the blocks, or they can
build fine bridges. The critical difference is the approach to discipline and managing the classroom for learner participation (Charney, 2002:17-25).

In my years of working as a classroom teacher and a teacher educator, I have found the American model of a Responsive Classroom approach to teaching particularly helpful in managing and recognizing my own biases and values and reflect on how these influenced my expectations for behaviour and my interactions with learners as well as what learning looks like. I recognise that the goal of classroom management is not to achieve compliance or control but to provide all learners with equitable opportunities for learning. It offers teachers tools and techniques for creating a learning community that is nurturing, respectful, and full of learning. According to Charney (2002:17-25), seven guiding principles underlie the approach, which comprise six practical teaching strategies:

- The social curriculum is as important as the academic curriculum.
- How children learn is as important as what they learn: process and content go hand in hand.
- The greatest cognitive growth occurs through social interaction.
- Children need social skills in order to be successful academically and socially: cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control.
- Knowing the children we teach – individually, culturally and developmentally – is as important as knowing the content we teach.
- Knowing the families of the children we teach and inviting their participation is essential to children’s education.
- How the adults at school work together is as important as individual competence: lasting change begins with the adult community.

Charney tells us that children do not come to school knowing how to do all these things. They must be taught consciously and systematic. Shriver and Weissberg (2005) state that when Responsive Classroom approach programmes are well designed and executed, they have consistently achieved these goals, turning out students who are good citizens, committed to serving their communities, and who cooperate with others. I found that this was an appropriate form of giving my learners a voice and not marginalising them.
The practical wisdom from experienced teachers and students help persuade the other colleagues at our school that it is possible to create a classroom that is enlivened by caring and respect, and that such a classroom atmosphere is a critical foundation for learning. When we teach students to be self-disciplined and caring, and we do so with courage and authenticity, we are using instructional time well. Most important, we are building essential habits of self-control and care through the very routine of our classrooms. Socially constructive learning is a method used to enhance learner awareness of the role they play in their learning.

Large class sizes usually snuff out vital creative passion. Put one teacher in a room of three-dozen-plus youngsters, and the priority becomes keeping the class under control, with teaching by rote a central tool in this process. While rote instruction is the easiest way to impart information to a large group, it is the worst way to foster imagination and problem-solving. When it comes to establishing the social context, teachers set the stage and play the lead (Kaiser & Sklar Rasminsky, 2003:130). Teachers’ attitude towards their learners help form the social context. I always tell my learners: *To be a star you must shine your own light, follow your own path, and don’t worry about the darkness, for that is when the stars shine brightest.*

The lotus is the sacred plant of the Brahmin religion of India, considered as the symbol of an elemental trinity of earth, water, and air. As an aquatic plant, it derives its nutriment from all of these elements combined, its roots being planted in the earth, its stem rising through the water, and its leaves exposed to the air. The metaphor that initiated the writing of my doctoral thesis has now undergone a metamorphosis in its development and has evolved into a dragonfly.

The following story illustrates this process beautifully:

*The Dragonfly*

*Once, in a little pond, in the muddy water under the lily pads, there lived a little water beetle in a community of water beetles. They lived a simple and comfortable life in the pond with few disturbances and interruptions.*
Once in a while, sadness would come to the community when one of their fellow beetles would climb the stem of a lily pad and would never be seen again. They knew when this happened; their friend was dead, gone forever.

Then, one day, one little water beetle felt an irresistible urge to climb up that stem. However, he was determined that he would not leave forever. He would come back and tell his friends what he had found at the top.

When he reached the top and climbed out of the water onto the surface of the lily pad, he was so tired, and the sun felt so warm, that he decided he must take a nap. As he slept, his body changed and when he woke up, he had turned into a beautiful blue-tailed dragonfly with broad wings and a slender body designed for flying.

So, fly he did! And, as he soared he saw the beauty of a whole new world and a far superior way of life to what he had never known existed.

Then he remembered his beetle friends and how they were thinking by now he was dead. He wanted to go back to tell them, and explain to them that he was now more alive than he had ever been before. His life had been fulfilled rather than ended.

But, his new body would not go down into the water. He could not get back to tell his friends the good news. Then he understood that their time would come, when they, too, would know what he now knew. So, he raised his wings and flew off into his joyous new life!

(Aaker & Smith, 2010)

As mentioned above small actions create big change. If we use different avenues for social change, what difference would we make? What kind of impact would we have on the individual? Education, like life, is a journey. Life is full of many emotions – fear, hope, joy, sadness, love, rage – many of which happen simultaneously and many of which can be confusing or scary. I work with educators and children to broaden their awareness of themselves and their feelings, both conscious and unconscious. For Bassey (1999:37), education is:
• Firstly, experiencing and nurturing personal and social developments towards worthwhile living.
• Secondly, acquiring, developing, transmitting, conserving, discovering and renewing worthwhile cultures.

I advocate a lifestyle of awareness, of simply noticing what your emotions and thoughts are in any given moment. I also advocate the need to be less judgmental with self and others, learning to love and accept who we are.

Self-reflection is a place where, hopefully, a person can bring all of his or her experiences, from the most painful to the most joyous. Education can be a place to work on relationships, personal growth, goals and dreams, anxiety and depression, rage, grief, and even joy.

Education is also a place to work on issues relating to sexuality, food, addictions and spirituality – the energy that connects us to each other and to ourselves (Houston, Blankstein & Cole, 2008:1). I hope that a spirit of Ubuntu would be more visible amongst my learners to create the conditions for greater awareness and acceptance of learner diversity. Dragonflies begin their lives in water, and then move to the air as they grow. They break through the glittering glow of the water's edge, and they are changed forever. The dragonfly, therefore, symbolises going past self-created illusions that limit one’s growing and changing.

Self-reflection and education can be helpful as one begins to grow and change. Initially, people may only see only a glow of hope, and sometimes they are so deep below the water’s surface that they cannot even see the water's edge. My belief is that education can be a place where a person can move toward the water’s edge and then break through into a new life that is full of light and vibrancy.

5.8 CYCLE OF EMPOWERMENT

In this section, I am asking, “What did I do to address my own and my learners’ feelings of isolation and marginalisation?”

Within this practice-based form of theorising, I hold myself accountable for my work, within a self-study action research methodology, as explained by McNiff (1993), McNiff et al.
I show evidence of my practical pedagogical changes, and changes in the learning experiences of the children who participated in my research. My accounts of these experiences have been tested at several levels – in the classroom, in conference presentations and research seminars – against the values that I identified.

House and Frymier (2009:36) are of the opinion that an empowered learner is motivated to perform tasks and, more particularly that an empowered person perceive the tasks to be carrying great weight, feels competent to perform them, and feels his/her efforts have an impact on the design of things. According to these authors being empowered relates to an internal condition that an individual experiences, similar to experiencing motivation or anxiety. Empowering refers to those situational factors that help others feel empowered. This means that as an empowering instructor, I helped my learners see the relevance and importance of learning tasks. I designed tasks that my learners could perform, but not tasks without challenges so that my learners had to work to accomplish them; they experienced some success and realised their competence as learners. In other words, I did things that changed my learners’ perceptions of themselves as learners. Would it then be theoretically correct to say that an empowered learner is likely to be the result of the combination of internal factors, such as personality, as well as the empowering behaviours of teachers? (House & Frymier, 2009:37).

My motivation and/or purpose was to allow my learners space to own their own learning and not simply to impart my knowledge to them. I want to echo Freire (1978), in his contention that education can be used to foster critical reflection and action. I believe that there is a need for change in the philosophical framework or “paradigm” in which we educate our learners so that our contemporaries can emulate these changes. The word “education” is derived from its Latin root “e” “ducare” to lead, so “educare” means to lead out or bring forth that which is within. Hence, I thought that as an educator I should become more concerned about unlocking the dormant capacities and sensitivities of my learners’ souls than with wadding their reflexive young minds full of processed information. It is an education that prepares young people to live purposefully, creatively and morally in a complex world.

For a prepared oral topic my learners had to choose a career they were interested in and orally share their ideas with the class. On the day of their oral presentations (6 October 2009), learners brought along different aids to illustrate the career of their choice and dressed
accordingly. I chose this topic because it allowed my learners the opportunity to visualise and live out their envisaged careers. Through this oral discussion, my learners could express themselves more freely than simply writing this down. I saw this as a celebration of what my learners could and should be if given the correct navigation tools and support.

Curtley, a very hyperactive boy who never completed his assignments, always submitted work that was very untidy and full of oily, fatty stains. It was not a pleasure to look at his work I once over heard another teacher say. He had donned a tidily cleaned and ironed blue overall for his presentation and carried a tool-box to complete his external appearance. He started off by saying:

In the neighbourhood where I once lived, there stayed a Rastafarian who showed me how to repair mechanical errors on cars.

Immediately the entire class, myself included, gave him our full attention.

With this tool-box I can just about solve any problem on a car

Curtley then explained what each tool was and what its use was. His fellow learners had many questions to further investigate and test his knowledge I called in a male educator, who I thought would be more knowledgeable about the topic. The two of them engaged in a very fruitful discussion and I think nobody was more pleased than Curtley about the teacher’s participation in the classroom.

I asked Curtley, based on his oral presentation, what he could do.

I can identify different mechanical tools.
I know what it is used for.
I know how to handle each tool.
I know the importance of casing the tool correctly.
I know the importance of cleaning my tools.
I know that I must be properly dressed to perform my mechanical duties, because the oil stains cannot be removed easily.

I claim that I gained new knowledge from episodes as recounted above in that I began to understand the power of learner-empowerment as a motivator to learn for those who are so
often ignored by their educators who hold the power of knowledge in their hands and silence learners to retain control of their classrooms. Based on this new knowledge, I introduced changes in my teaching in order to influence the learning of my learners. I invited my learners to keep personal diaries in which they wrote or drew pictures about things I can do and teach them. Reflection helps enforce new learning by re-enforcing it. Recognising that a self-confident child, sure of him/herself, is a child ready to learn and grow, teaching social and emotional skills, such as self-awareness, behavioural change, active listening, direct and clear communication, self-motivation, problem-solving, decision-making, and working collaboratively lies at the core of my teaching and learning. I set about to teach my learners a new emotional vocabulary of positive life skills and behaviour patterns, and conflict resolution, social and emotional skills, such as:

- Listening to others
- Confronting one’s own fears
- Finding positive alternatives to violence and self-destructive habits

My methods were not prearranged; instead, they were developmental and transformational in the following way:

**Figure 5.1: Layers of data gathering**

![Layers of data gathering diagram](image-url)
5.8.1  Layers of data gathering

I want to utilise the metaphor of a “lily” to illustrate the teaching I envisage. The lily plant has medicinal value (Native Remedies), in Elizabethan times; lilies were one of the ingredients in medicines to restoring voice loss and healing of the liver and for the purpose of this study also represent the safe work spaces created by my teaching to provide the optimum conditions for positive change. However, it does not only represent the actual physical space, but also the processes, relationships and activities that go into my teaching.

The Romans used this flower to cure callosities (a piece of skin that has become thickened as a result of repeated contact and friction) with the juice of its bulbs, in terms of which my learners’ emotions or concerns were transposed to a different place, I involved different people through using used autobiographies to explore my learners’ goals and objectives, without leaving their feelings exposed or rendering them vulnerable, and to offer them concrete tools to carry into everyday life. The autobiographies allowed my learners to describe their lives (actions taken) and then offer their own analysis and interpretation of the actions (their explanation), with the assistance of paired interviewing (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010:44).

Table 5.1 provides a summary of the data generation and documentation processes that were utilised. I also provide a reference to the appendixes where examples of the data may be viewed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Documentation</th>
<th>Appendix</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Informal, conversational</td>
<td>► Autobiographies</td>
<td>► Voice recorded and transcribed into text</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>► Drawings</td>
<td>► Visual data – photographs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>► Incomplete sentence schedule</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>► Collage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>► Drawing and writing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>► Role play</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>Observation-as-context-of-interaction</td>
<td></td>
<td>► Research journal</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>► Visual photographs</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textual/</td>
<td>Journals/ Personal</td>
<td>► Letters from critical friends</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data:</td>
<td>reflections</td>
<td>► Validation group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following value-based questions guided the evaluation process in my classroom:

- Do I create an environment of respect, trust, safety and kindness?
- Do I practise non-judgment?
- Do I work towards our highest potential?
- Do I validate the creative process?
- Do I support growth and change through self-awareness?
- Do I practise positive communication?
- Do I make conscious choices and accept responsibility for outcomes?
- Do I create peaceful solutions?

In general terms, the question was whether I showed the kind of commitment that Young (1990:3) speaks about, that social justice demands “explicitly acknowledging and attending to those differences” in making sure that education caters for recognition of culture, special educational needs or disadvantage. Lynch (1999:17) communicates that “if one’s cultural traditions are not a valued part of the education one receives, if they are denigrated or omitted, then education itself becomes a place where one’s identity is denied or one’s voice is silenced”. Did I in my teaching of learners who were socially excluded showed concern for these aspects as mentioned by Lynch?

I noticed how my learners responded to recording the different stages in their development; I realised that by writing about themselves, learners could tap into their feelings of isolation by creating characters that metaphorically shared those feelings. Embarking on the task of developing an autobiography lies at the heart of each child’s understanding of what it means to be that particular child. I am working in a self-study action research tradition, which is grounded in a logic of question and answer (Whitehead, 1989; 1998). I constantly pose questions about the processes involved in my learning and actions, both of which are mutually influential, and in a dynamically influential and transformational relationship with my personal life world, which is itself in a dynamically influential and transformational relationship with my social world (see McNiff, 2006b).
My Grade 6 learners were asked to write their own seven-chapter autobiography, under the following section headings:

**Table 5.2: Outline of the autobiography assignment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CYCLE</th>
<th>SECTION HEADINGS</th>
<th>REQUIREMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>COVER</td>
<td>Design the cover to include your name, the year and the Grade (also collect as many pictures, photos, certificates and memorabilia of your life).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>MY FAMILY</td>
<td>Draw up a family tree: Find information on parents, grandparents, etc. Tell the reader about the members of your family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>MY FIRST SIX YEARS</td>
<td>Record stories of unusual things you did from 1-5 years. You need photos of your activities and any reports, certificates, etc. you got at pre-school or play school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>MY SCHOOL CAREER</td>
<td>This deals with Grades 1 - 6.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>GREAT MOMENTS IN MY LIFE</td>
<td>Those times you remember as a highlight in your life: winning a competition, a trip, an occasion in the family, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>MY FAVOURITE ACTIVITIES</td>
<td>Your hobbies, sports, things you do in your leisure time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>MY HOPES FOR THE FUTURE</td>
<td>Give some thought to how you see your life from Grade 6 to when you are an adult, what do you hope to do or become.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because my learners seemed to enjoy reflecting on their learning attainments, I encouraged them to record things that they experienced whilst completing their autobiographies in their reflective journals. The following is an example from one pupil’s journal entry dated 18 August 2009:

*What would the other learners call me when they read in my autobiography that my mother is a domestic worker that both she and my father are not financially capable to take care of me? I am living with my father’s mother and sister after the social worker encourage them to take care of me.*
The autobiographies served as a framework of action (as adapted from Cooperrider, Stavros & Whitney, 2003). The cycle describes the process for moving forward for an individual (Houston et al., 2008:52). I was used to organising my classroom so that my learners worked individually; however, at the end of this project, I asked my learners to assess each other’s commitment to the task assigned and to get an understanding of the others experiential world. I learned to value the input each child made to the learning process by allowing participation and peer-to-peer learning; my new learning required that I give my learners opportunities:

- To work and discuss with other learners for the first time,
- Having learners rather than myself give an opinion on others’ work.

To do so involved changing both my learners and my own attitudes about what constitute legitimate inclusivity and the right to effective quality learning. I also needed to convince my learners and myself of the educational value that this project held. I had to develop my learners’ potential and their competence to participate in their learning. They also had to look at the content holistically and explain their decisions and input.

**Figure 5.2: Autobiography**

![Autobiography Diagram]

5.2.1 **Discovery**
In this initial phase, my learners were grouped in pairs and asked to look at the positive capacity of his/her partner. They had to interview one another to learn about high-point experiences, strengths, assets and the aspirations they held for the future. These autobiographies presented a picture of each learner, based on information about his/her learning attainments. What slows down the recording of this process was my first concern. My learners responded; stereotyping and labelling (see Appendix 8). Data from the discussion workshop we held on “stereotyping and labelling” are filed in my Appendices.

I organised a three-day workshop on leadership and participation for my class. The venue was Landela Christian Youth Centre, 40 km in the direction of Elands River, in the Uitenhage area. Various organisations and private persons made this venture financially possible for my learners.

The participants entered the research on a voluntary basis. They manifested this when they gave their informed and unambiguous consent, free from coercion or bribery, to take part in this study, (Economic & Social Research Council, 2005). My hope is that all who participated in my research will be helped by it. The importance I attached to informed consent arose from my subscription to the democratic rights of freedom and self-determination. By inviting participants to partake in this study, I was required to protect them from any violation of their privacy, anonymity and confidentiality, and to avoid harm, betrayal and deception (Briggs & Coleman, 2007:112).

I took the following steps as recommended by Noble-Carr (2006), as being necessary for conducting successful interviews and workshops with children:

- I chose an appropriate setting;
- I then established rapport with the participants;
- I conducted informal (and at times semi-structured) interviews;
- I enabled the children to provide an open account of their lived experiences;
- I used open-ended questions; and
- I employed the aid of various visual and task-based activities.

My previous research writings were done within a qualitative research paradigm; I therefore found myself continuously being influenced by that research design. My action research
design proceeded in a developmental transformational way, in which new questions were addressed as they emerged through the process (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010:11). I was challenged by various researchers in deciding which instruments of data collection to use. Power (1998:692) states that in order to engage in inclusive, qualitative research that is imaginative and creative, research “as unique data may be generated by insight, chance, serendipity, happenstance and the imaginative application of flexible methods”. In his research, Noble-Carr (2006), however, used a variety of task-based techniques to put children at ease and elicit discussions. Kay, Tisdall and Wallace (2003) experienced challenges in integrating tasks for learners aged 11 to 14 years as these children considered games to be too childish, but found formal talk sessions too overwhelming. Strode and Grant (2001) conducted a study within a South African context in which children were offered pictures and vignettes and then requested them to make up a story based on their experiences or to talk explicitly about the similarities between the scenario in the pictures and their own experiences.

I pasted notes displaying negative words on learners’ backs, and in the discussions the learners role-played how other people responded towards a “slow learner”, a “poor learner”, etc. Each participant shared in his/her group how he/she felt about being called a specific name and how he/she had overcome the obstacle this name-calling imposed on his/her growth. In their groups, the learners discussed how they felt and what they had learned from this experience. I included this task-based activity in order to stimulate and encourage conversation with and between my learners. Visual evidence on the photos in (Appendix 8) clearly shows that all my group sessions occurred in a circle. This is an expression of my belief in the uniqueness and individuality of each individual; the circle emphasises equality, lack of hierarchical status, shared leadership, connectedness and the recognition of each individual’s contribution.

Picture 5.1:  Labelling and name calling
Through (see picture 5.2) the process of facilitating the group discussions with my learners, I was providing them with an opportunity to engage in dialogic relationships, which Freire (1972) advocates are necessary for education as the practice of freedom. Dialogue, according to Freire, is the antithesis of the ‘banking’ system of education, and is, therefore, contradictory to what Marcuse (1972:77) refers to as the logic of domination. The dialogical approach has been defined by Freire (1970:87) as follows:

**Dialogue is an existential necessity.** Dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person’s “depositing” ideas in another, nor can it become the simple exchange of ideas to be ‘consumed’ by the discussants. Because dialogue is an encounter between men [sic] who name their world, it must not be a situation where some men name it on behalf of others. It is an act of creation; it must not serve as a crafty instrument for the domination of one man by another.

In Table 5.3 below, I present a summary of the task-based instruments that I employed to channel the informal conversational interviews. Drawing and writing were used most of the time. In the table, I comment on the format of the activities, the estimated duration of each task, and the documentation process. A reference to the Appendix 1 where completed examples of the instrument may be viewed is provided.
Table 5.3: Task-based instruments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What did we do?</th>
<th>Approximate time spent on task</th>
<th>How did I record?</th>
<th>Appendix</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Pasted labels on learners’ back:</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
<td>• Learners exploring labels were photographed</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Group activity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Moving around in group scanning labels</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Role-play: How others react to the name tag:</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
<td>• Photograph of children engaged in role-play</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Group activity and discussion</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Audiotaped and transcribed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Discussion on feelings and emotions</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>• Photograph of activity</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Report back to whole group</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
<td>• Interview was audio-taped and transcribed</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Whole group activity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Drawing and writing activity: River of life. The obstacles that impede my growth and events that strengthen my growth</td>
<td>• 30 minutes individual activity</td>
<td>• Drawing and written text</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Individual activity</td>
<td>• 30 minutes individual interview with each child (assisted by facilitators)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Picture collage: “all about me” perceptions</td>
<td>• 2-hour session group activity to construct the collage</td>
<td>• Completed collage was photographed</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Group activity</td>
<td>• 30 minutes individual interview with each child</td>
<td>• Interview was audio-taped and transcribed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Individual interview</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Examples of learner responses as recorded on Tuesday, 9 February 2010. I felt angry, worried, sad, horrified and intimidated. Feelings of being different and not fitting in or not being smart enough paralysed me.

Learners also had to look at what strengths they have to overcome major obstacles such as poverty and complex family structures with single parent households, or no parents at all. It is not easy to produce evidence of other people’s learning so I asked my learners themselves, as recommended by McNiff & Whitehead (2009:104).

5.2.2 Dreams

Reflective discovery conversations about the learners’ experiences lead to a collective image of an ideal future in which learners felt they should not call each other names, realised that
everybody was different, that we needed to respect others for who they were and that we should not be judgemental towards others, especially people with disabilities and under privileged. The facilitators noticed a difference in learner mood; the participants were enthusiastic and motivated to participate and share their information with the bigger group. Most of the participants shared similar feelings of isolation and fear, but with continuous discussion and participation in the discussed topic, they were able to express themselves. Evaluation is grounded in the ideas of values and of making judgements. Self-evaluation (McNiff & Whitehead, 2009:105) allows the person to make his or her own judgements about the issue in question.

My learners sometimes complex lives – both past and present – had left them with limited trust in their own abilities. However, I continued to make our individual thinking public. These data include learners’ drawings, reports and taped and transcribed discussions with others in my school context. Learners got the opportunity to reflect in their journals when and began to develop new ideas about participation and their resistance to it.

Learners came to see that best practices could be the norm as they articulate their future classroom environment that is an introduction to the next phase of our data collection process. They realised that they can have dreams and objectives despite their atrocious obstacles.

5.2.3   Design
Together, my learners had the opportunity to identify the changes that they would like to make in their social architecture in order to move towards their collective ideal.

This was highlighted by one of the facilitators Mrs Stevens*, who motivated the participants by telling her own story; she too had faced marginality, shaken confidence and challenges – but experienced ultimately success. Whilst going through my storehouse of values I searched for different solutions to my research question. My learners now had to act by carrying out a plan, observe what occurred and form their own judgement of the success and/or failure of our plan.

5.2.4   Destiny
My learners were encouraged and supported in generating their future conception and a safe environment was created in which they could experiment and take stock. Learners began to
see that their friends and they themselves had worth. The destiny for learners in the process was to become proactive, to begin with the end in mind. I realised that my learners could all work together towards a common goal and vision, the school would be so much greater than the sum of its individual parts.

Elliot (1991:51) states that when values define the end of a practice, such ends should not be viewed as concrete objects or targets that can be perfectly realised at some future point in time. This statement became important to me, working within the framework of inclusive education, and enhanced my value of Ubuntu, which had given meaning to my personal and professional life. These values acted as my criteria and standards of judgement (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010:93).

I realised that my learners did not require “repairing or renovating,” but merely to be allowed to cultivate the amazing capabilities and internal resources to facilitate their growth and ability to prosper. McNiff and Whitehead (2010:60) state that good management often means managing to stay out of the way and let things evolve. Reid (1978:112) is of the opinion that teachers not only monopolise classroom talk, but also control it in ways that others in the school would regard as rude and unacceptable. They typically ask questions to which they already have the answers and check up on and interrogate learners almost constantly. They consistently state and impose on their learners their definitions of order, discipline, knowledge and ability. However, I decided that my practice should different; I wanted to provide my students with opportunities to engage others in dialogue or to stand in dialogue with them.

5.9 METHODOLOGY TO DEPICT MY LEARNERS’ LEARNING RELATIONSHIPS

The research methods that I have outlined are linked at many levels. Initially, I thought that the simplest way to portray this was in the form of a table. By showing the various layers of data gathering, I thought that I could explain the different data gathering tools I used for the research on my learners. However, the linear arrangement of my research did not illustrate the multiple levels of connectedness between my learners’ learning relationships.

Figure 5.3: Task-based instruments
5.10 TESTING MY CLAIMS

Action research is practice-based, and practice is understood as action and research (McNiff & Whitehead, 2009:17). This however, differs from the stance of traditional research, which is normally conducted from an outsider perspective (Briggs & Coleman, 2007:62). Action research, on the other hand, puts practitioners in control of their own practices. This allows for the promotion of personal and professional development as well as the development of the body knowledge on which practitioners action is built (Robertson, 2008:57). Action research consequently combines the concept of taking purposeful action with educational intent, and testing the validity of the claims we make about the process (McNiff & Whitehead, 2009:18).

The first step in action research is reflection on the values one holds in life. I now want to discuss the links between my research methods and the core values that I articulated in Chapter Two. I want to show how this has enabled me to generate evidence from my data to test its validity in support of my claims to knowledge. I set this out in the following way:

- I state the values and standard of judgement;
- I provide an example of practice of the enactment of each value;
- I analyse the data excerpt in relation to my values and standard of judgement;
I explain how I have used this data as evidence to establish the validity of my claim to knowledge.

Below, I illustrate this procedure with reference to the value of inclusivity.

5.10.1 Inclusivity as a value and standard of judgement

I am asking do I allow all learners in my class to participate fully irrespective of their socio-economic background (Journal Entry, 11 February 2009).

An example of the acting out of this value which I hold very dear as a teacher, in my classroom situation, was finding appropriate forms of voice for my learners so that they could become co-researchers and co-knowledge creators in my research. I enclose clips (see Appendices Durban tour) to offer the readers a glimpse of my embodied claims to know what the creation of a participatory and inclusive environment entail (Hartog, 2004). One example of taped and transcribed conversations between my learners and the tour guide, in Chapter Two, in which they discussed the best way possible to get to the bottom of the mountain-practice of discussing learners, shows participation by and inclusion of all learners that was not evident prior deciding to live out my values. Artwork was another method I used to facilitate pupil voice, as illustrated by the example where a pupil drew the river flow of his life (Chapter Two). In his picture the pupil depicted how the combination of good and not-so-good experiences had hampered his participation in class activities. Being able to talk collaboratively about it gave him a sense of belonging. Inclusivity is a value that expresses the common threads of my archaeological digging into myself.

5.10.2 Do I act in ways that demonstrate participation and inclusivity?

(5 September 2003 Journal Entry, original in data)

My action research extends beyond my classroom practice where my research question was formulated. Data gained from my study resulted in a broad spectrum of applications. Therefore, since I am creating generalised knowledge I need to recognise the necessity of a standardised system of ethics.

I now want to explain the methodological process through which I moved from data gathering in my classroom to generating evidence to test the validity of my research claims. This
process involves generating evidence to support my claims and then testing my claims and theories at various levels:

- Personal or self;
- Social;
- Institutional;
- Process;
- Democratic;
- Catalytic.

Taking the example quoted above of allowing learners to participate in collaborative discussion, I will describe and explain how I generated evidence from it. I saw art as a celebration of learners’ talent and used it as a basis to elicit information. In this activity I was what McNiff and Whitehead (2009b:32) term the “actor-agent”, taking action to address a problematic social situation and asking questions of the kind. My choice was influenced by my value of participation, because it offered an alternative form of expressing opinions and reflection that might have been difficult for the learners to express in writing.

The value of inclusivity for any person, irrespective of his/her ability and/or disability, generated new knowledge about how children who were socially excluded from participation understood the term inclusive. Respect was the value that influenced my actions and my selection of the learners’ artwork. I chose this specific data (learner absailing) to justify and test my provisional claim that I was realising the value of respect for the capabilities and uniqueness of the individual in my practice. Inclusivity and respect became part of the living standards by which I wanted to have my work judged. In judging my work, I asked whether this data as above demonstrated inclusivity and respect for the individual in my practice. My actions support my claim that I began to respect and include learners who were previously excluded; I gave them an opportunity for personal development as well as building relationships within my practice to express their own thinking.

5.11 VALIDATION PROCEDURES
5.11.1 **Personal validation**

I tested my claims first at a personal level and in three ways, as indicated by McNiff and Whitehead (2009:194):

- I argued my conviction about the importance of inclusion and respect for the capabilities of the learners who participated in my research throughout this thesis;
- I demonstrated in journal extracts how I critically reflected on these commitments, examples of which exist in the self-questioning that I have already referred to in this thesis, such as when I asked,
  - “Can I act for my learners?”
  - “Do I act in ways that demonstrate freedom?”
  - “Do I show that my values are alive in my research?”
  - “Have I taken the best steps morally and ethically to improve the quality of my learners who have been excluded learning experiences in my research?”
- I demonstrated confidence in my values and convictions by acting upon them and by opening them to public critique.

Part of the practical process of validating my research was open-ended critique to avoid suspicion that began in the reflective discussions between the learners who participated in my research and myself. During the course of my research, this form of critique developed into collaborative discussions between different stakeholders and ensured that I remained reflexive about my action research process.

Readily available are many prerequisites to the arts-based research approach (DeLande, Mitchell & Stuart, 2007:230) namely:

- Drawing prompts children to focus on traumatic experiences of, or exposure to, violence, and to talk about this.
- Drawings allow a participatory and child-centred assessment of the effects of violence in children’s lives.
- Through viewing these drawings, researchers are afforded some insight into the children’s points of view.
Table 5.4 below is an example of how I developed resilience in my values and beliefs by acting upon them and asking others to comment on what I had done. Rather than asking, “Do you agree that these data are evidence of my values of respect and inclusivity in action?” I gave a teacher, an art therapist and an educational psychologist the transcribed conversations and invited their written comments. On the next page numbered Table 5.4, follows a discussion in which Pupil Bee had drew her feelings about her river of life. My learners had to write on what they drew, to assist in the understanding of the meaning and intention behind their drawings.

**Picture 5.2: Learner Bee’s drawing about her feelings of exclusion in her river of life**

![Learner Bee’s drawing about her feelings of exclusion in her river of life]

**TABLE 5.4 Validation Procedures**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actual words in the discussion</th>
<th>My comments</th>
<th>Triangulation comments – other professionals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I: Would you like to take us</td>
<td>Learner’s hand moves over the</td>
<td>Learner responded to the question in any way he/she felt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>through your river of life.</td>
<td>drawing.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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187
**BEE:** My heart was very sore when I got the instruction for this activity. I was sitting under the tree and cried so much. However, after teacher came to hug me I felt much better.

**I:** Take me through your drawing.

**BEE:** My parents were very happy once, they at the top of the drawing they then got divorced; now it is only my two brothers and I staying with my mother. We go without many things lately and even less friends because of the fighting between my parents.

**I:** Why these stones and sticks in you drawing?

**BEE:** The stones and sticks show the hurt I feel when other kids make fun at me when my father comes to our home to fight with my mother and us.

**Feelings are matched by colour. Parents are drawn in yellow when they got married; brothers and she are drawn in red.**

**Accepting the feeling of the learner and understands how the child feels. Good to talk with the learners as I noticed you do instead of at them.**

5.11.2 **Social validation**

The design above also offers a form of social validation; this is what Habermas (1976) calls inter-subjective agreement. Social validation in my research entails opening my research up to a wider group to review and give input. I have been collecting so much data since my research started in 2006; my two critical friends helped me provide perspective and distance from previously taken-for-granted assumptions. We met at least monthly. They acted as both encouraging friends and as critics familiar with my research. A validation group of five people from an educational background listened to my work at various stages and commented on its value and the acceptability of my claims. We were not engaging in group thinking but in dialogical interaction with a view to reaching an agreement. This group met five/six times yearly during the course of my research. Work colleagues also acted as critics and evaluators of my research.
Habermas is of the opinion that social validation is a process of rigorous assessment, where there are clear procedures and criteria to guide one’s judgement (McNiff & Whitehead, 2009a:195). He recognises four criteria, namely:

- **Comprehensibility** – Does my claim make sense to the reader; is it comprehensible?
- **Truthfulness** – Am I telling the truth? Do I provide firm evidence base against which to test the validity of my claim?
- **Authenticity** – Do I show in my research that I have committed to living as fully as possible the values I advocate?
- **Appropriateness** – Do I show that I understand my learners’ historical, social and/or cultural background?

I now want to communicate how I developed a living theory of learning to teach for social justice, in relation to learners who were previously socially excluded. As part of my validation process, eight Master’s Degree student teachers from the University of Oldenburg (Germany) completed the questionnaire below. The questionnaire (sample below) was completed following a presentation of my research evidence in support of my claim to have developed a new living theory of teaching for inclusive education in South Africa for learners who were previously excluded from participation.

Dear M,

Thanks for the opportunity to speak about my work at the University of Oldenburg (Germany on 5th November 2009). I am interested in your critical comments on the following questions in order to clarify whether my work is of value to others:

- Was anything in the content new to you?
- What did I omit that you think that I should have spoken about?
- Can you envisage yourself within this classroom environment, what will you do differently?
What good practices, in similar lines, have you personally used?

Do you think that the approach that I used in my work is relevant for classroom-based teachers, for learning support teachers or for student teachers and why?

Your input is highly appreciated because you have valuable information that can assist in my understanding of inclusive education and the implementation thereof.

Thanks, Didi

(Complete sample in Appendix 6)

The question “Did you learn anything new?” was posed to establish if the new knowledge I claimed was in fact new to those in a different experiential than that experienced by my learners. Everybody answered “yes” and went on to describe the new knowledge for them (see Appendix 6). To the question, “Does the new knowledge you gained help you understand learners learning a bit better?” One student responded: “I know role-playing is an effective teaching method, however, I did not think it could be used to develop leadership skills in learners” (20 May 2010).

5.11.3 Institutional/Academic validation

I presented my work at certain gatherings at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University and at Oldenburg in Germany to staff and students. Universities are still seen as the highest body for what counts as valid, or true, knowledge. By submitting this thesis, I am seeking the legitimation of my research by the academy. The criteria by which it will be judged include both the criteria of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University for a doctoral thesis and the criteria specific to my research in which I am claiming to have developed a living theory of practice.

The criteria of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University for a doctoral thesis include an original claim to knowledge. However, the forms of academic validation have changed significantly with the introduction and legitimation of procedures that enable practitioners to identify their own criteria and standards of judgement, as well as through the legitimation of multimedia forms of evidence (McNiff & Whitehead, 2009a:196). Hence, I outlined the
criteria on which I base my claim to have developed a living theory of practice in practical terms in Section 1 and in terms of my ontological commitments and embodied values in this chapter. In the continuing sections of this thesis, I show that I have tested my data against these values, which I identify as my living standards of judgement, with the intention of generating evidence to support and test my claim to knowledge.

5.11.4 Process validation

Process validation brings about the generation of new knowledge. I reflected on how my research methodology and adaptations I used to fit the realities of my classroom setting and foster as well as capture the flow of action.

My learners were regularly tested for their ability to conform to prescriptive expectations of mainstream teaching; those who did not match imposed criteria were then excluded. I searched for ways so that my learners could co-creatively recognise and inspire to “bring out all the talents of a diverse, mutually supportive and explorative community, not just a select few Icarus-like ‘high fliers’”. This entailed an invitation to learners by learners to participate in and feel that they could contribute to deeper enquiry. This enquiry was not boastful but honestly and challengingly reflected on the accomplishments and limitations of current understanding, and the opportunities that arise from these. There was both an acknowledgement of the status quo and a readiness to question it, which enabled learners to feel that they could contribute both individually and collectively to the continual evolutionary transformation of their understanding relationships with others around them. Anderson, Herr and Nihlen (2007) state that the researcher is asked to grow and change while also asking the same of the local site, which is the classroom environment.

5.11.5 Democratic validation

Democratic validation asks to what extent the various stakeholders’ points of view are taken into consideration in the research. I did this through collaboration by involving my learners, educators and experts on educating learners in my research process. Thus, I have collected multiple perspectives and took these into account when deciding on the best possible way for my learners to learn.
I selected my classroom learners as the participants to my research question because they could provide me with answers to questions pertaining to my own teaching and learning. The learner was not branded as an object or a case (and was not an activated and unwilling deliverer of data, singled out and classified for my (professional or academic endeavour). However, my data-gathering plan needed further adaptation to be effective and manageable. This data collection also leads to interventionist research in “my classroom” or in “my school” in order to change and improve the current situation. Consequently, the transformation will improve conditions for teaching or helping my learners through collaboration.

5.11.6 Catalytic validation

Catalytic validation relates to the depth of the process of my own as well as my learners’ learning. Both my learners and I engaged in owning our action research and learning from each other. Through this validation process I had to consider whether my new learning strategies would afford me the opportunity to reach my research objectives, namely to teach for inclusion in a participatory way so that my learners could participate in their learning.

I am consciously aware that I must display integrity at all times in the pursuit of my educational goals and values. I at all times asked others for their opinions, because I was curious of their interpretations of my action situation. Reminding myself that I must be objective and honest at all times about my reasons for action lead me to new learning about my teaching and myself. I remained open-minded towards the views of other and withheld my opinion at times to show them respect and that I valued their points of view, their thoughts and actions.

5.12 CONCLUSION

This chapter presented a detailed report on how I went about collecting data on my learners’ learning and lack of participation. This chapter was a challenging one to write, because it required me to look at my work very critically while at the same time being aware that it was in neither my own nor my learners’ interests to remain within the status quo for too long. The data that I collected did not only confirm what I already knew, but challenged me to re-examine my previous assumptions, and allowed me to take decisions based on a more
complex understanding of the needs of my learners and their learning. I was fully aware that I
could only lead my learners thus far and that they would have to go back to their respective
homes where their *status quo* remained and still impedes their learning.
I do not have a picture drawn by me at a very young age, thus I am including one (drawn by my daughter, Cara Geduld, age 4 years) to represent how a child at a young age might view and represent the world.

I remember seeing an image of a girl in an oval-shaped mirror hanging on a wall. But I am looking into the mirror. Why am I not seeing my reflection? The girl looking back at me is not me. I look nothing like her. Her eyes are skew, her mouth is skew, and her whole face is distorted. How can anyone like having a face like that? She is bald; aren’t girls supposed to have braids? Does anybody know her? Does anybody even like her? Who wants to play with her? Well, do not ask me – I am definitely not playing with her.

Krall recommends a five-movement strategy of personal historical research, the first step being “venturing”, in terms of which thick descriptions of past educational experiences that ground them in their own experiences are recorded (Renner, 2001:1). I could not record others’ experiences if I did not look at my own personal community and the source of most of
my personal satisfaction: my family home. In exploring my childhood, I gained a richer understanding of myself and developed greater insights, knowledge and wisdom.

Her name was Deidre Chanté Stevens, the second youngest daughter of Freda and William Stevens, one of eight children (four girls and four boys). At the age of three, she suffered two strokes because of meningitis, leaving her white face distorted and her body paralysed on the right hand side. Her beautiful curly brown hair was shaved off to make it easy for a drip to be administered.

Suffering from a serious illness as a small child introduced me to both my own vulnerability and that of others. I can remember very clearly what it felt like staying in a hospital bed for three months; not any kind of hospital bed; a bed in the then Apartheid South Africa when resources were not divided equally amongst its people; I remember unskilled staff with no compassion for the needs of their patients. I feared darkness and listened to the cries for comfort of other kids for comfort, but nobody ever came. I was acutely aware that each one had to cope with his/her fears and loneliness alone. I believe that this experience awoke in me at a very early age a desire to make things better. I have clung on to this hopeful belief that however difficult things may feel, we always have the potential to change the situation.

Patanjali wrote the following centuries ago, long before the birth of Christ:

*When you are inspired by some great Purpose, some extraordinary project,*  
*All your thoughts break their bonds;*  
*Your mind transcends limitations,*  
*Your consciousness expands in every direction,*  
*And you find yourself in a new, great And wonderful world.*  
*Dormant forces, faculties and talents*  
*Become alive, and you discover yourself To be a greater person by far Than you ever dreamed Yourself to be*  

*(Dyer, 1998)*
6.1 MY PROFESSIONAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

My memories helped me in nurturing dreams for a better future for my learners and myself. I have hope in my heart, because I know there are people within my school community faced with adversity yet with the driving force to make a difference in the lives of their learners; people who add honey to the lives of their learners one teaspoon at a time. From my own personal experience, I know that I feel most purposeful and fulfilled when I am teaching. Conversely, I want to create a school-based professional learning community, which has been cited as a strategy useful in sustaining meaningful school improvement (Dufour & Eaker, 1998).

Compiling my autobiography has highlighted the many paths I travelled in finding my true self. Evans (1995) reflects on Lomax in terms of the importance of the self within research teacher and statements: A fundamental part of Lomax’s view of action research is that the self is the focus of the enquiry. The ultimate question is: What have I learned and changed about myself from this study? This has contributed towards the validity of my research; I have captured the many voices that have contributed to creating the person that I have become. This is not only a narrative account of events, but also a true connection to try to gain a greater understanding of my own history and practice. My human mistakes, my errors in judgement and my lack of wisdom, are the hardest to accept here where I am deeply attracted to the outcomes. One of the many benefits of telling my story is that I have learnt more about myself. The very process required considering what I believe, what matters most and what the sum of my life experiences has taught me. *Narrative is the way we remember the past, turn life into language and disclose to others and ourselves the truth of our experiences* (Ellis, 2004:126).

However, no journey is ever entirely smooth. I too experienced that my journey had its vicissitudes, at times it took more than enough to just get up, dust myself off and move on again. I experienced many challenges in my hidden exclusive self, as discussed in this section.
My story and learning

I value stories; that is why I am telling mine; the stories I choose to tell about myself let the world know who I am, because who I am is not what I do, but how I live – that is what shapes the world. My story talks of a mother who cultivated the ability within her children to be a friend to the self, based on living with compassion and loving kindness towards others:

Ubuntu ungamntu ngabanye abantu.
People are people through other people.

IsiXhosa proverb

My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up in yours. We belong in a bundle of life. I am a human, because I belong. A person with Ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good; for he/she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are.

Desmond Tutu explaining Ubuntu in No Future Without Forgiveness (1999)

I have just written my story humbled, liberated and amazed me. This study captured my story and journey and forced me to pay attention to how I spend my time on earth. My stories told were the best resources I knew on how to be the best leader of my life and live congruently with my values. I realised through documenting my life story that I have built up two “careers” at the same time: one of caring for my visually challenged son and high academic achieving daughter and one of caring for socially excluded learners in my classroom and later for the entire school when I assumed the position as acting principal. Biographical research results published by Händle (1996,1998) seem to indicate that intensive storytelling and communicating on life histories and professional development work in favour of empowering female teachers.
6.1.1 My parents

Picture 6.2: William and Freda Stevens, my parents

Although some photographs in this thesis may lack the degree of clarity/quality one might expect from modern technology, I believe their inclusion is justified in that they help to provide the reader with a fuller picture of the context of the study and of significant role-players.

Whenever my father would engage with others about me, he would inform them how sick I had been as a child. He took it upon himself to be my protector. He was physically challenged, but never skipped a day’s work to provide for the needs of his eight children and wife. This experience profoundly affected him; the way he lived his life and the values he held, was based on his own intuition rather than on that of the pack. Many days I could see clear signs of discomfort and pain on his face but it did not distract him from his responsibility. Worry was not part of his life experiences. My father was a good man. He loved reading; he read all of the time and took so much joy in reciting beautiful poems to us. My father taught us much about character, because that is what kept him going in tough, challenging times. He inculcated in us the belief that, just because something was a struggle, it did not mean that you could not do it. To him, it simply meant that you had to find a different way of doing it; your full potential will emerge when you are inspired by the extraordinary. A man I so loved taught inclusivity in all its forms to me: my father.
My father taught my younger sister and me the value of communication when he brought home a toy telephone set. These phones allowed two people to talk to each other within a distance of 50 meters. It was battery operated, and the sound quality was very good. My father told us: *This is your time to shine, daughters of mine. Communicate well and know that the hopper (a baby locust) cannot quite fly, but they can jump up to two hundred times their height, any current setbacks will enhance rather than tarnish their potential. The hopper learns to fly by riding the wind. When the wind blows and treetops rustle, the hopper’s instincts say: This is my time to jump.* At that moment in time, my sister and I seized the tide of opportunity. Where did you buy the phones? my sister and I wanted to know. “No, I didn’t buy it — I got it from the white lady’s whose house I painted today,” was my father’s reply. “I asked God for full blossoming of your talents and this is how He responded. “He told us Jabez’s (1 Chronicles 4:9-10) meant “pain, suffering, trouble” and “heartache”; unfortunately, the name suited him all too well. In those days, people took on the traits of the meaning of their names. You can only imagine what Jabez had to put up with as a youngster. The other kids surely ridiculed him. That name affected his self-esteem and put limits on his life, but the scriptures teach us that he was a more honourable man than any in his family. However, Jabez, instead of his rough upbringing, in spite of his self-image constantly being attacked, Jabez looked up to the heavens and said: *God, I’m asking that you bless me indeed.*

My name, Deidre, is Irish in origin, meaning “broken-hearted, sorrowful”, also possibly “fear” or “raging woman”; given to me by an Irish Catholic priest. Wow! Thank you Lord and Daddy for believing in me and reminding me that I am a daughter of the most High and that I should go beyond the norm and beyond my borders, freeing me from the boundaries of the meaning of my name.

I am a very happy person and believe that I was conceived within a moment of intense love shared by my parents. There is no substitute for parents; it is the parents’ influence for good or bad that primarily forms the child’s character, I believe. As an infant, I was always handled gently, fed when hungry and comforted when I was miserable; therefore, today it has assisted me in trusting others and having an unshakable liking for human beings. It was love for my parents that made me adopt their best traits and learned the qualities they urged upon me.
I remember my mother always telling me that she had been a teacher when she was a young girl; *But why did you stop?* I always wanted to know. *I had to take care of eight children,* she replied. While her formal educational pedigree was unremarkable; her powers of reason were not. My mother taught us to set high standards for ourselves. One of the greatest lessons my mother ever taught me was that of endurance. She always said if we did not endure, we would not succeed. To endure is the best we can do at certain times, under certain circumstances. Black mothers in South Africa have a history of endurance; had they failed I would not be studying at a university today; had they failed to persevere through difficult times, we would never have been able to choose our field of study today. My mother was passionate about the education of her children. She always reminded us that our calling was deep within us and had a hold on us.

Something in my mother’s heart refused to give up, no matter how vicious the challenge. I recall waking up late one night with a terrible headache; my body was shaking with fever. I thought that the meningitis had returned; my head felt as if it was about to burst, and I thought death would follow soon. I communicated my fears to her, and she said:

*You, Deidre, are my hope for the future. Through you, I will accomplish the things I could not do, and you will fulfil the dreams that slipped through my fingers. You will carry my heart into days I will never live and places I will never go. You will not die, my child, not now.*

Today, I can truly say that my mother was a teacher because I cannot remember a time that I did not learn something from her; she gave me the freedom to roam and explore. My mother had mammoth strength and a good heart. She had an inspirational attitude that was not judgemental or unappreciative.

My mother’s dream was of being educated and teaching others; however, while she could not pursue this dream, she could not relinquish it. Her children were the vehicles through which she accomplished it. She scrimped, saved and sacrificed for the sake of her children’s education. Even after death, her breathing message continually proclaimed, “You can do it! Don’t you dare give up on that dream! It’s never too late!” I am fulfilling the dreams my mother cherished for herself, but never brought to fruition. Everything about my mother
mattered; no trial, test or triumph was merely personal; it was generational, with eternal consequences.

Today, I vividly remember a gospel song my mother always sang:

You said to lean in your arm
   And I am leaning
You said to trust in your love
   And I am trusting
You said to call on your name
   And I am calling
I'm stepping out on your word.

6.1.2 My schooling

I remember my first day of school: 20 January 1978, and rows of exciting children sharing their Christmas and holiday experiences waiting to be dispatched to their new teachers. I peeped through our lounge window; longing to be, with every fibre of my being, where they were at that moment, wondering if my teacher would ever come to fetch me. I lacked the vocabulary to articulate my desire to also belong to a group. I detested being excluded. If only someone could acknowledge my desperate need to be included. That someone turned out to be my mother who took action. In terms of the Schools Act at the time, I was supposed to be six years old when I started my first school year. However, I would turn six only by the end of January. My mother, who knew the Grade 1 class teacher, negotiated with her to allow me into her class since she felt that I should not be excluded from education for a full year only because I fell a week short of my sixth birthday.

My mother served as the vehicle orchestrating my inclusion into a society insensitive to inclusivity. My parents commenced a process that I was to continue many years down the line.

I was requested to attend school the next day, dressed up in my new school uniform. Intellectually, I never had any problems with any of the work content. I read well, my
mathematics and problem-solving skills were above average for my age, and I was soon asked to read to the other kids in my classroom.

Academic achievement was promoted in the form of a competition created by my mother between the boy living next door to us and myself. We started school in the same year. From Grade 1 to Grade 7, we were in the same class. The assessment reports we brought home would be scrutinized by my mother; comparing each outcome reached and providing feedback to both. I think this exercise, which my mother kept up until we completed Grade 12, helped to keep us focused on our coursework.

This period coincided with a very traumatic event in my life – when I was eight years old, my mother gave birth to a stillborn boy. It was the time of Princess Diana and Prince Charles’ wedding. Our house was opposite the school fence; the children would line up in front of our front door to catch a glimpse of their televised wedding ceremony during break interval. The same happened the morning of my brother’s funeral. The funeral service took place at our home, and whilst the priest was performing the religious rites, I could hear the screams and laughter of the children playing during recess. Death was never a reality to me until then; I could see, smell and experience its finality in my whole being. The death of my brother made me acutely aware of the mortality of my parents and that my safety net would and could be disturbed. I became anxious about how would I adapt to that environment. My greatest fear became the prospect of the death of my parents. I developed a real fear of death, a deep insecurity that they would not be there when I returned from another stressful day in the classroom and would have to cope with all my personal challenges without their love and support.

My primary school years were a very distressing time for me; my teachers were completely unaware of the challenges I faced, such as hearing and visual problems. I remember that I had a very low self-esteem. I looked forward to the end of the school day and the comfort of my home environment. The name-calling and the mocking by my so-called friends left me with very little resilience. However, nobody knew how deeply this all affected me, because I managed to hide my pain behind laughter and projected an exuberant personality. Today, I know that my behaviour was just a way of protecting myself. I felt that I was by my very nature flawed; the efforts to control my soul’s longing to live fully translated into efforts to control, reshape, improve and change myself.
In what way did this period affect and/or change my approach to learning? I believe it had a reflective effect on my confidence and the way in which I presented myself to the outside world. I had felt special and excited about starting school, but I quickly realised that school was very different from what I had expected. I soon lost my eagerness to go to school.

A poem I read by Hafiz, in which he talks about another way of learning, a way based on the assumptions that to grow is to reveal one’s own innate beauty, a beauty best brought forward by tender encouragement, changed my course of life after primary schooling. Inclusivity and leadership to me was nothing more than my quest for my personal truth – the truth about what I had experienced in the past and what I can evolve into in my future.

**It Felt Love**

*How*

*Did the rose*

*Even open its heart*

*And give to this world*

*All its Beauty?*

*It felt the encouragement of light*

*Against its*

*Being,*

*Otherwise,*

*We all remain*

*Too*

*Frightened*

My high school teachers were my greatest role models and played a major role in my decision to become a teacher; they were passionate, dynamic and energetic. I transferred my inspiration to a rudimentary home tutoring system; my younger sister became my learner, whilst I emulated my teachers in teaching her. I transferred the inspiration I felt by becoming her “class teacher”. My self-created classroom under our willow tree in the backyard consisted of paraffin tins, which served as my learner’s chair; while a cork slate board served as a book to write in as I feverishly drilled into my learner the basic mathematics, reading and writing. Bandura (1986:395) states that *people who regard themselves as highly efficacious... produce their own future, rather than simply foretell it.*
I remember that when I was in Grade 9, one prescribed book was *To Kill a Mockingbird*. My teacher told us that it told the story of a trial and the search for justice for Tom Robinson, a naive black man accused of raping a white woman. However, years later I realised that on a deeper level of understanding the book was about the raising and education of children. It was about being a role model, recognising the value of *Ubuntu*. If I wanted to be a great teacher like my teachers, I would have to be the person I wanted my learners in my replicated classroom to be. This novel instilled in me the value of having faith in my learners’ ability to understand and achieve even beyond my hopes for them.

To this day, I keep on asking myself: What did my high school teachers know that my primary teachers did not? Writing this autobiography allowed me to explore for the first time all those events all those years ago, as it helped me understand how and why I have established the epistemological views that I have. Research provided me with powerful tools necessary to prevent me from repeating the mistakes made by my primary school teachers. My writing has allowed me to account for my own life and personal and professional practices. Congruity between my inner and outer self has created trusting relationships with others.

6.1.3 Motherhood

**Picture 6.3: My family: Grandpa (Gerald), husband (Stafford), Cara (7), Aygan (9) & I**
In this section, I seek to show how I inquired into my practice as a mother whilst seeking to live according to values that I believe embody Ubuntu in ways that are generative of new possibilities. I use this picture of my family taken in 2004, the year I started my Honours Degree, to deepen my expertise in Special Educational Needs.

I got married on the 7th of May 1994, a week after South Africa’s first democratic elections were held, and my mother’s birthday. This was a very symbolic time in the history of our nation, for we as a people, nation and individuals could say, “We are free at last”. Years later I realised that freedom was a state of mind. Today I am the living result of my choices.

Aygan Ray Geduld was born on 20 October 1994, a beautiful, quiet baby boy. This is my opportunity to share the relationship a mother has with her visually challenged son. There are so many beautiful memories engraved in my mind of his smiles and burbling baby sounds. Aygan was a beacon of light shining in the stormy days of my tempestuous youth.

Prior to his first birthday celebration, I was completely unaware that he might have any visual difficulty. However, the reality of his condition hit me when my husband and I took him to watch aeroplanes landing and departing from the then HF Verwoerd Airport in Port Elizabeth. He could hear the overwhelming sounds of the jet engines, but was constantly searching for the origin of the noise. At one year and six months old, he paid his first visit to an ophthalmologist and was fitted with corrective lenses. Whilst the eye specialist confirmed our suspicion that there were huge challenges as far as his eyesight was concerned, we were completely at his mercy regarding residual vision and corrective measures. It was a challenging exercise for an eye specialist to test a child of that age, as the ultimate confirmation that the corrective measures did assist the child to see better, had to come from the child himself. Feedback from a child at that age was grossly inadequate.

In the year thereafter, we monitored Aygan closely, holding expectations that he would start enjoying television programmes and cartoons. To our amazement, we discovered that he chose to watch television without his glasses. Based on our own experience, we simply assumed that he was still adjusting to his new lenses. How much more adjustment was not needed, we thought, by a child. We had no doubt that Aygan should be made to wear his glasses regularly. In imposing this discipline on him, we accepted that the prescribed lenses
were in fact the correct ones. This resulted in constant fights with trusting Aygan, who consistently rejected the use of his glasses.

Aygan’s resistance was the best non-verbal evidence possible that the prescription had been wrong right from the beginning. Realising that the specialist to the learning process at the most vital stage in Aygan’s development had caused much harm, I decided to close that chapter and dedicate myself to become an expert in the field of learning disabilities, primarily for the benefit of my own children and Aygan in particular. My spirituality and commitment were expressed and connected me to the value of learning, Ubuntu and inclusivity. These values are as unique as my fingerprints, and are based on my own experiences.

We as a family also decided that Aygan would not be sent off to the School for the Blind in Worcester (in the Western Cape, 890 km away from home), as recommended by the specialist, but that we as a family would pull our resources together and do what we could, in the best interest of us all. We called on the Society for the Blind in Port Elizabeth for help, and they regularly visited and educated his teachers on the best teaching practices for Aygan. At school, he was not the first learner who had barriers of this nature; therefore the school culture was conducive for inclusivity. I wanted to give my son a specific experience of a mother that actively participated in his life and personal, educational and social development. I had struggled long and hard to learn the hidden rules of success in society, and I wanted to provide an easier path to those rules for my son. I also wanted Aygan to closely match, test and evolve the values that I held.

*Faith is knowledge within the heart, beyond the reach of proof.*

*Kahlil Gibran*

I promised myself that I would not stare blindly at the hole of Aygan’s visual limitations, but rather look at him as a whole.

My daughter, Cara, when she compiled her autobiography in 2008, wrote:

*My brother Aygan is still very much shy, unlike me; perhaps it is because he still thinks he is different to others. His eyesight is different to others. Like our father, he has the capacity to “take over a party” in terms of true confidence that truly comes from within. He enjoys life and that is something we have in common. He started cycling when he was two and*
swimming when he was three years old. He is also involved with music training, which he likes a lot. I believe that he will become a super achiever, regardless of any drawbacks. He gives his all during the year. My brother has recently won the Riley Trophy at our school for his dedication and commitment to his schoolwork.

Homework is a collaborative project in my family; we do what needs to be done at the same time each day with Aygan, Cara and myself present. We assist each other, give input and motivate each other. This pattern has been evident in our household over thirteen years and is based on persistence and dedication. We never verbalised the phrase “I cannot”, nor did we make excuses for our abilities and/or disabilities; our achievements matched our values. Every story in our household started with You can... you are a master, and the rest followed. Aygan wrote: I walked to the stage. My name was called. It is the 16th of November 2005, did I hear correctly; the more I walked the further the stage seemed. I could not hear or see anybody. My upper limbs were so stiff I could not move it; I had to drag my legs in order to reach the stage. I was the only person facing the crowd, including Ms Best. Do you know what, I, Aygan Ray Geduld, won the Riley Trophy in front of millions of learners, teachers and parents? No people, I am only joking, the numbers were less. That was my greatest moment.

**Picture 6.4: Aygan (10) and certificate for determination**

(Image of Aygan (10) receiving the Riley Trophy)

(The school certificate for Determination Aygan received in 2005)
Cara Bez Geduld, my daughter, has been a great joy since the second she was born. The blissful moment of her birth seems to last for eternity; it felt as if I had seen God’s face. She reminded my heart of great possibilities, of new beginnings. God’s seal of authenticity was all over her, it seemed as if the angels had patted her face and heaven was somewhere in her eyes. At that moment, Cara became centre stage, forever my little girl. Reflecting on her birth moment reaffirmed in my mind that I was needed; my protective nature was stimulated and my provisional instincts started wanting to provide in her every need as a mother.

Cara wrote in her autobiography, dated 2008:

*I can compare my life to Ratanga Junction, an amusement park, to describe my life up until now. My birth on the 19th of September 1996 was in a secured, camera monitored ticket box. Standing in line were my loving parents, supportive grandparents, spoiling aunts and uncles and the watchful eyes of my law enforcing older brother.*

**Picture 6.5: Cara (6 months) and Aygan (2)**

Next followed the first four years of my life on Disney character rides with Winnie the Pooh Bear, Mickey and Minnie Mouse, Goofy and Pluto. Cotswold Preparatory School reminds me of an old Mid-Western Runaway train; harsh without the company of your loved ones and exciting meeting new friends to hold your hand when the robbers (teachers) scold you.
Herbert Hurd Foundation Phase, the Monkey Log of my life Letters, sounds and words the starting point of my school career. All of a sudden you are thrown into a downhill pool of water where you must read books, do word sums and behave yourself.

I am including experiences and images to show that I am a living organism with interrelated parts and functions. These parts and functions complement each other, and they achieve balance in using resources, sharing space, and growing over time. Blankstein et al. (2008:61) state that the introduction of any new programme or initiative must be done with consideration of the overall context of the school system, and with attention to how that programme will fit with – and balance – with existing realities. My teaching and learning
values have been the things that I have stayed away from, in the sense of not directly confronting or questioning them in my personal life. Female teachers who are socially oriented and who are mothers seem to be better equipped and prepared than male teachers and other female teachers to handle and develop integrative practices within complex diverse classes and school environments, because of their “double socialization” as girls and young women actively involved in family life and in their careers (Handle, 1997). I agree with Handle that intensive storytelling and conversing on life histories and professional development work in favour of empowering female teachers.

### 6.1.4 Navigating my professional path

Within this section, I want to account for my own views on teaching and learning and be able to demonstrate how my practice as a teacher emerged to embody the values that I hold.

Inclusivity, the right to learning, *Ubuntu* and social justice were the core beliefs that guided and stimulated my behaviour within my classroom and the school as an organisation. However, due to continuous reflection and self-talk, I realised how great a role leadership played in determining the choices I made. My values served as blueprints for the decisions I made, the problems I solved and the conflicts I settled.

For me, this was accompanied by a considerable amount of anxiety; much of that anxiety centred on the learning relationship – the relationship I developed with my learners; the attitude I had towards them, the assumptions and expectations that characterised our every exchange, and the routine ways in which we negotiated with each other. The quality of the learning relationship is the single most influential factor in the learning experience: *Why did I not experience this with my primary school teachers? Did I not fit in with my teachers’ definition of what was required in the situation?* (My Journal Entry dated 27 February 2009).

The journey of my professional education career started in 1990, when I enrolled at the Dower Teacher Training College in Port Elizabeth, a stone’s throw away from my home. In 1994, I started teaching at my current school; here, I learned firsthand how rapidly one’s identity is reshaped by institutional demands. In 2003, I enrolled at the University of Port Elizabeth (now the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University). I commenced my studies with a B.Ed. Honours Degree in Educational Psychology, which afforded me the opportunity to
enhance my practice in the identification and screening of learners with barriers to learning. This qualification deepened my understanding of their limitations and the support I could give in assisting them in reaching their educational outcomes. I developed as a specialist in the field of inclusive education. I shared my knowledge and understandings with educators in my school and neighbouring schools. My role as a mentor to educators started, while my colleagues remained unaware of the anxiety I experienced about the exclusion of so many learners who walked through the doors of our education system.

**Picture 6.8: My teacher training graduation (1994)**

Qualifying myself as an educator afforded me the opportunity for a better future. One in which I will be able to provide a better future for my family and myself. As a non white person I did not have many career options to choose from. Teaching was one of the career opportunities for which the government of the day paid for. Coming from an impoverished home and having both parents unemployed at the time coerced me to follow this path. Today, with hindsight I choose education.

My Masters’ Degree research served as an introduction to my Doctoral studies by creating a culture of inquiry at my school through using our SMT as my sample. Prior to my studies, educators at my school operated in a culture of isolation; their concerns and limitations were never articulated. My Master’s thesis was in effect an autobiography of where our school was at the time of writing and recording my research. We (the SMT) began to have regular, concrete and precise talks about our teaching practices pertaining to inclusive education.
In order to contribute to the reader’s understanding of my thoughts at the time, I draw on the following validation letter from Prof. Doc Wolfgang Nitsch from the university in Oldenburg, Germany:

*Because of the outstanding quality and relevance of her recently finalised M.Ed. thesis, she was also invited by the Faculty to present two lectures on her research and on the methodology and design of her current D.Ed. project. Ms Deidre Geduld drafted a lengthy and reflective paper on the research methodology of her M.Ed. project on her participation in an emergent inclusive learning system in her primary school in Port Elizabeth (Eastern Cape) and she prepared and gave a very stimulating and lively presentation on her research practice in a public colloquium for faculty members, teachers and students.*

It was at this time that I first heard of self-study as a methodology that I could use to expand my personal understanding of reflective practice. This concept was also introduced by me to my colleagues to inspire and excite them in studying their own practice using self-study methodology. At the onset of my Doctoral thesis, I recognised that the success or failure of an inquiry depended on the conditions that made it possible, which in this study was to achieve effective communication among staff members about what should be done. I needed to create an arena for the expression of interpersonal needs and the development of social contexts in which these needs would be met. Clifton and Kasloff (2007) suggest the following requisites for collaboration; *the creation of collaborative teams for the purpose of ongoing support; collective inquiry that focus on the examination of innovative research-based practices; and a commitment to continuous improvement of practice through engagement in collaborative learning.*

Teaming equipped me with the tools to validate my practice my value of inclusion and leadership and guided me to ask the following questions in my journal:

- *Who am I to be in this teaming?*
- *Will I belong?*
- *Will the teams meet my personal and practical needs?*

When and if these needs were adequately satisfied, I focused on concerns for power and influence. Teaming practices (placing more than one teacher in a classroom, pairing veteran
and novice teachers) have been shown to cultivate fresh avenues for teacher collaboration. Sharing responsibility for group learning and working together enhance effectiveness (Drago-Severson, 2004:70).

- Who has power or is powerless?
- Can I join with others to gain power and influence to meet my needs?

In addition, if these were successfully discussed, they gave way to freedom in active engagement in which accommodating and open-minded relationships enable individuals to realise their own identity and the group to be effective in relation to its task.

- Who are we together in this group space?
- How do our needs and abilities complement each other?
- How effective are we?

The external examinations written by all Grades 1 to 6 learners in the District, gave me the opportunity to make a graphical presentation of results to measure my learners’ performance at our school. This presentation (20 February 2010), was an assessment of where the school was and this process and the results thereof initiated the **Teaming Process** at my school. This venture was part of a staff development exercise to formulate our Personal Growth Plans for the year. The recording graph of the examinations provided us with data to plan for future teaching. This research highlighted the idea of building capacity in the interest of teachers, students, learners and the school at large. I realised that this initiation process would present many challenges and would require time and preparation. Teachers, students and learners were requested to do things that were unknown, unfamiliar and maybe uncomfortable to them.

Based on regular classroom visits, we had the opportunity to observe our colleagues teaching, to broaden our understanding and to make constructive suggestions on the teaching and learning of learners experiencing barriers to learning. Schön (1987) proposes that teaming contributes to a culture of adult learning through challenging teachers to examine their assumptions and practice. This process helped tremendously in establishing our teaching identity. As a team, we moved from nurturing, to energising to relaxing (Randall &
Southgate, 1980). As team member, researcher and leader, I established good rapport with the team members to help them feel free, comfortable and able to contribute, while at the same time providing a sense of challenge and stimulation. This was intensely challenging when some team members brought experiences of disempowerment. However, using teaming for unfreezing assumptions the first of Lewin’s change transition stages, where people are taken from a state of resisting change to being ready and willing to make the first step, afforded the required space for transformation.

Self-talk allowed us to share our expertise with our colleagues by teaching each other what we had learned and knew about the craft of our profession. Teaming can be a developmental mechanism, because it cultivates an individual’s skills for dialogue and discussion, builds leadership and contributes to school growth (Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross & Smith, 1994). The purpose of the group was expressed in questions such as: “Will this group meet my needs and will I be able to contribute?” and “Will we be free to follow our own purposes?” This required a sufficiently clear framing of the inquiry task to enable members to grasp the purpose of the team, while being sufficiently open so that they could make it their own. LaBoskey (2004) holds the opinion that when teachers initiate and engage in this type of focused inquiry with the aim of the transformation of the self and subsequent student and institutional improvement, the research undertaken could be considered as institutional self-study.

This brought me to my next concern: What is in this research project for the learners, the students and teachers? These four years has been a period of steep growth for me and all my participants. This activity brought new knowledge, skills and a new sense of commitment to teachers to want to make a difference in the lives of their learners. Through looking at our different lesson plans for inclusive education teachers’ abilities to work with these learners were enhanced through our collective discussions and the opportunities we received in collaboration with our peers, students from our local university and guidance from other experts in the field of inclusivity (see Appendix 5). As teachers, we developed a hands-on approach from people with experience of accommodating all our learners within their classrooms; our selves.

During this period, I learned the value of teamwork. I really enjoyed participating in our discussions, because it allowed me to become very future orientated. My studying period was
a very positive and fruitful time in my career, because I developed greatly and incorporated this into both my personal and work lives. I also experienced reduced stress at home, since I became better equipped to assist my visually impaired son to reach his full potential without being excluded from participating.

Although the meaning we make of events in our lives can be limited by our current range of understanding (Wheatley, 1994), we still can learn from carefully considering and reflecting on our experiences. As a reflective practitioner (Schön, 1983), suggests that I think about what I am doing (reflection in action), and what I have done (reflection on action). Carr, Fauske and Rushton (2008:4) advocate that when we have diverse avenues, tools, processes and experiences to help contextualise and re-examine how we interpret what is happening around us, our understanding of our motives, intentions and actions becomes more solid, grounded and honest and therefore creates within us the realisation that we can.

The development of my autobiography assisted me in shifting from playing a passive role in my own assessment and evaluation in which I was pressed by the external issues of being in a position – to an active role, in which I engaged in more multifarious thinking of what I have learned. Action researchers (Fitchman-Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2008:4) seek out change and reflect on their practices by posing questions or “wonderings”, collecting data to gain insight into their wonderings. Managers, it is argued, learn on their feet in the day-to-day enactment of their managerial roles (Mintzberg, 1973) and by visiting their memories, I would add, to let their imagination fly.

6.1.5 My professional leadership roles

*My visit to Germany made me become more aware of my personal power and voice. I heard not a foreign distant voice echoing in my head, but my own (Journal Entry, 3 January 2010).*

Nothing within a school has more impact upon learners in terms of skills development, self-confidence or classroom behaviour than the personal and professional growth of their teachers (Barth, 1981:145). My journey started the minute I walked into my first official classroom. I immediately realised that what one HAS learnt at Teacher Training colleges, did not fully prepare one for the reality of one’s classroom. I had to make so many decisions, ranging from how to accommodate a hyperactive learner in my class who continuously disturbed the other
learners, identifying my learners’ academic, social and emotional needs, grading papers, attending staff meetings, assisting with fundraising – and I had to attend to them all simultaneously whilst teaching. In this hurried and pressurised space, my emphasis was on others – the learners, their parents, colleagues and the Department of Education and its expectations. I never made time for self-reflection and engagement.

Lamb (cited in Battersby & Gordon, 2006:16) comments: “Training to become a teacher is not so much an apprenticeship as a journey of personal development, in which skills such as classroom management develop alongside an emerging understanding of the teaching and learning process”. The process of teaching is a practical one; through telling my story I want to reinforce the fact that I will return and keep on returning to a teaching institution because of my desire to be a part of the education of my learners. I want to empower my colleagues by entrusting them with authority and responsibility by emphasising teamwork.

In 1994, I started teaching. It was also the year in which signs of Vitiligo (a pigmentation disorder in which melanocytes (the cells that make pigment) in the skin are destroyed) became more visible on my hands. I suffered varying degrees of emotional stress and depression. The spreading of this condition to visible parts of my body was very traumatic. I did not want to socialise and, as a result, became very withdrawn. I then embarked on a number of short courses to convince myself that my hands had much value in them and that the skin disorder does not define me as a person. Flower arranging was my initiation into rediscovering my purpose and my authentic self. Authentic is used here to describe true and honest congruency between self and action (Carr, Fauske & Rushton, 2008:38). I needed to create a framework for acknowledging myself and for reflecting inward as to the very nature of whom and what I was. I compelled myself to undertake tasks that coerced me to look at my hands and express gratitude over them. The words of Theodore Roethke kept ringing in my ears: “In a dark time, the eyes begin to see”. I opened my heart by acknowledging the magnificent power that lay within my hands. Channelled by my value of leadership I wanted to create many leaders at all levels of my school organisation.

Rumi emphasises: Let yourself be silently drawn by the stronger pull of what you really love. I again recouped the wisdom of guidance from the creatures of nature. Geese, I reminisced, have an internal capacity to follow coastlines and the magnetic resonance of the earth to tell them where to go, whilst bats, whales and dolphins could echo-locate to find their direction;
similarly, I could begin to trust my own inner resources to guide me through the rivers of my own stories. Butler (2005) emphasises that in order for me to give an account of myself in the process of becoming, I have to lose or reshape what I am in order to become something different.

I asked myself whether as principal of my school would be the main carrier and mirror embodiment of the managerialism that is crucial to the transformation of the organisational regimes of schools in South Africa. Leaders in South Africa have often derived power through coercion based on fear or through exploitive rewards (Covey, 1990). I realised that there was a lot more to leadership than simply getting the job done. Would I exercise leadership through being successful? Would I do it through empowering others?

Research proposes that enhancing the effectiveness of professional development models depends on factors such as structure, process and content. The structural characteristics of schools should include their responsibility regarding the formulation and implementation of policy and should incorporate organisational forms such as study groups, teacher networks, extended periods, ongoing support, and the collaborative participation of groups of teachers in similar settings (Crowther & Cannon, 2002). However, I now know that I am no longer the person who raised these questions; I am already in a changing paradox, evolving into someone new. I have lost the perspective of the person who asked the questions as a form of resistance; because I have opened myself up to new discoveries, new possibilities, new perspectives and, most importantly, to a new me.

As the Integrated Quality Management coordinator at my school, I annually drew up a needs analysis based on individual teachers’ growth plans; this made me realise that the teachers at my school needed to facilitate the removal of barriers for learners to have a meaningful opportunity to succeed. This became the focus of my Master’s thesis: “... How does the SMT describe the implementation of inclusive education in their school?” Teachers at my school required development. When you develop people, you are helping them to improve as individuals; when you help someone to cultivate discipline or a positive attitude, that is development. Bush and Middlewood (2005:4) reiterate that leadership:

- involves a process of influence,
- should be grounded in firm personal and professional values,
involves developing and articulating a vision for the school.

In South Africa, key milestones that contribute to the professional development of teachers who teach LSEN necessitate major curriculum changes; changes in educational provision, particularly the movement for greater inclusive practice; and changes are in teacher education (Engelbrecht & Green, 2007:142). Changes in these milestones have resulted in major developments that influenced teachers’ professional roles and responsibilities. As leader of the school, my focus should be on the performance of my staff whose skills and motivation are critical to the achievement of the school’s organisational objectives. I therefore had to find a way of merging the needs of both individual learners and the staff. Foskett and Lumby (2003:82) argue that providing staff with opportunities to develop is the final step that closes the circle of managing performance.

Bolam (2002:103) augments that professional development is crucial to the improvement of organisational performance and delineates it as:

- an ongoing process of education, training, learning and support activities;
- taking place in other external or work-based settings;
- proactively engaged in by teachers, head-teachers and other school leaders;
- aimed primarily at promoting learning and development of their professional knowledge,
- skills and values;
- helping them decide on and implement value changes in their teaching and leadership behaviour;
- so that they can educate their learners more effectively;
- thus achieving an agreed balance between individual, school and national needs.

My ultimate challenge as the head of my school is to generate optimum performance from all staff. Professional development is a requirement of educational practice; yet teachers are challenged to find opportunities to engage in learning that increases their impact on their students’ learning, while augmenting continuous growth. Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson and Hann (2002:59) see empowerment as central to the learning organisation. Principals who want to see their school develop into a learning organisation must empower their teachers in meaningful ways. Muijs and Harris (2003) emphasise that the quality of leadership matters in
influencing the motivation of teachers. Empowerment assists educators in better managing the complexities of work and life to claim ownership of their individual change. Bush and Middlewood (2005:28) reiterate that where there are many leaders in an organisation, there are multiple sources of innovation and greater potential for enhanced individual and team performance, leading to school improvement. Supporting, including, believing in and developing people are the best ways of securing significant and sustainable improvement in performance.

School leadership for me is about heart – commitment and profound caring. It encapsulates the values on which my teaching is built. To me, it is important to witness another person’s growth, because it confirms that my efforts to support another human being bring some difference in his/her sense of self and his/her ability to influence the lives of the marginalised learners they teach. Barth (1990:49) affirms that nothing within a school has more impact on learners in terms of skills development, self-confidence or classroom behaviour than the personal and professional growth of teachers. I want my work in school leadership and teacher development on behalf of my marginalised, socially excluded learners to assist me in paying attention; so that I will be better able to learn what others think and how they tend to make sense of their learning and growing experiences.

Action research reflection awarded me the opportunity to understand and comprehend the statement of Muijs and Harris (2003:439) to the effect that there are four discernable and discrete dimensions of a teacher, namely:

- the translation of the principles of school improvement into the practices of the individual classroom;
- focusing upon participative leadership where all teachers feel part of the change or development and have a sense of ownership;
- teacher leaders may assist other teachers to cohere around a particular development (the mediating role);
- teacher leaders are important sources of expertise and information (forging close relationships with individual teachers through which mutual learning takes place).

Classroom-based teaching was instrumental in preparing me for my role in school leadership and management. The skills I acquired within mainstream education were demonstrated
throughout my professional career. Early on in my teaching career I became acutely aware of the value of relationships in teamwork. I believed the best of people and had faith in their abilities.

6.2 ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

The school at which I am teaching, opened its doors in 1975. Not once in the history of this school was it ever governed by a female principal, nor did a female ever serve as the deputy principal of this school. Within Nelson Mandela Bay, women in management positions are still in the minority, despite the many changes that have taken place in education in South Africa in recent years. I interviewed a small number of females in managerial positions to identify the pressures in their own backgrounds and careers. These women were interviewed at the various schools at which they were employed. All these women worked in the Northern Areas (coloured people only area as allocated by the government (1950-1994) of the day with the Group Areas Act) of Port Elizabeth. The interviews were informal, consisting mainly of open-ended questions covering career development and progression as well as current managerial experience. The data collected revealed that because the women in these positions were so few in number, certain specific pressures could be identified as having an effect on their performance. These pressures included feelings of isolation, the strain of coping with gender stereotyping, discrimination from colleagues, and the whole experience of pressure from the organisational culture.

The value of having role models is well documented. The mere existence of women in managerial positions holds out hope for other women. However, many of women interviewed, were isolated in terms of gender. The difficulties they experienced isolation or exclusion were widespread. Below is the response of a female school principal (7 May 2009), reflecting on her earlier encounters after many interviews for principal positions.

Even though I was better equipped, more competent, had better managerial and other skills, more sound inter-personal relationships and could deal better with conflict, I was still overlooked for the post. This led me to the conclusion that my exclusion was based solely on the fact that I was a female.
Lesley Treleaven describes how she carefully made a collaborative inquiry space for women in what she described as a masculine oriented organisation, drawing both formally on her role as Staff Development Manager, and informally on her peer identity as a woman in the organisation. She accentuated the need for the preparatory phase of the inquiry “to be harmonious with collaborative processes and grounded in responses to exploratory dialogue” (Treleaven, 1994:142), writing that she knew that collaborative inquiry “could evoke anxiety with its lack of structure, excitement with its open-endedness, and uncertainty with its unpredictability”.

I therefore spent a lot of time making initial contact with the women, talking with them about their experiences as women working in the organisation, sharing the patterns that I identified from these conversations, and exploring what a collaborative inquiry could offer them... actively listening and using language that expressed their own concerns and interests... (Treleaven, 1994:144). Bruner (1966) articulates that a culture by its very nature is a set of values, skills and ways of life that no single member of society masters. Knowledge in this sense is like a rope, each strand of which extends no more than a few inches along its length, all being intertwined to give solidity to the whole. The conduct of our educational system has been curiously blind to this interdependent nature of knowledge. We have “teachers” and “pupils”, “experts” and “laymen”. However, the community of learning is somehow overlooked. Knowledge transcends any single “knower”, and in the spirit of Ubuntu, the characteristics of knowledge reflect the strength of its community of learners.

Culture is related to the Latin word “colo,” which means to build and to develop. It includes everything people do and create as participants of an identified society. Culture arises from the individual’s ability to create (Van der Westhuizen, 2002:120). This emphasises the move from centralisation teachers’ responsibilities, the identification of incompetence, bureaucracy, applying pressure and surrendering responsibility, to an emphasis on decentralisation, teachers’ rights, developing competence, learner-centeredness, applying resources, and participation.

School cultures can be defined as “moving mosaics of beliefs, values, understandings, attitudes, norms, symbols, rituals and ceremonies, preferred behaviours, styles and stances and power structures” (Day, Harris, Hadfield, Tolley & Beresford, 2000:20). Scheim (1985:24) suggests that culture concerns the deeper levels of assumptions and beliefs that are
shared by the members of an organisation, which unknowingly define their institution’s view
of itself and its environment. Whilst defining our school culture, I came to realise that it was
not for the faint-hearted. It takes a lot of courage to look at oneself analytically. For the
purpose of this study, culture will refer to the underground flow of feelings and folkways
winding its way within schools in the form of vision and values, beliefs and assumptions,
rituals and ceremonies, history and stories, and physical symbols (Jerald, 2007:23).

Swart and Pettipher (as cited in Engelbrecht & Green, 2007:107) highlight that in order to
become an inclusive, caring community that celebrates and accommodates diversity, an all-
embracing school culture that communicates and lives a philosophy based on the principles
and values of equity, social justice, respect, acceptance, belonging and dignity are required.
Teachers should be spontaneous and flexible enough to respond to challenges in supporting
their learner population. Teachers should have the courage to take risks, move beyond the
traditional roles that are expected of them by the teaching profession and adopt a problem-
solving approach (Schaufer & Buswell, 1996:59).

Mead (2001:32) states that, “by the time I got to Tau I will have made a fairly comprehensive
survey of the life of the Samoan girl, ceremonies and observances surrounding birth and
marriage, her theoretical functioning in the community and the code of conduct which
governs her activity”. According to Gardner (1995:84), Mead was a leader because she was
someone who impinged on the thoughts, behaviour and feelings of others. She caused others
to understand and welcome the uniqueness of specific cultures and to be aware of how
important it was to study them. Schein (1999:334) suggests that we need to study
organisational culture until we understand it, then leaders can propose new values, introduce
new ways and articulate new governing ideas.

My school does not need restructuring, because leadership is dominated by the presence of
women for the first time in its history, but it does need reculturing. There is very little
collegial activity at my school; consequently, over the years that I have been here I have
learned that as a leader you need not be mindful of what others say when you want the
discussions to follow a specific path. Is my approach not conflicting with the values I hold of
social justice, respect for learning and valuing participation?
It was not only what I said that influenced discussion on and participation in specific subjects. I also used body language. At times the body language I used, did not encourage sharing and my facial expressions indicated that there was no room for deviation. I now realise that my colleagues might have felt intimidated and that their collaboration in discussions were compromised by me. However, I felt much challenged by my own frame of reference, which included being a so-called coloured growing up in Apartheid South Africa, with all the disadvantages of being in the majority, but being viewed as a minority. I had numerous experiences of being the target of prejudice and stereotyping, because of prejudices against me simply because I was a black South African woman living in a male dominated world. Frequently, the words “black women are just good in providing for their men” rang loudly in my ears, coercing me to write a statement of non-discrimination for myself:

- I will organise events so that all learners can participate.
- Teachers must know and understand the background of their learners.
- We should be prepared to change many of the ways in which we have thought about others.

This statement highlights that I value Ubuntu; education is about relating.

Many things are perceived as threats to adult learning: the risk of failure; the fear of humiliation; the lack of control; the sense of loss of efficacy; the feeling of being isolated and of being not part of a group. Therefore, I became very sensitive to factors that could exacerbate the stress levels that my veteran teachers might endure.

- I assisted teachers at my school in building positive self-esteem by arranging Capacitar Training in (capacitor is a Spanish word meaning to empower, to encourage, bringing life). Capacitar embrace the human struggle to heal and empower others. Capacitar is committed to loving service and solidarity with the grassroots people of the world for the healing, transformation and enlightenment of all. It was important that my teachers felt they belonged, felt accepted in their group and felt special and unique in some way.
- Teachers had to have control over their work lives and the freedom to monitor their own progress and emotions based on their workable set of values and beliefs.
Through team building and self-development, I set out to awaken teachers to their own source of strength and wisdom so that they could reach out to heal injustice and create a more peaceful school environment for all children.

6.3 CONCLUSION

Lambert (2003:22) defines professional development as learning opportunities that can be found in collegial conversations, coaching episodes, shared decision-making groups, reflective journals, parent forums, or other such occasions.

The above-mentioned definition guided me as such into my own learning, allowing ideas to surface through my ideas, assumptions, histories and prior knowledge. Most important, answering the question: What do I currently believe and do? This led me to sharpen my inquiry skills to enable me to transform my inquisitiveness into practice in the form of my autobiographical writing.

Thereafter, I entered into dialogue and reflection (Teaming in my school) to improve understanding and to build on the ideas we already had on inclusive education. Our aim was to construct meaning and knowledge, not as isolated individuals, but as a collective. My objective with this exercise was to develop sustainable improvement. My values significantly affected the teaming process and it ultimately influenced members’ performance. I had to examine my own belief system constantly.
CHAPTER SEVEN
TEAMING TO PROMOTE SOCIAL INCLUSION IN THE SCHOOL

7.1 INTRODUCTION

As the acting principal of my school, I was very mindful of how I would introduce this new concept of teaming to my teachers, because I did not want them to perceive it as simply another initiative being forced on them from the principal’s office thereby ensuring that all participants would claim ownership of it and not its success and failure. As explained below, I carefully planned the way in which they were introduced to the concept of teaming.

During our discussions, I emphasised the preferences we hold as human beings to stability, as opposed to instability and change. In my school, stability was indicated by enduring and familiar ways of doing things, acceptance of the status quo, and faith in existing practices, activities and outcomes. I pointed out that lack of change had the disadvantage that we could become set in our ways, our perceptions and behaviour, to the degree that we would simply go through the motions, without sparing a single thought to what we were actually doing and why we were doing it.

I organised a staff development programme (held on 12 March 2009) to initiate this process. The title of this workshop was Why are we here? We also considered what had brought us to education as a profession, and to what has kept us here in the profession I followed the conversational form of eliciting information from participants to get them talking. I did not want them to form the notion that I was stuffing something new down their throats only as an investigation that could benefit my personal studies. Collective inquiry was my objective and I did not want to awaken recollection of the enforced implementation of inclusive education by the DoE, as verbalised by participants.

I called in the help of a friend who is a trained facilitator, because I realised that I would not be able to sustain the dialogue, because the topic confronted teachers’ set ways of talking and thinking. I did not want to get sidetracked into debates, arguments or manipulative consensus-building.
7.2 TEAMING IN MY SCHOOL CONTEXT

Four students from our local university were allocated to our school as student teachers for the 2010 school year. I grouped each of them with a veteran teacher as guide or mentor in their teaching and learning. Our new education system had identified the shortcomings in teacher training for an inclusive South Africa and therefore empowered student teachers with adequate training in inclusive education. Specialist remedial teacher training was understood as a luxury in the old dispensation, therefore, schools must respond directly to this educational inequality inherited from decades of racial discrimination and injustice. Learners from impoverished homes at state schools do not receive any specialist remedial teaching.

The National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa (2007:14) states that student teachers may undertake programmes within a structured mentorship programme. I decided to group a veteran teacher with a novice student teacher in trying to educate vulnerable learners who were previously marginalised and excluded from effective participation. Simultaneously, I hoped that this approach would provide some form of informal training for veteran teachers who had been excluded from effective training. All teachers needed to acquire skills in recognising, identifying and addressing barriers to learning and creating inclusive and facilitating teaching and learning environments for all learners, including those excluded from classroom participation.

Throughout the process of initiation to the concept of teaming, I was cognisant of strong feelings of fear and apprehension amongst many of my staff members. They articulated that they saw no need to implement this process, because they did not see the need for change in the way they teach their learners. I ensured consequently that the teachers were well informed and began to understand and embrace the need for change. I organised a workshop for all teachers and students (12 March 2009) to fully explain the need for change and to create a platform to listen to the viewpoints of teachers. This enabled all of us to analyse and understand the challenges of inclusivity for ourselves, and obtain accurate and reliable information concerning change required for full implementation thereof.

My objective was to create effective teaming as a developmental mechanism for collaborative growth. I looked at ways of effectively exercising leadership in support of teacher learning within my school. I was in agreement with my critical friends that teacher development could
be best achieved as informal, diverse, democratic, school-based and continuous processes. Through this strategy, I hoped to empower both teachers and learners to achieve greater inclusivity in the teaching and learning process. Teachers were allowed to participate more in decision-making process. In this way, they began to feel part of the change at my school rather than feeling that this idea was forced down their throats by the principal (see Appendix 4). One way to facilitate the support and development of principals and teachers is to shape schools and school systems more effectively as mentoring communities or learning centres – contexts for collaborative learning in which teachers challenge each other to grow (Drago-Severson, 2009:iv).

Such an intervention strategy would afford the teams the opportunity to build connections with one another and decrease feelings of isolation. Veteran teachers would be able to articulate their perspectives and share information and expertise, whilst student teachers would be able to bring theoretical knowledge to the classroom and collect information on the subject of inclusivity, for the benefit of themselves and the school at large. Teacher leaders would be able to help new student members “learn the ropes”, become familiar with grade-level standards, understand how to use data, and gain skills in classroom management and instructional strategies. Both veteran and student teachers would be able to acquire skills in recognising, identifying and addressing barriers to learning and create inclusive and enabling teaching and learning environments for all learners (National Policy Framework for Teacher Education in South Africa, 2007:16).

At the heart of this mentoring system would be enablement and empowerment. The advocacy of this programme was capable of reassuring participants that they stood to benefit from it. My goal was to establish and implement a coordinated, regionalised system of personnel development that would increase the capacity of the school systems to provide early intervening services (with an emphasis on inclusion), parallel with the general education curriculum, to at-risk learners and LSEN who have been socially excluded, as measured by improved learner progress and performance.

Greater professional confidence, enhanced knowledge, better understanding and improved teaching and classroom management skills were amongst the fruit of successful engagement in these activities (Journal Entry of Veteran Teacher, 12th of March 2010).
As stipulated in the SACE Act teachers need to adhere to a Code of Professional Ethics that includes a responsibility to keep abreast of professional trends and developments (National Policy Framework for Teacher Education, 2007:20). This statement has guided me in the development of a programme to emphasise the integrated development of learning area content knowledge and pedagogical skills, together with a thorough understanding of the changing social character of schools and the skills required to manage learning in diverse classrooms (see Figure 5.1, Geduld, 2010).

**Diagram 7.1: My personal professional mentoring system**
Authenticity means being true to oneself, honouring one’s strengths and your weaknesses and understanding the importance of one’s history whilst remaining open to the possibility of one’s future (also see section 6.1.5 for explanation of the term authentic). My first parents’ classroom visit (27 January 2000) reinforced my personal reasons for becoming a teacher whilst watching my visually impaired son trying to make meaning of his classroom environment and the teacher’s determination to include him in all activities. My choice of education as a career was based on a genuine desire to serve and to make a difference in the lives of my learners.

In communicating my objective to the four teams I had formed, I informed the team members that the teams would consist of two Grade 6 classes (one Mathematic and one English) and two Grade 5 classes (one Mathematics and one English). In each grade, we would create teaming only in environments of mutual respect and shared learning. All participants were required to pledge to become learners in a community of learners, thus becoming agents of change in their own learning. Carr, Fauske and Rushton (2008:8) propose that each of us has a guiding philosophy that is shaped by our beliefs and experiences. They emphasise that philosophy leads us into making reasoned and thoughtful professional choices favouring one teaching method over another.

Teacher participants were asked to write a story on a pressing issue and this concern is offered to his student partner for discussion. Teacher A responded:

At the end of our discussion, my partner and I had plenty to reflect upon. I got in touch with aspects of my teaching I ignored for too long.

Charles Darwin said that it is not the strongest of species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the ones most responsive to change.

One of the incentives of this teaming approach is that it helps teachers to discover where they are not living out their professional values, which creates discomfort with their current classroom practices. Teaming offered the participants the opportunity to set realistic goals. Although the members were at different stages in their teaching careers, I believe all needed ongoing opportunities to renew, refresh and redirect their teaching practices because the situation not only warranted this, but the socio-economic realities in my learners’
environments requires it; after all, the only constant in education, is change. The teaming partners provided each other with professional feedback and vicarious learning through the observation necessary for classroom practice development. The students provided the teams with critical perspectives and theories that supported and challenged developing practices. The teaming process was dynamic and constantly changing, to meet the needs of the people involved. Both partners gained in different ways, especially in their different roles as teachers and students. Fichten, Holderness & Nitsh (2008:8), contributors from Oldenburg, prefer to follow a team research approach. Geduld (2009) highlights the importance of collective enquiry for personal growth.

In a script for the team research course Meyer (2009:31) presents their theses regarding action research:

- School-related action research as self- or outsider-evaluation can give important impulses for the development of school and teaching.
- Self-evaluation is surgery on an open heart.
- Change of perspective, possible within team research, allows for establishment of distance to one’s own action.
- The claim of leading empiricists that practitioners cannot research due to systematic reasons is arrogant and has very often been proven wrong.
- Small is beautiful.
- Only through the method the research matter is becoming visible.
- Research competence develops in an alternation of being led and self-directed action.
- Not only the research work is promoting professionalism but also the team-setting.
- There is no automatic link between the increase in professionalism and practice-related research. Professionalism is only being furthered if research is being bound to “places of structure of reflexivity”.

Practising teachers must establish the type of professional development that will support their daily practice. Collectively, teams need to develop activities that are not removed from the realities of their work. Teachers need to be working with the people, issues and concerns they
face daily if they are to see the need for, and relevance of, teacher development (Robertson, 2008:6). Teachers must be **challenged** to understand and reflect on how changing their practice will make a difference to the education of learners excluded from effective teaching and learning. Teaming, I believe, provides that challenge, because participants share their perspectives with each other in a learning community. Robertson (2008:7) contends that the variety of perspectives, the development of activities and skills, and the presence of support all serve as professional development opportunities that enhance teaming relationships.

Nitsch (2008:59) writes: “In order to compare and evaluate the relative merits, problems and limits of approaches in educational action research for empowering disadvantaged learners, teachers and community workers in different countries... we need a kind of taxonomy or inventory of aspects, factors, dimensions of action research”. Whilst Fichten and Meyer (2008:97) suggest that “due to its team components, the Oldenburg research is characterised by mutual relationships, group building, and cooperative work structures which can “improve ... life and learning quality, and can also help develop a sense of identity for the individual”.

The concept was new to my school and the participants had to teach the teams the **roles and skills** of teaming and convey the principles behind these. The most important rule was that all teams had to make their own decisions and that I would simply assist them in reflecting critically on their practices so that they could make informed decisions about their teaching and learning. This process required that all teachers become actively involved in and positively supported this endeavour. The first step was recognising that as a school we needed this concept as a possible solution to the exclusionary practices exercised at the school. The next step was the implementation of the concept and putting it to the test.

### 7.3 IMPLEMENTATION OF TEAMING

Ainscow (1991) states that schools are places where teachers and pupils are engaged in activities that help them to become more successful at understanding and dealing with problems. In the context of collaborative problem solving for effective teaming, including children who have been identified as having “special needs”, teaming can therefore be seen as an opportunity for the whole school to learn and develop and become more effective.
I did not feel very comfortable within this new partnership because I felt I needed to protect myself within my classroom set-up. My eyes followed the student around with great suspicion. I did not trust her nor did I desire to work with her (Journal Entry of Teacher B, 12 February 2010).

As the principal of my school, I had a pivotal role to play as an agent of change in my school. The success of this programme was largely dependent on my skills; therefore, I adopted an inclusive attitude so that all teachers would be converted from resistors to change agents. My personal vision for my school was to transform it into an effective institution school.

“An effective school is an inclusive school”

My goals for my school were:

- for it to become an effective school
- to improve learner outcomes
- to improve my school’s profile so that there would be ownership by all involved
- to lead my teachers into the area of data gathering in a safe environment
- to build a collaborative learning community.

Whilst reading this entry, I related to what McCourt (2005:255) wrote in Teacher Man: “The classroom is a place of high drama”. This entry created a chance to involve student teachers creatively and to influence their lives and the lives of my learners. The most important role of each team was to facilitate conversations. This led to participants developing a sense of trust, focused attention on what mattered, stimulated new thinking, and promoted honest and candid exchanges. Within this context, the value of participation was also highlighted, because participants continuously had to report on what they thought and how they felt. I am convinced that inclusion is underpinned by genuine, open and honest relationships. I am a class teacher who has reflected a great deal on my own practice and who had the courage to experiment.

An extract from Teacher Journal (dated 24 February 2010): My first adaptation within my classroom was the way my learners were seated. Instead of linear rows, I grouped them in
multi-ability groups. I began to involve the children in lesson planning and was amazed at how imaginative their ideas were and how committed they were to learning. My learners had so much to say and were a little overwhelmed. However as my teaching became more learner-centred, I found that his role as a teacher changed. I no longer had to stand in front of the class for hours talking. I redefined myself as a facilitator of the children’s learning.

In this way, the class as an entity were able to adapt the curriculum to make it more relevant to the individual needs of learners. The teacher, student and learners could give input on the level of understanding of the learning content for each learner. My value of inclusivity was celebrated in this way. The team identified that the passiveness of learners in classrooms was a barrier to inclusivity. Long-established practices implemented in mainstream classes prevented children from expressing their opinions. Children were introduced to equal and open practices in the classroom and became very vocal. In this way, Ubuntu, human rights, democracy, social justice and inclusive education were seen as inextricably linked. There was no evidence of pandemonium I experienced learners to be very peaceful and calm in this environment.

The more members of a team work together the more skill they will develop especially if goals, rules etc. are developed and made explicit. The skills for effective teaming as an incentive are:

- listening
- reflective interviewing
- self-assessment
- goal-setting
- developing action plans
- setting time frames
- observing and describing practice
- giving effective feedback and
- acquiring knowledge of the action research process.

Robertson (2008:78) emphasises that these skills lead participants through dialogue towards greater praxis and are therefore, an intentional bridge between theory and practice.
7.4 MEETING LEARNER NEEDS

Reflection is supported by record keeping of the entire process. Both teachers and participants were required to keep their independent journals; they could collaborate and gave opinions on what the other recorded. Teaming holds the potential for supporting transformational learning. Drago-Severson (2004:73 & 2009) claims that teaming can be a context for testing new ideas and acting as colleagues collaborate over time. Fundamentally, teaming holds the possibility to help all adults improve their capability to handle the complex responsibilities of professional and personal life. I supported this method of data collecting, because it afforded me the opportunity to promote the inclusion of diverse perspectives. However, I was also mindful that this process would take time; that it should not be hurried along, as every encounter was valuable and each participant would at times be the coach, at other times the coached.

One of the teams’ objectives was to design lessons, plans to strengthen learning in the search for new approaches to meet learners’ needs. I identified that teachers in my school needed the kind of support that would assist them in adapting to the daunting demands of their educational environment. Drago-Severson (2009) is of the opinion that a highly effective school leader can have a dramatic and positive influence on students’ overall academic achievement. I wanted to see a process in place that would allow my learners to achieve to the maximum of their ability; therefore, I needed more than one adult to walks into a class. A collaborative team would be the most productive in creating an environment in which my learners could achieve in a supported milieu. This year (2010), the school has been blessed to have the assistance of four students who were placed with us for the year. Next year, we will be better equipped to deal with inclusivity and refocus on how we can make this type of arrangement a more permanent one for each classroom. Our objective will then be: One teacher working with the support of an assistant who is also well trained.

Teacher C wrote in her journal: *I value the participation in a content-based discussion team; I can now understand the relevance of using content that complement the learners’ experiential world for greater learner participation.*

*I see the opening of your potential in you as you see it in me*

*From a Tibetan/Nepali greeting “Namatse”*
Each team started with creating IEPs for LSEN. Teams were requested to obtain an overview of each learner’s existing level of functioning, set goals for the year, provide a description of how the learner would participate in the classroom and how his/her progress would be measured.

Learner A: Information from Teacher’s Journal (27th January 2010):

*The original objectives for learners will not be utilised directly from the text but will be modified to accommodate the learner’s present level of functioning. In a reading lesson in which the content for Learner A was simplified, learner will be given longer period for reflecting on material that will enable him to meet the desired goal. Learner will be allowed more time to answer questions during classroom discussions and more time will be allocated to complete seatwork problems. Both student and teacher’s efforts will be coordinated; the teacher will have his/her lesson plan (Statement), the Individual Educational Plan (IEP document) that individualise the curriculum to assist learners in meeting their goals.*

Journal Entry of Student A (1 February 2010):

*LSEN will be included in the learning process and will feel that they are part of the interactive learning environment. I witnessed reduced level of frustration in learner behaviour, learners’ confidence also excelled.*

The best way to support these learners is to guide them towards experiencing success and to work from the known to the unknown.

### 7.5 PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION SYSTEM

Generally, it can be assumed that inclusive education mainly depends on what teachers do about including all learners in their classroom teaching. How teachers function within their classrooms is to a large extent dependent upon their training, experiences, beliefs and attitudes, as well as on the teaching environment. Regardless of the fact that the teacher is not the only role player in the effective delivery of the product of inclusive education, he/she will be singled out for responsibility for its failure even though he/she may not have been backed up adequately or not at all by his/her employer, the DoE.
The way the classrooms were divided into eight sections each, allowed children to work in small, heterogeneous groups. The pupils helped each other. The class setting, as well as the non-teacher-centred approaches, promoted co-operation among the pupils, not only within the same sub-group, but also within the whole class. The purpose of streaming was to offer the learners instruction that was more individual and to improve their study motivation. For example, learners were organised in teaching groups according to their reading skills and mother tongue so that one group addressed the grapheme-phoneme (letter sound) correspondence, while another group read short texts at the syllable level and a third group explored children’s literature.

Teachers became aware through studying the examination graph that lack of language skills was a barrier to learning for many children. To develop a space for considering this further, teams worked on a questionnaire, which gave children the chance to write what they felt about writing. These questionnaires were developed from initial discussions with children. Those who struggled with writing participated through the means of interviews.

**Example response: (Table 7.1)**

**What do you not like about writing?**
I don’t like long stories and struggle with spellings; half hour enough. It takes me a long time to think what I’m going to write; it’s hard work. Sometimes; when you have to do it independently; writing is hard, that’s the thing; I don’t like writing. It hurts my hand - it aches and when I go home it’s sore

**What do you like about writing?**
Like writing my stories, telling others about my family and me.

**Tell us about the best piece of writing you have ever done**
Making a mind-map about my family, I was in Grade 5. My teacher praised me a lot she gave me an excellent badge. My teacher cared about me and the other learners we worked very hard to keep our teacher happy.

**Tell me about the best piece of writing you read.**
It was a biography on the life of Nelson Mandela I was in Grade 3. I still have the work I did on that activity.
The response of learners encouraged us to consider an activity that could address the needs expressed by many learners. This was a participatory learning opportunity; built on the premise that learners must be interested and engaged in the learning process. Dunst (2001:313) formulated the following interesting paradigm:

- Interests create the development of opportunity for different skills and competencies to be developed;
- Engagement provides opportunities for the mastery of the skills through active participation.

The learners were an integral part of the activity and related how they felt when certain things happened. This activity also served as a motivation for parental participation in learner programmes. See below an example of a learner’s assessment on how the introduction of this programme and collaboration between the team, his parents and himself had enhanced the quality of his work.

**Learner S formal English assessment:**

![Image of Learner's Assessment]
7.6 WORK IN THE PROGRAMME


Learner S was a highly disorganised learner; a Scaffold Instruction was introduced to assist him in the learning process, with prompting and guidance, tailored to his specific needs did offer just enough support in the completion of a new task (Bender, 2002:55). Learner S did not understand the reading passages, because he did not realise that there was an underlining structure; consequently, he missed the opportunity to use the story structure to enhance his comprehension of the reading passage.

Firstly, Learner S was required to complete a story map, as a scaffold on which to build understanding of the learning content.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scaffolding Example: (Table 7.2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Name</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Story Title</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The main character was:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Then several important things happened:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The problem was solved by:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This topic was decided upon because on the 21st of March, National Human’s Day is celebrated and the learners have background or prior knowledge information on it. The LSEN’s ideas were written on a chart and hung on the wall of the classroom.
Images of murals made by learners who have barriers to learning instead content assignment as done by other learners

The team isolated Learner S’s learning problem. An intervention was selected for him, thereafter an action research hypothesis was stated, and the scaffolding strategy was implemented. The assignment, a test written by him and story mapping provided the data required to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention.

7.7 TEACHING FOR COLLEGIALITY

Heifetz (1994) distinguishes between “technical change” and “adaptive change”. Technical change involves applying existing skills, knowledge, tools, etc. to a situation. His notion of “adaptive change” fits closely with ideas of double-loop learning and “second order” change, in that it requires people to shift their values, habits, expectations and behaviour. He states
that ways of thinking and behaviour that have proved to be successful in solving technical problems are not effective in certain evolving, complex situations (such as experienced in the teaching and learning of learners with special needs). Heifetz expresses the view that the modern leader needs to act in ways that support people’s adaptations to conditions in order to survive. People must be assisted to engage in problem solving for themselves. This view differs radically from the “visionary hero” model of leadership which, Heifetz argues, presents a threat to democracy. People might want simple answers, but these do not deliver what they promise. Adaptive leaders recognise the importance of evolutionary approaches and therefore seek to assist the people they lead in developing their own capacity.

Heifetz (1994) recommends four principles for bringing about adaptive change:

- It is important to recognise just when a problem requires adaptive work through understanding the deeper issues and values at play.
- Truly adaptive change is not easy and could be experienced as stressful by the people being led through it. The leader must keep a balance and not underwhelm or overwhelm people; there is an optimum state in which there is sufficient stress to energise and enable momentum.
- Focus is critical. Attention needs to be maintained on the real issue and sidetracking should be avoided.
- The people who need to make the change are the ones who need to do the work of change – not the person leading.

Vision without the ability to convert it into successful action is pointless. I think that I had given my leadership role enough time to work on the adaptive learning of those in respect of whom I occupied an informal leadership position. I fully engaged with reality as experienced by the teachers and learners.

Each participant had to compile his autobiography including teachers and learners as an initiation into the programme. We then each had to draw up a professional improvement plan as a continual effort to improve our own teaching (see Diagram 7.2):

**Diagram 7.2: Teaching components for collegiality (Geduld, 2010)**
Active listening was an intervention tool I used to get members to listen and respond to another person to improve mutual understanding. Often when people talk to each other, they do not listen attentively. They are often distracted, half listening, half thinking about something else. When people are engaged in a topic of discussion, they often already formulate a response to what is being said. They assume that they have heard what the other has said many times before, so rather than paying attention, they focus on how they can respond to re-enforce their perspective.

Active listening holds many benefits for the participants such as:

- Firstly, it forces people to listen attentively to others.
- Secondly, it avoids misunderstandings, as people have to confirm that they do really understand what another person has said.
- Thirdly, it tends to open people up, to get them to say more.

I divided the team into pairs and let each pair have a listener and a speaker. The speaker was then given a situation which he spoke on as the listener actively listened to him. After the speaker was done, the listener tried to rephrase the speech in the way he understood it and then tried to offer solutions or feedback to the speaker. They reviewed each other’s performance and swap roles.

The probing question was, “Do children with special educational needs have the right to be educated by you?”
Members achieved a greater sense of understanding and communication was improved between them.

**Table 7.3: Professional Improvement Plan**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A Professional Improvement Plan (Adapted from Bender 2002)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name ____________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School ____________________________________________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposed professional development activities for academic year:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Professional knowledge activities
   - I will read a minimum of fifteen journal articles on differentiated instruction and participate with my colleagues in sharing information groups.
   - I will read two books on differentiated instruction and share with colleagues at my school.
   - I will create a portfolio over the course of the year to synthesize all of these activities.

2. Action research
   - I will develop two action research projects with two different learners between March and June of this year.
   - I will present the results of those action research projects to the principal at the end June.

3. Professional engagement
   - I will make a forty-five minute presentation to our school staff on differentiated instruction in July of this year.

Self-talk (as presented in Diagram 7.2) forms an integral part of collegial inquiry which, according to Drago-Severson (2009:26) is an example of a larger developmental concept known as reflective practice, which can occur individually and/or in a group. She goes further and articulates that collegial inquiry is a shared dialogue in a reflective context that involves reflecting on one’s assumptions, convictions and values as part of the learning process. The central goal for our team was to improve our teaching and learning – which included focusing attention on our emotional and intellectual well-being and growth.

My inquiry included a focus on my influence on learning by sharing the action and reflection of it on my role as a teacher/learning partner with teacher teams and the ways in which I had developed a practice that was much closer to the values I wished to live by. The values that
emerged through and in my practice served as the living standards of judgement of my inquiry. Gunter (2001:31) further identifies the concerns of the development of a model of school leadership that is very much focused on meeting easily measurable targets rather than recognising the vast sense of difference within education and practice and leadership that can exist. Gunter argues for the need to acknowledge the individual and the personal background and histories that have influenced individual values within leadership; celebrating difference rather than attempting to make everything the same. My thesis recognises this and promotes a model of leadership that recognises traditional theory and utilises this within practice in order to create a living educational theory of practice.

The most important asset we had as a team was our sense of community. We accepted the SMT’s (see Geduld, 2009) vision for inclusive education after thorough collaboration. The SMT did not automatically form part of the teaming process as an entity; however, individual members of the SMT were part of the Intervention Teaming Team. I believed that if my value of inclusion was adequately negotiated, team members would feel adequately confident to challenge each other and the leadership; the differences that arose about purpose, process and method, and the exploration and the resolution of these differences were part of an effective group (Srivastva et al., 1977).

**Vision for inclusion**

The question: Why should a vision be formulated for the group? can be asked. The group’s need for a vision for inclusion identified the need to move forward and to rediscover their passion for education. They needed fuel to keep themselves going. They expressed the opinion that a printed version of a vision for inclusivity, fully visible in their classrooms, would help to create an environment conducive to productivity and success for themselves and their learners. This ensured that we kept the vision of inclusivity visible before role-players, both the educators and the learner, and helped the educators to understand and value their role in implementing inclusive education (Geduld, 2009:127).

The following vision for inclusion was adopted, as formulated in 2008:
By 2013, the above-mentioned school will be a recognised leader and advocate for inclusivity. The school will be known for successfully educating a diverse array of public school learners within its community in all aspects of the development of the learner. Our learners must be educated holistically resulting in socially committed and morally responsible individuals in their respective communities.

It is our goal to deliver academic excellence and encourage positive self-esteem and leadership discipline amongst all our educators and learners.

Trust and compassion were vital resources we brought to the party. We mobilised our power as individuals to embrace collaboration. This helped us to move the group forward in fulfilling our shared purpose (see Diagram 7.1).

The team often switched classes to share resources and experiment with new teaching tools. I use examples like this to demonstrate how I was influenced in my own learning and how this evolved into practice recognisable by those around me. My self-study aims to provide authentication of the process of the transformation of my internal state and developing practice that seeks to be as harmonious as possible with the person I seek to be more consistently.

7.8 FOCUS FOR REFLECTION, EXPLORATION AND ACTION

As a tool to reinforce the stance, the team took to grow individually and collectively in incorporating our vision for inclusive education, I drew up a timeline to sketch the key events in my personal life, my collegial relationships and my professional life beyond my school (see No. 2 in Diagram 7.1). McNiff and Whitehead (2006:58) state that our values need to be seen as in lived relation with others. For them to make sense, the values themselves need to be understood as real-life practices, not as abstract concepts. In re-examining post-event evaluation returns, I felt encouraged when individuals expressed the opinion that the event had given them the opportunity to be part of the experience; they had not just been the recipient of it but were challenged to think critically for themselves – even to the point of passively rejecting aspects of my own “truth”; to ask their own questions, not just to respond to mine; and to sense a resemblance between my implicit values and my explicit practice.
However, role hierarchy created my first tension. As a teacher knowledgeable in many and varied ways of my school community, my visionary leadership contributed to the effective implementation of inclusive education. Yet, I returned to the local university as a student. This shifting between the worlds of inclusive leader and novice action research student, and manoeuvring between the hierarchies of speciality and now academia, has confronted my sense of identity and confidence. Issues of who am I, where am I going, and how to hold on to my educational value roots were ever present.

Action research created a repetitious process in which I could address the student tensions of role hierarchy and transition, and the contradictions of community engagement. I drew on action research literature to inform my reflections of knowledge and experience, examine the roles I had and would take, gain awareness of the principles, promises and perils of action research and revealed my underlying assumptions and beliefs. I am able to mitigate or advance these parts of me for the inquiry process. Torbert (2001:252) explains that action inquiry begins in the personal with “meditative inner work”, which enhances second-person relational practice, in being truthful and matching intended meaning and dialogue with others; these self-study and interpersonal skills reinforce the qualities of third-person leadership that are necessary for creating organisational conditions of transformation. Heen (2005) interprets first-person action research as a focus on the single person, second-person for people coming together in cooperative inquiry, and third-person action research extended to larger collectives or communities. Kemmis (2001:100) speaks of opening “communicative space” for progressive mutual understanding, authentic engagement, and consensus on and about action.

Experienced Teacher B, this programme increased my understanding of practice. I have learned so much about the latest educational ideas and practices, it is invigorating. I have a platform to share my small successes as well as my challenges. I want to continue with my development and hone my skills to assist and accommodate my learners with barriers to learning and effective participation.

It is at these moments that I could inform and develop my own grasp of the subject matter, refining, cultivating, pruning – growing it, and an “audience” could do the same. I became to see myself as performing when delivering a motivational workshop for my staff (past learning), but as performing above myself when in true dialogue with others (new, two-way
learning). In the Vygotskyan sense, this performatory function is associated with learning, not ego, and betrays no sense of inauthenticity or dishonesty. We wear a facade without self-consciousness or guilt – to “act up”, to play the “role” of learner, and through this play, to familiarise ourselves and proceed within the learning role. In the words of Keleman (2001:95): “In the facades we put on for others we demonstrate our potential”.

7.9 CONCLUSION

Through writing, I could see the concrete evidence of my mental processes. This allowed me to interact with, expand upon, and create more transformative views through examining my writing as representative of myself. The spirit of Ubuntu in education for me refers to a deep connection between learner, teacher and learning content. A connection that is so sincere and essential that it cannot help but be extremely relevant; empowering us to look at the world with new eyes. Guided by the spirit of Ubuntu, we began to experience wholeness in our relationships with each other. We began to develop compassion in addressing human questions in education and living those questions. My values of Ubuntu and inclusivity evident in the ways I observed my learners, dealt with the curriculum and assessment, influenced what our classrooms and schools could become, and appreciated and celebrated the best of what happened there (Carr et al., 2008:93). I became able through my values to know how to learn, how to organise and how to educate and re-educate myself. From my own experiences and observations in this teaming process, I realised it is not so much the education that counted: it was the self-re-education. Specialisation in inclusive education is not enough; what our schools need, is well-rounded human beings.
CHAPTER EIGHT
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

“You have plenty of courage, I am sure,” answered Oz. “All you need is confidence in yourself. There is no living thing that is not afraid when it faces danger. The true courage is in facing danger when you are afraid, and that kind of courage you have in plenty.”

(L. Frank Baum, from The Wonderful Wizard of Oz, 1900)

8.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the influences that I consider the most important in the development of learning opportunities for learners from impoverished homes are presented and their impact described.

In my personal growth, I learned that I had to place much emphasis on the value of maintaining good relationships. I realised that I had to transform my school into a more participative and inviting institution. I had to involve my staff so that they would begin to feel empowered (see 6.1.4). In creating the conditions for effective interaction, I had to intervene, when necessary but at the same time allow the group members to find their own balance. This interaction constituted the glue in our team: teachers, students and learners not only worked with each other, they also learned from each other.
Above (Figure 8.1) is a sketch of the journey I travelled and the value of engaging in reflective activity. It emphasises the fact that collaborative and reflective discussion allowed me to capitalise on the social nature of learning. My journey was not always well designated, but was always informed by our vision and values. I not only considered how education could be used to assist children’s growth, learning and development, but also applied the same concepts in the development, growth and learning of their teachers. Within such a safe environment, Pollard (2008:24) states that within such a safe environment aims are clarified, experiences are shared, language and concepts for analysing practice are refined, the personal insecurities of innovation are reduced, evaluation becomes reciprocal, and commitments are affirmed.
Having immersed myself in my study, I want to support the finding of the South African Parliamentary Monitoring Group (2007), namely that the inclusive education system in South African is currently not functioning effectively. The many exclusionary factors, especially those resulting from poor socio-economic factors, are putting the effective implementation of inclusive education further at risk. However, Booth, Nes and Stromstad (2003:1) are of the opinion that inclusion is a process of consciously putting into practice values based on equity, entitlement, community, participation and respect for diversity. Inclusion entails the reduction of all exclusionary practices that result from differences in social and economic starting points and a lack of opportunities in order to reach your full potential. Inclusion protects all learners against any form of discrimination stemming from race, gender, disability and family background. It therefore not only addresses the barriers experienced by learners, but also promotes the development of cultures, policies and practices in school to allow it to become more responsive to diversity and to value all learners equally (Booth et al., 2003:1).

The question driving this study has been:

*How do I create learning opportunities for learners from impoverished communities?*

I wish to refocus on my contributions to knowledge that this research has produced, and brought together, multiple aspects of myself and of my claims to learning into a compacted, understandable wholeness. This study covers the growth of an idea that sprang from a wish to improve the learning opportunities of young children and explore the development of an idea to meet the needs of the school. The findings presented, include extracts from learning programmes developed within the teaming process, the words of teachers and students involved in the process, and understanding gained from the research over a four-year period.

I suggest that the communicative form of this thesis has been such that I have met these standards of representation and reflected on the outcomes of this project. In sharing my own story with others, I wish to initiate discussion and dialogue about the nature and importance of teacher research and the value of inclusivity within the South African educational context.

In the various sections of this thesis, I hope to show that my research approach was rigorous, truthful and valid. I hope to shown that my knowledge claims are rooted in the experiences that I described in the narratives I shared. I hope that bringing into consideration knowledge gained through a living practice of *Ubuntu*, the school will be able to offer ways of evolving
its role as a social force that can legitimise the lives, perspectives and knowledge forms of learners who have been excluded or devalued. I believe that teachers could have an immensely positive impact on their learners. The responsibility lies with teachers to build confidence within our schools, encourage learners’ persistence and ignite their curiosity.

As a woman in a school management position, I hope to have shown that it has been possible to live a productive life, characterised by a sense of love and life-affirming energy, raising a son who is extremely visually impaired, and contributing to transformational educational practices through my embodied practice of *Ubuntu*. I hope to have shown the value of considering my situation through growing from within, as reflected in my autobiography, *and* wearing lenses based on the principle of full inclusion for all learners. Thus, I took action based upon that which reveals itself through that separateness, not from that which I was given from the perspective of others, camouflaged as unbiased knowledge, but spaces and opportunities through which teachers could engage in different forms of reflection and shared conversations. We were motivated not to end with the production of IEPs (see Appendix 5) but rather pay attention to the process of developing inclusivity.

I had to challenge some of my own beliefs and did not always manage to arrive at positions of clarity or comfort throughout my journey. I engaged with those who said that if I could not provide an alternative methodology to that which they knew and did, then I should keep my mouth closed. To me, education is not a quick-fix, because we arrive at our holistic selves through the accumulation of different experiences, both positive and negative. Some experienced my constant questioning as negative, and I worked to find inclusional, appreciative forms of expression that would embrace their concerns without accepting patterns of human and organisational behaviour that reinforced exclusion. Teaching is a team effort, and our school, as a professional community, should have as an objective the creation of an institution in which inclusion is welcomed.

I searched for ways in my teaching and learning to recognise, and inspirationally, bring out all the talents of a diverse, mutually supportive and explorative community, not just a selected few, because to me, this encapsulates what education is. Senge (2000:59) articulates that personal mastery is a set of practices that supports people, children and adults in keeping their dreams whole while cultivating an awareness of the current reality around them. This calls for sustained support that will remain in place over a long term. I would argue that through
my own work, I have attempted to establish a community of enquiry within my school that
draws on a multi-generational model of knowledge production through bringing together
teachers, researchers, students and critical friends.

I enabled teachers to account for their learning and practice. I achieved this through engaging
them in debate and dialogue about their practice and methods of adjusting that which was
already known to them to address the diverse needs of all learners. I believe that I
demonstrated that I became a learner; learning alongside, firstly, Nelson Mandela
Metropolitan University students and, secondly, my colleagues at school. From these learning
experiences, I was able to improve my practice. For me, this was about embracing the
thinking of action research. Those who wish to engage with this account may well be able to
appreciate the value of action research and be persuaded to employ it themselves. Craig
(2009:7) is of the opinion that those who want to solve problems, address issues and improve
situations select action research for conducting research because the process promotes
professional growth, improvement and change.

Osterman and Kottkamp (1993) provide a rationale for action research that I want to embrace.
These authors comment: “Action research as a professional growth process in its credo for
reflective practice, holds that everyone needs professional growth opportunities, all
professionals want to improve, all professionals are capable of assuming responsibility for
improving practice, and the process enriches the professional environment”. I believe that I
have been able to offer the evidence that supports this view. This is central to my approach to
establishing teacher-research within my school; of being able to build a community of enquiry
that is able to move forward collectively with their practice through dialogical experiences
that engage with key questions relevant to their own practice. Teachers were enabled through
this process to experience success firsthand (see 6.1.5, 7.1 & 7.7).

Fitchman Dana and Yendol-Silva (2003:5) state that as a teacher-inquirer in charge of your
own learning, you become a part of a larger struggle in education – the struggle to better
understand, inform, reshape, and reform standard school practice. However, according to
Spillane (2006), teachers’ prior beliefs and practices could create challenges, not only because
they may be unwilling to embrace new policies, but also because their existing individual
knowledge may interfere with their ability to interpret and implement a reform in ways
consistent with policymakers’ intent. The fundamental nature of cognition is that new
information is always interpreted in the light of what is already understood. “An individual’s prior knowledge and experience, including tacitly held expectations and beliefs about how the world works, serve as a lens influencing what the individual notices and how the stimuli that are noticed are processed and subsequently interpreted” (Spillane et al., 2002).

8.2 FINDINGS

These findings pay attention to the complexities of inclusivity, while at the same time suggesting strategies and principles for action, and how to implement them. They address the many tensions teachers experience within their classrooms, acknowledge differences and focus on getting a fair deal for all.

8.2.1 Commitment to wheels of learning

Teachers need to be thinking practitioners and learners must be valued as independent beings. To this end, we adopted a concept known as A.P.B. (an “all points bulletin”). The group members were asked to seek the same thing: creating better opportunities for learners with barriers to learning whom we previously disadvantaged. Our searching revealed answers, new perceptions and better understandings. Teachers did a lot of talking and thinking about what was important to them. Teachers, aided by self-reflection as a method and attitude, took a closer look at their interests and talents and weighed these alongside their values and beliefs. Teachers used auditing as a tool and recognised how much they had already achieved and the depth of expertise that already existed amongst them. Self-reflection increased teachers’ skills. They expressed that they felt their self-respect also increased, because they knew why they were doing what they did, exercised control and claimed ownership to best practices.

Teachers expressed that the teaming process allowed them to continuously construct and reconstruct the meaning they attached to learning and create new and innovative ways to maintain it (see 7.2). Inclusive schools deliver a curriculum to students through organisational arrangements that are different from those used in schools that exclude some learners from their regular classrooms (Ballard, 1995:2). Successful teaming breaks down the body of knowledge or skills to be learned into small, logically arranged and easily manageable parts. The parts teachers experienced, were easy to understand and easy to engage with. The practical application of skills and knowledge was built through
autobiographical writing. According to Drago-Severson (2009:25), teaming creates an opportunity for adults to share their diverse perspectives and learn about one another’s ideas, perspectives and assumptions, as well as to challenge one another to consider alternative perspectives and revise assumptions, in order to achieve growth.

Inclusivity for teachers in this research entailed having arrived somewhere, collectively from an imagined past to an imaginative future of skills application. Teachers were able to create, through applying the principles of inclusivity, an infrastructure for learning composed of roles and responsibilities, inquiry, reflection, and a focus on learners’ learning. Teachers were better able to calibrate their energies in order to hang in for the long haul of inclusivity. However, inclusivity challenged teachers to consider their total lives; who they were as professionals, parents, spouses and individuals, to sustain the vision of inclusivity as they supported each other in this journey towards creating effective learning opportunities. The Department of Education (2005b:30) concedes that educators may require new skills in curriculum assessment of potential, curriculum differentiation, collaborative teaching and learning, collaborative planning and sharing reflection on practices and cooperation. Communication and collaborative skills are singled out as the most essential skills for effective teaching within an inclusive school environment.

Teachers hold very little in the way of conversations and discussions on what is happening in their classrooms; they therefore often conclude that very little learning takes place, because they cannot measure it against that of their colleagues’ classrooms. Topping and Maloney (2005) state that inclusion is a dynamic process, not a static condition a journey, not a destination; I want to go further and state that inclusion is learning, synonymous to school improvement. This was aptly illustrated in a discussion with a veteran teacher who commented on the value of teaming with the focus on learning and improvement:

I thought about what I practise daily within my classroom. All the good things I do which helped to define me when my self-esteem was at its weakest. It enabled me to initiate discussions with my peers, and through dialogue we could combine theory and that which we learned within the classroom to improve our school as a whole.

Inclusion is the exploration and consolidation of routes that are thoroughly mapped for all to voyage in safety into your own, there to discover your full potential. The adventure is in
knowing why you did what you did. We need to learn to think, value knowledge and apply it with competent skills that will dominate our classrooms. We need to demand high performance standards. The main ingredients of competence are observation, learning and practice. A challenge for all of us is inspecting the data available to us so that we obtain new understandings and improve our approach to doing things. It entails having a teacher that knows what he/she is talking about, clears up challenges that may arise and are not understood fully – the result will be coming up with a new view of educability.

Education for me entails an invitation to learners to participate in and feel that they can contribute to deeper enquiry. This enquiry is not arrogant, but honest and challenging, as it reflects on the accomplishments and limitations of current understanding, and the opportunities that arise from these. There is both recognition of the status quo and a readiness to question it, which enables learners to feel that they can contribute both individually and collectively to the continual process of the evolutionary transformation of our understanding of relationships within our experiential world. However, my personal vision and that of the team changed, as we became more knowledgeable about what inclusivity entailed. Education is a declaration of intent, the desire to live passionately and take the necessary risks to live closely with that which is within and around us. The stories of education I shared opened up pathways into interior landscapes; I did not know in advance what the end would look like or what action it would inspire or compel me to take; however, real change happened from my present vantage point. Schools must set a context where learners and teachers have the right to reflect on their vision (Senge, 2000:60). I explored the ongoing nature of evolution between educational spaces, and how this process of change was managed as I moved through different stages of my career and life.

I realised that the small, intuitive and personal choices made by the teachers and learners reflected the value of true inclusiveness. Throughout the project, the teachers and learners constantly had to deal with the question: What is happening here? I know that my practices within my class improved through such questioning, interpreting and reflection. However, my professional confidence also increased through the process of sharing my project with others and the personal theories I constructed through this research study. I no longer feel that research is only for academia, but that teachers within mainstream education can also undertake and benefit from it. I also experienced inclusivity through others in the sense of sharing the initiatives that were applied with the intent of supporting teachers, students and
learners. Through this, a dialogue emerged that supported learning and was understood and owned by all involved.

8.2.2 Leadership capacity building

I found that leadership roles at my school were not distributed; teachers were not invited to impart power and decision-making confidence. Inclusivity as a teaching and learning skill was not transferred into every aspect of school life by the SMT. Teachers and learners were excluded from this broad-based sensitisation concept. Drago-Severson (2009:25) states that a leadership role is an opportunity to raise not only one’s own consciousness, but also a group’s consciousness with respect to the ideas, perspectives and assumptions we bring to our practice. The core function of educational policy is the effective organisation of knowledge management and learning (Rayner, 2007:49). Learning in classrooms was not based on engaged participation, as articulated by research participants. Therefore, through this research, I am asking group members to grow and evolve in new understanding as networks are established between individuals in dynamic relationships of inclusivity.

I expected not to show people the way to inclusivity, nor impart some great wisdom through my research; however, I wanted to share my own story with others and thus stimulate discussion and dialogue about the nature and importance of teacher research. I am aware of what I believe I have learned from interacting with others through their writings and through the dialogues that I have had with them, but perhaps my own complacency and lack of self-belief prevented me from believing that others could learn from what I had written. My research has allowed me to be creative and stretch my thinking by solving problems. I had the opportunity to inspire my colleagues by the positive example I chose to set, and all of this has given my life a rich sense of purpose.

Daniels and Garner (2000: xvi) comment: Schools encounter great difficulties when they attempt to become learning organisations. From the point of view of those concerned with special schools as organisations there is a need to shift schools from positions of passive compliance and/or resistance to change and ask how best they might be transformed. The school as an organisation does not enable access to learning because teachers at the school were under the impression that they did not have to change in their approach to teaching and learning to mirror the ideology of inclusive education. Teachers did not exercise mediation
nor utilised different ways of stimulating the children to participate optimally. The influence of teaming on capacity building cannot be underestimated; particularly where the existing knowledge and skills of the group members are articulated and discussed. In this study the teaming facilitator encouraged group members to reflect on what they had said, discuss how the most appropriate aspects could be strengthened and built on, and finally decided where and how new knowledge could be incorporated into existing practices. The emphasis was on development. Teachers became fully alive, because they felt that they had been given the opportunities for skilful participation in the work of leadership. Teachers expressed that they were now making a difference in their classrooms and were engaging with colleagues and working within a professional culture. Co-creating knowledge was one of the greatest benefits of the teaming process for the teachers. We as teachers employed a developmental practice that supported the growth and learning of adults, yet at the same time honoured their diverse ways of knowing and doing. Teachers highlighted that this approach decreased teachers’ feeling of isolation, it opened up communication channels that built interdependent rapports, and it supported their individual and collegial growth.

Stofile and Green (2007:58) and Prinsloo (2001:345) are of the opinion that the attitude and morale of teachers constitute a critical challenge in terms of their input to inclusive education. However, the essence of effective teaching lies in the ability of teachers to set up a learning experience that brings about the desired educational outcomes. Ultimately, it is still the learners, rather than the teachers who do the work, with the teachers simply helping to direct the learners’ cognitive processes. Importantly, teachers need to realise that their own attitudes towards learners with barriers to learning have an effect on these learners. Karagiannis, Stainback and Stainback (2000:4) indicate that learners in inclusive set-ups will develop positive attitudes towards other learners if they receive the necessary guidance and direction from adults. As a principal, I focussed on empowering teachers to be able to account for the embodied knowledge they held about learning within their classrooms and to enable them to create learning opportunities for learners who have been socially excluded from full participation within their classrooms.

Swart and Pettipher (2005:19) and Walther-Thomas, Korinek, McLauglin and Williams (2000:33) agree that the first step towards the establishment of an inclusive school is a collective vision of favoured conditions for the future. They remind us that principals need to play a strategic role in constructing this collective vision. Walther-Thomas et al. (2000:30)
signify that effective leadership, shared by all role-players, is vital for everyone involved with learners and their families. Teachers need leadership that establishes direction, aligns key participants, motivates and inspires others, and produces useful changes in the school as an organisation. I had to concentrate on keeping up the motivation of teachers, assist them in finding creative solutions, meet the challenges they encountered and stimulated critical reflection, which is crucial for any development to take place (DoE, 2005b:17). I believe that it is time to listen to teachers that are within the profession and allow them the power to direct the future of education. In the theatre, there is a saying, “No role is a small role”. The same applies to education: everyone within the profession should drive innovation, everyone should embrace change; and everyone needs to take responsibility for results.

Jasman (2001) articulates that the synonym for the term “effective” is “powerful”. Effective continuing professional development has power – power to change teachers, students, learners and the entire school system in general. If the constituent of teaming is effective and high in power, teaming will have a positive effect on teachers. Teachers wanted to be the origin of their own learning and transfer their learning into their daily practices.

8.2.3 Lack of learning communities

A supportive school culture is needed, and teachers experience that the word *praxis* defines just that: to the process whereby theory, lesson and skill are enacted to the benefit of the child. The reflective approach and my own experience in teacher professional learning in settings led me to accept that adults and children learned best when actively involved in what they were discovering, because they are actively involved in applying and practising their actions and knowledge.

“Why are we here?” became our mantra. Our comfort zone had been contravened, risk-taking had been initiated. Teachers experienced that when they treated inclusion and intervention as integral and essential parts of everything they did, the above question would be answered. We created within teachers and learners the culture of “I can,” where finding positive ways of meeting our everyday challenges became the norm.

Teachers expressed concern that there were not enough opportunities for them to be part of a continuous learning community and shared the idea that a learning mentor might successfully
address this barrier (see Appendix 5). This led to our next question: **What is a learning mentor and how can this person be incorporated into everyday school life?** According to Clutterbuck (1999), mentoring is a process through which one person (mentor) is responsible for overseeing the career and development of another (protégé) outside the normal management/subordinate relationship. However, the role of a learning mentor is a formal one. It should be done within an educational setting. My critical friend, personal mentor and life coach *Lynn, availed herself to be our school’s mentor. In the past, she had already been involved in staff development activities. We felt that she had been on a learning walk through our school already. She knew our institution and would find herself doing the following:

- Working with teachers to develop an action plan for moving forward.
- Offering guidance and support with personal and professional issues.
- Providing opportunities for teachers to enhance their self-esteem and teaching confidence for inclusivity.
- Working with other professionals to support teachers with the barriers to learning they experience.
- Coordinating, developing and running groups on issues such as identification and inclusive management.

Looking at the overview of learning mentor activities and interventions, Lynn worked individually on a one-on-one basis with teachers and collectively in group activities, which included workshops and group sessions. Teachers became active meaning makers in their own learning. The constructive-developmental theory of Robert Kegan (19982, 1994) was particularly relevant to what was happening in our development, because emphasis on understanding and attending to adults’ different ways of knowing enabled us to build a school focused on inclusive education and at the same time support adult growth and learning. Transformational learning changes the “how” a person knows (Drago-Severson, 2009:35).

John Dewey (1933:30-33), the father of reflective thinking, recommends:

1. Open-mindedness, which is the active desire
   - To hear more than one side.
   - To give heed to facts from whatever source they come.
► To give full attention to alternative possibilities.
► To recognise the possibility of error even in the beliefs that are dearest to us.

We must therefore be willing as teachers to reflect upon ourselves and to challenge our own assumptions, prejudices and ideologies, as well as those of others (Pollard, 2008:20).

2. Whole-heartedness, which is willingness to throw yourself totally into an endeavour. Dewey suggests:
► Teachers should be dedicated, single-minded, energetic and enthusiastic.

3. Responsibility as a form of integrity, a willingness to consider the consequences of possible changes and to go forward if they are consistent with your beliefs.

Teachers were of the opinion that as staff we should give acknowledgement to the concept of: “We’re in this together”, evident through dialogue. The more we talked, the more we wanted to find out about this concept. We spoke a common language, and this aided our further understanding and learning. “I have learnt nothing from life”, wrote Omar Khayyam, “except my own amazement at it.” In addition, I realised that we have learned to do things for ourselves”. Hannell (2008:114) suggests that school leadership, policy development and ongoing professional training are all-important elements in the development and maintenance of an inclusive school community. However, Bolster (1983) states that teachers’ knowledge is specific and pragmatic and resistant to development. I want to emphasise that this idea gives little incentive to change; the evidence I collected, supported alternative ideas and practices. My value of social justice mobilised me to act in order to bring about change (see 6.1.4).

Meeting the individual needs of learners is an ongoing process that requires the involvement of many members of the school community (internal and external) working together towards a collective goal. Therefore, individual commitment is an essential ingredient in an inclusive school. My personal learning in the area of identification of special needs included the development of systemic work and higher order questioning, analysing data and generating evidence. I became more aware of the benefits of belonging and participating in a collaborative network of action researchers, who contributed to my professional and personal knowledge.

As the leader in my school, it was important that I showed my colleagues that I valued their contributions and that every decision we made, was in the best interest of our learners.
created the necessary time and space for teachers to perform their required roles. This offered teachers the vision to encourage a sense of freedom to try out and share new ideas to improve practice. We supported each other with care, concern and practical assistance when the going got tough, which it often did. Personal well-being became a priority to my learners, children, colleagues, the school and me; if I were not well, they would all suffer. The advantages of teamwork are also fully documented. Stott and Walker (1999:51-52) propose that “the advantages of teamwork are taken almost for granted, given the extensive coverage in recent education literature”. The benefits they cite should be familiar to any student or practitioner interested in team management, including “collaboration, empowerment, cooperation and consultation” (Stott & Walker, 1999:51). They refer to arguments that teamwork provides teachers with “a significant role in school decision making”, “control over their work environment”, and “opportunities to contribute to [a] range of professional roles” (Stott & Walker, 1999:52). Finally, they document the claims that teams can solve problems more creatively than individual leaders and that modern organisations need 'processing machines' to deal with the overwhelming flow of information (Stott & Walker, 1999:53).

8.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Please read me another story, Mummy. Well, my dear girl, what about The Wonderful World of Oz? Yes, please read on...

Just as Dorothy and her friends followed the Yellow Brick Road one step at a time to lead them to the Great Oz and find their way home, if we approach our challenges one step at a time, we, too, will find our way to inclusivity. The following is a number of recommendations arising from collaborative discussions and interaction with teachers and students:

- Teachers must teach understanding, not just to impart knowledge and skills.

From my teachings, I want my learners to form a holistic concept so that they are able to bring facts and skills together and see their connections and relevance in their lives. We must therefore become intentional teachers, so that we can better plan for instructional options to reach all of our learners. We must plan for learners who need information visually, learners who learn best through discussions, or learners who need language support. Let us think of education as a means of developing our greatest abilities, because in each of us there is a
private hope and dream which, fulfilled, can be translated into benefit for everyone and greater strength for our nation (John F. Kennedy, President).

The stories our learners bring to our classes are an integral part of their humanness. There is no more significant time than now to recognise our learners’ personal needs; therefore we must create environments of love, recognition and support. When we take the time to get to know our learners as people, they are more likely to trust us and respect us. Only then do we stand a chance of opening the pathways to the one thing we know can help them overcome their challenges (Kryza, Duncan & Stephens, 2010:17).

- Limited human resources and limited time constraints must be addressed by identifying the human resources available within the school and the community at large.

Volunteers may include parents who are unemployed, and retired persons, especially teachers, who could be used as mentors and bring their knowledge to the classroom so that knowledge can be derived from a variety of perspectives. For me, education and inclusivity are about people, therefore, it is important for all to have their say and have their voice heard. Inclusivity can never be fully achieved; to me, it is a verb, always unfinished, always revisable.

- Experienced teachers are irreplaceable in the early professional development of newly qualified teachers, therefore mentoring needs to be ubiquitous in every school in supporting reflective professional development and the professional well-being of individual teachers.

Teachers must become more aware of the complexities of their work and be able to take action, which will influence positively on their growth. Professional development offers a great deal of personal fulfilment. The characteristics of a teacher are just as significant as the attributes of a learner’s background (Wenglingsky, 2002). The powers teachers have to shape learners’ lives are immense and the possibilities are inspiring. Inspiration to me is the calling to proceed even though we are unsure of goals or achievements – it may even be claimed that we enter unchartered territory. Telling my story facilitated the formation of a scab over the injuries of exclusion I suffered over the years. However, reading my autobiography reminded
me that the scab was a gift to me. It indicated that the essence of *Ubuntu* and inclusivity was working within me. Reflective opportunities for teachers must be created so that they can take an active part in identifying and reviewing their own performance and professional development needs.

- **Schools need more teacher-led school improvement models to enable teachers to make more of a difference in their schools by making a greater contribution to development work, which will result in improved learning outcomes for learners.**

Senge’s (1992) as cited in MacBeath and Mortimore (2001:17), view of organisational learning disabilities, which presents blocks to improvement, include:

- Teachers projecting their own deficiencies onto their learners.
- Teachers clinging to past practices.
- Defences built up against threatening messages from outside.
- Fear of failure.
- Seeing change as someone else’s job.
- Hostile relationships among staff.
- Seeking safety in numbers (a ring-fenced mentality).

However, MacBeath and Myers (1998) suggest the following seven steps to be taken in sequence and over time en route to becoming a learning school:

- Promoting a learning climate.
- Identifying the green shoots of growth.
- Identifying the barriers.
- Sharing pedagogical leadership.
- Creating intelligence from within.
- Using critical friends.
- Building resilient networks.

Therefore, I recommend that as learning organisations, schools need to collect as much data about themselves. Therefore, a new school experience for our school needs to be designed,
which will involve learners, parents, teachers and the officials representing the Education District Office, in altering some deeply embedded and unquestioned habits and practices. Professional learners need to be encouraged to seek out direct evidence from practice.

- **Teaming needs to be implemented in all schools, to discuss challenges and successes, to implement a new concept of implementing inclusive education in classrooms, which are workable, and at the same time bridge the gap between theory and practice.**

The clustering between teachers will augment collaboration, development and the sharing of skills, knowledge and expertise. They will be making sense and creating effective learning opportunities by using new knowledge. They will test their new experiences against previously learned ways of thinking and doing things. Teachers will be afforded the opportunity to have joint production by using the ideas of others through what they say, make or write.

Teaming assists continuous professional development and accommodates new initiatives, requirements and challenges. Schools and universities will thus be able to designate their roles more successfully. Teachers will be able to identify goals that can build on what learners know and already can do, understand why different approaches work, acknowledge the benefits to the team and establish a learning environment that supports risk-taking and innovation. Continuous development within schools needs to be protected and sustained, which is why action and reflection need to be continuous on a day-to-day basis.

- **Utilising emotional intelligence for teacher development.**

*If we come to understand that we can educate others only through ourselves, the question of education is made void, and only the question of life is left. “How must I live myself?” I do not know a single act in the education of children which is not included in the education of oneself* (Leo Tolstoy).

We all admire and appreciate persons who have good interpersonal skills, live their lives by a clear moral code, and are able to show their own feelings and have empathy with the feelings of others. These individuals are more often than not confident when they take decisions in
life and are brave in facing up to difficult situations; they are enthusiastic and show resilience in seeing things through, both at work and in their personal lives. Irrespective of their intellectual abilities, these individuals appear equipped both to get the most out of life and to deal with problems. Teachers are caring for more than children’s intellect; therefore, schools must also take responsibility for their personal development. Therefore, I recommend workshops for teachers in EQ; it will not necessarily provide solutions to problems, but a set of strategies for answering questions. EQ does not just focus on the individual or the situation, but emphasises both the power of the situation and the importance of individual differences.

● **Staff development leadership**

As teachers within an inclusive school environment we must bring hope, compassion, honesty, openness and authenticity as a way to increase people’s personal power and control and not to play on their fears. Teachers’ presence in our school must bring about an upsurge in energy, excitement, and active involvement.

Teachers need to search for and find their identity; integrating all the different parts of their education into a healthy whole to create inclusivity and a sense of togetherness within our schools. This is especially difficult for teachers who hail from the pre-democratic education system within South Africa and are now expected to function effectively in a post-apartheid South Africa with a new set of demands. Teachers find it extremely difficult to operate separately from their socio-cultural realities. In this study the journal and autobiographical writings allowed us to follow a trail, marking our steps through life; our memories stretched backwards in time to our childhood and permitted us to tell our life stories as adults. I can vouch that my autobiographical writing had positive spinoffs for my own social and emotional development. Acknowledging my whole life; integrating what I remember with what I simply know about my life.

Exclusion implies rejection, and the continuous pressure put on schools to raise levels of educational attainment and specifically the writing of the Common External Exams for Grade 3 and 6 learners will further enhance exclusion within South African schools. Therefore, it is incumbent on us as teachers to ensure that we keep pupils at risk of exclusion part of the educational setting within mainstream. We should not allow our possible negativity towards
inclusion to have a negative impact on our work within a collaborative milieu and our own well-being, but begin to build mentoring communities in our schools and school communities.

8.4 LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

This study had certain limitations. Firstly, one of the amazing experiences during this study was successfully encouraging teachers to become willing participants in my action research project. Teacher morale has been very low in recent years and mere participation in this study required that their cognition regarding personal and professional objectives be permeated by review and analysis procedures. Much pessimism, traditionalism and bureaucracy, to name but a few challenges, complicated these exercises.

Time is a highly valuable commodity in teaching and learning especially considering how teachers have to provide the best possible experiences for all children, particularly those vulnerable to inequalities in provision. It is challenging to keep teachers motivated to make time to participate in this kind of research. Due to this limitation, my study was confined to my own school and to my own development.

Most teachers at my school had not been sufficiently prepared by their pre-service education to engage in academic discussion and collaborations, therefore, they had very limited understanding of the sources available within them. This led to lack of enthusiasm at times to answer questions, which was paramount in the effective planning and delivery of an inclusive curriculum.

Initially, teachers were very wary of new practices that would impact on their workload and their initial scepticism lead to a rejection of inclusivity under consideration. At first, I was not aware of teachers’ points of view.

Time was arguably our school’s most valuable resource, but it was not effectively used by most of us. I am not very confident that my research is transportable from the spontaneous emerging of new knowledge, to the classroom setting, which is sheltered, highly controlled and limited in terms of resources.
Notwithstanding this study’s limitations, as mentioned above, I foresee that it will contribute significantly to the effective implementation and integration of inclusive education to understand individual differences in learning capabilities and learning styles. Teachers will be able to adjust their teaching to the unique capacities of those learners in their classroom who come from impoverished homes.

8.5 FINAL CONCLUSION

Recognising and developing the strengths and positive qualities of marginalised learners are two fundamentally important ingredient/approaches when promoting social inclusion in a school. Teachers should try to stimulate and encourage values such as inclusivity, *Ubuntu* and social justice within their learners and to give recognition to these as important foundations of learning. They can try teaming learners who seems to lack motivation and participation, with partners who model willingness to explore and go beyond the basic tasks.

Inclusion is a two-way street and learners themselves are an important aspect of this process and partnership. Learners need to have enough self-esteem, self-confidence and optimism to believe in their own entitlement to equal opportunities. If learners feel that they do not really belong in a classroom, then inclusion is not happening.

Hannell (2008:114) states that school leadership, policy development and ongoing professional training are all important elements in the development and maintenance of an inclusive school community. If we want to educate our learners holistically, it is imperative that teachers work with colleagues and parents to establish good communication regarding the learners’ well-being, learning objectives and outcomes and their well-being. Openness, cooperation and the implementation of strategies for sharing information can help to create an atmosphere of trust, make everyone’s job easier and support the final goal of enabling learners to thrive within our classrooms and in their individual communities.

This study has taught me that inclusivity is the core route to improvement. As Figure 8.1 illustrates, social cohesion requires:

1. that learners have certain skills, new knowledge, and competencies;
2. additional resources (time, ideas, expertise and dialogue); and
III. that there is new motivation in that teachers and learners desire to put forth the efforts to navigate pathways to inclusivity

For teachers who need to change in order to become more socially inclusive, leadership that is by example rather than by "lecturing" or "coercion", appears to be appropriate and influential. Instead of being advised and reminded about the moral justifications for inclusivity, teachers tend to prefer to observe successful practices upon which they can base and develop their own approaches (see, for example 5.4 and 6.3). By observing, and reflecting with others, on socially inclusive teaching practices, teachers tend to get better at finding their own ways and devising contextually appropriate inclusive practices.

When schools do this, they often mobilise more power for inclusivity. Through teaming, we will be able to create a pipeline of future teachers who can carry on, possibly even more effectively than we did. We further also highlighted that the best legacies have a touch of Ubuntu.

In conclusion, I would like to revisit my introductory metaphor in Chapter One: the image of lilies growing in muddy water. I used this to demonstrate the capacity of every individual to achieve his/her potential in spite of obstacles. This endeavour required the conquering of mountains and facing up to challenges, with the summit being the final objective. Teachers working together as collaborators in negotiating our pathways to the summit of inclusivity, through various intervention strategies (cycles) managed to pave their way to the common goal, which was the elimination of exclusivity by combating it with the creation of teaming opportunities for all learners irrespective of abilities and/or disabilities. Lilies, therefore, do grow in muddy waters; in fact, they do not only grow there, they thrive, given that the mud provides a variety of nutrients. My school offers effective learning for learners to force them to the surface in reach of oxygen. Here learners my young learners’ buds develop into gigantic leaves "knowing" that the more they cover the river surface with abundant leaves (education), the more will they be able to make use of sunlight (learning), these water lilies make ample use of daylight to perform photosynthesis (growth).
ABBIBIOGRAPHY


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Jerald, C. (2007). *School culture. The hidden curriculum (Issue Brief)*. Learning Point Associates in Partnership with the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) and WestEd.


APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL  
NMMU RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HUMAN)  

TO BE FILLED IN BY A REPRESENTATIVE FROM THE FACULTY RTI COMMITTEE:

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<td>Ethics approval given</td>
<td>Referred to REC-H (if referred to REC-H, electronic copy of application documents to be emailed to <a href="mailto:Kirsten.Longe@nmmu.ac.za">Kirsten.Longe@nmmu.ac.za</a>)</td>
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GENERAL PARTICULARS

TILE OF STUDY
Concise descriptive title of study (must contain key words that best describe the study):
PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION IN SCHOOL: REFLECTING ON OURSELVES

PRIMARY RESPONSIBLE PERSON (PRP)
Name of PRP (must be member of permanent staff. Usually the supervisor in the case of students):
PROFESSOR W.L. HOLDERNES FACULTY OF EDUCATION, NMMU SOUTH CAMPUS, P.E., 6031
Contact number/s of PRP: bill.holderness@nmmu.ac.za (E-MAIL) / 083 389 2113 (CELL)
Affiliation of PRP: Faculty Education; Department (or equivalent): ADVANCED STUDIES IN EDUCATION

PRINCIPLE INVESTIGATORS AND CO-WORKERS
Name and affiliation of principal investigator (PI) / researcher (may be same as PRP):
DEIDRE CHANTE GEDULD Gender: Female
Name(s) and affiliation(s) of all co workers (e.g. co-investigator/assistant researchers/supervisor/co-supervisor/promoter/co-promoter). If names are not yet known, state the affiliations of the groups they will be drawn from, e.g. Interns/M-students, etc. and the number of persons involved:
NOT APPLICABLE

UDY DETAILS
Scope of study: Local | If for degree purposes: Doctoral
Funding: No specific funding
Additional information (e.g. source of funds or how combined funding is split)
Are there any restrictions or conditions attached to publication and/or presentation of the study results? NO
If YES, elaborate: (Any restrictions or conditions contained in contracts must be made available to the Committee)
Date of commencement of data collection: JANUARY 2009  Anticipated duration of study: TWO YEARS
Objectives of the study (the major objective(s) / Grand Tour questions are to be stated briefly and clearly):
(1) TO IMPROVE LEARNER PARTICIPATION AND INTERACTION; (2) TO DEVELOP LEARNING AND TEACHING STRATEGIES (3) TO SHARE ACQUIRED KNOWLEDGE WITH OTHER EDUCATORS.
Rationale for this study: briefly (300 words or less) describe the background to this study i.e. why are you doing this particular piece of work. A few (no more than 5) key scientific references may be included: CHILDREN FROM IMPOVERISHED HOMES ARE SOCIALLY EXCLUDED FROM EDUCATIONAL PARTICIPATION IN MOST OF OUR CLASSROOMS. HICKEY A. DU TOIT (2007) STATE THAT SOCIAL EXCLUSION IS A FORM OF DEPRIVATION EXPERIENCED BY PEOPLE WHO ARE DENIED THE BENEFITS ENJOYED BY MOST MEMBERS OF AN AFFLUENT SOCIETY THROUGH POVERTY OR THROUGH BELONGING TO A MARGINALIZED GROUP AND RELATES TO THE ALIENATION OR DISENFRANCHISEMENT OF CERTAIN PEOPLE WITHIN SOCIETY. SOCIAL EXCLUSION LEADS TO LOWER CAPABILITIES, WHICH IN TURN REDuces THE PROSPECTS FOR ESCAPING POVERTY AND PEOPLE’S ABILITY TO ASSERT THEIR RIGHTS. MY RESEARCH BEGAN WITH MY QUESTIONING THE POLICY THAT LABLES SOME LEARNERS AS HAVING BARRIERS TO LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT (LOMOFSKY & LAZARUS, 2001). ENGELBRECHT AND GREEN (2007:54) ARTICULATE THAT BARRIERS TO LEARNING INCLUDE SOCIO-ECONOMIC BARRIERS, DISCRIMINATORY NEGATIVE ATTITUDES AND STEREOTYPING, INFLEXIBLE CURRICULA, ETC. THIS CONCERN DEVELOPED INTO FURTHER INQUIRING OF THE LITERATURE, THEORY AND RESEARCH IN THE FIELD. BY MEANS OF CHALLENGING CONTEMPORARY PERCEPTIONS I TOOK THE FIRST STEP IN A LARGER TRANSFORMATIONAL PROCESS OF MY THINKING AND PRACTICE. MY VALUES ARE BASED ON THE PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING THE RNCS (2003:5), WHICH GIVES RECOGNITION TO UBUNTU, SOCIAL JUSTICE, INCLUSIVITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS. HOWEVER, I MUST STATE THAT I DO NOT BELIEVE THAT ANY INDIVIDUAL CAN FORCE CHANGE IN THE WAY ANOTHER INDIVIDUAL THINKS ABOUT HIM/HERSELF AND CONSEQUENTLY HOW THAT PERSON FEELS ABOUT HIMSELF. IT IS POSSIBLE ON THE OTHER HAND TO TREAT AN INDIVIDUAL IN A WAY THAT CHANGES THE INDIVIDUAL’S FEELINGS ABOUT HIM/HERSELF. WILLIAM, PARKER-REES AND SAVAGE (2007:122) SUGGEST THAT BY TACKLING MULTIPLE DISADVANTAGES EARLY IN THE LIVES OF CHILDREN MAY HELP BREAK THE CYCLE OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION. I CAN ACHIEVE THIS IF I EMBRACE A SYSTEMIC PARADIGM IN WHICH THE STRUCTURES AND FUNCTIONING OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEMS ARE CALLED INTO QUESTION (ENGELBRECHT & GREEN, 2007:99).

ETHODOLOGY

Briefly state the methodology (specifically the procedure in which human subjects will be participating) (the full protocol is to be included as Appendix 1):

BY ADOPTING A SELF-STUDY ACTION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY, I HAVE FOUND AN APPROACH THAT ENABLES PRACTITIONERS LIKE ME TO OFFER THEIR LIVING EDUCATIONAL THEORIES AS THEY SEEK TO ACCOUNT FOR THEIR PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES (McNIFF AND WHITEHEAD, 2005). MY JOURNALS WILL CONTAIN RECORDS OF BOTH WHAT I DID AND WHAT I THOUGHT. I HAVE INCREASINGLY THROUGH THIS METHODOLOGY BECOME MY OWN AGENT OF CHANGE AND WILL BE ABLE TO REDIRECT MY OWN COURSE (DONALD, LAZARUS & LOLWANA, 2006:26-28).

State the minimum and maximum number of participants involved (Minimum number should reflect the number of participants necessary to make the study viable)

| Min: 40 | Max: 50 |

RISKS AND BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY

Is there any risk of harm, embarrassment or offence, however slight or temporary, to the participant, third parties or to the community at large? NO

If YES, state each risk, and for each risk state i) whether the risk is reversible, ii) whether there are alternative procedures available and iii) whether there are remedial measures available.

Has the person administering the project previous experience with the particular risk factors involved? NA

If YES, please specify:

Are any benefits expected to accrue to the participant (e.g. improved health, mental state, financial etc.)? NO
If YES, please specify the benefits:

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TARGET PARTICIPANT GROUP

| If particular characteristics of any kind are required in the target group (e.g. age, cultural derivation, background, physical characteristics, disease status etc.) please specify: | NOT APPLICABLE |
| Are participants drawn from NMMU students? | NO |
| If participants are drawn from specific groups of NMMU students, please specify: | NOT APPLICABLE |
| Are participants drawn from a school population? | YES If YES, please specify: |
| If participants are drawn from an institutional population (e.g. hospital, prison, mental institution), please specify: | SCHOOL |
| If any records will be consulted for information, please specify the source of records: | NOT APPLICABLE |
| Will each individual participant know his/her records are being consulted? | YES |
| If YES, state how these records will be obtained: | PERMISSION FORMS SIGNED BY PARENTS/GUARDIANS & SCHOOL PRINCIPAL |
| Are all participants over 21 years of age? | NO If NO, state justification for inclusion of minors in study: |

CONSENT OF PARTICIPANTS

| Is consent to be given in writing? | YES If YES, include the consent form with this application [Appendix 2]. If NO, state reasons why written consent is not appropriate in this study. |
| Are any participant(s) subject to legal restrictions preventing them from giving effective informed consent? | NO If YES, please justify: |
| Do any participant(s) operate in an institutional environment, which may cast doubt on the voluntary aspect of consent? | NO If YES, state what special precautions will be taken to obtain a legally effective informed consent: |
| Will participants receive remuneration for their participation? | NO If YES, justify and state on what basis the remuneration is calculated, and how the veracity of the information can be guaranteed. |
| Do you require consent of an institutional authority for this study? | YES If YES, specify: DEPT OF EDUCATION (LOCAL), PARENTS/GUARDIANS |

INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS

| What information will be offered to the participant before he/she consents to participate? (Attach written information given as [Appendix 2] and any oral information given as [Appendix 3]) |
| Who will provide this information to the participant? (Give name and role) | MRS DEIDRE CHANTE GEDULD PI If "Other", please specify: |
| Will the information provided be complete and accurate? | YES If NO, describe the nature and extent of the deception involved and explain the rationale for the necessity of this deception: |

PRIVACY, ANONYMITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY OF DATA

<p>| Will the participant be identified by name in your research? | NO If YES, justify: |
| Are provisions made to protect participant’s rights to privacy and anonymity and to preserve confidentiality with respect to data? | NO If NO, justify If YES, specify: |
| If mechanical methods of observation be are to be used (e.g. one-way mirrors, recordings, videos etc.), will |</p>
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<th>ETHICAL AND LEGAL ASPECTS</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Declaration of Helsinki (2000) will be included in the references: YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like the REC-H to take note of the following additional information:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DECLARATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If any changes are made to the above arrangements or procedures, I will bring these to the attention of the Research Ethics Committee (Human). I have read, understood and will comply with the Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Research and Education at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University and have taken cognisance of the availability (on-line) of the Medical Research Council Guidelines on Ethics for Research (<a href="http://www.sahealthinfo.org/ethics/">http://www.sahealthinfo.org/ethics/</a>). All participants are aware of any potential health hazards or risks associated with this study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I AM not aware of potential conflict(s) of interest which should be considered by the Committee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If affirmative, specify:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| SIGNATURE: PROFESSIONAL W.L. HORDERNESS (Primary Responsible Person) | Date |
| 06 April 2011 |

| SIGNATURE: DEIDRE CHANTE GEDULD (Principal Investigator/Researcher) | Date |
| 06 April 2011 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCRUTINY BY FACULTY AND INTRA-FACULTY ACADEMIC UNIT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This study has been discussed, and is supported, at Faculty and Departmental (or equivalent) level. This is attested to by the signature below of a Faculty (e.g. RTI) and Departmental (e.g. HoD) representative, neither of whom may be a previous signator.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDICES

In order to expedite the processing of this application, please ensure that all the required information, as specified below, is attached to your application. Examples of some of these documents can be found on the Research Ethics webpage (http://www.nmmu.ac.za/default.asp?id=4619&bhcp=1). You are not compelled to use the documents which have been provided as examples – they are made available as a convenience to those who do not already have them available.

**APPENDIX 1: Research methodology**
Attach the full protocol and methodology to this application, as "Appendix 1" and include the data collection instrument e.g. questionnaire if applicable.

**APPENDIX 2: Informed consent form**
If no written consent is required, motivate at 4a). The intention is that you make sure you have covered all the aspects of informed consent as applicable to your work.

**APPENDIX 3: Written information given to participant prior to participation**
Attach as "Appendix 3". The intention is that you make sure you have covered all the aspects of written information to be supplied to participants, as applicable to your work.

**APPENDIX 4: Oral information given to participant prior to participation**
If applicable, attach the required information to your application, as "Appendix 4".

**APPENDIX 5, 6, 7: Institutional permissions**
Attach any institutional permissions required to carry out the research e.g. Department of Education permission for research carried out in schools.
APPENDIX 1 (a)
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Stenhouse (1975) suggests that research entails critical and self-critical enquiry, conducted in a systematic manner, which can contribute to the development of knowledge. Beginning a critical exploration of my educative practice and developing my own living form of theory (Whitehead, 1993:54), necessitated a search for an appropriate research paradigm defined by Bassey (1990) as a network of coherent ideas about the nature of the world and the function of researchers which, adhered to by a group of researchers, conditions the patterns Authentic research also requires evaluative criteria to test the credibility, validity and reliability of my theory and knowledge claims, given that the generation of theory or knowledge is not value-free, but is, in fact, a highly politicised act (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005). This thesis explains how I have monitored the nature of my educative influence in my practice already mentioned, and how, in the process, I have generated my own living theory of inclusive education. I trace the development of my knowledge, the origins, influences and events that have contributed to its development, and the challenges and refinements that subsequent experience, cognition and critical consciousness have visited upon it. I then address the transformative potential and significance of this synthesis of embodied knowledge in my educative settings.

McNiff and Whitehead (2005b) perceive action research as a form of narrative inquiry and describe knowing as a holistic practice (McNiff, 2002), where the boundaries between theory and practice merge as they interact with one another in a movement towards better education. I am drawn to this idea of theory as a form of practice and practice as a form of theory as they co-exist in a living dialectical relationship. As I make my claim to knowledge here in this thesis, I am aware that I am drawing my living theory from my practice and I see how my practice is the living expression of my theory. My practice gives rise to my theory and this theory, in turn, influences my practice, as both theory and practice interact in a mutually shared manner.

A firm belief in the capacity of people for inclusive education, and a steadfast commitment to developing pedagogies that would sustain those values and allow them to emerge in a living form in my practice influenced me to begin this study. By adopting a self-study action research methodology, I have found an approach that enables practitioners like me to offer
their living educational theories as they seek to account for their professional practices. This approach is well documented in the literatures (for example in McNiff, 2002; Whitehead 2004a, 2004b; Whitehead & McNiff, 2006), and has had influence for the transformation of existing social and cultural practices (see Church, 2004; Lohr, 2006; Naidoo, 2005; Pound, 2003). I hope that my thesis can contribute to this growing body of knowledge.

An action research methodology supports the idea of “teacher as theorist” (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005), an advancement from the proposal of teacher as “reflective practitioner” (Schön, 1995) and “teacher as researcher” (Stenhouse, 1975). Efron (2005), writing about the educator Janusz Korczak, says that Korczak, too, questioned the traditional positioning of teacher as transmitter of knowledge and implementer of others’ theories. For example, Efron states that Korczak was

… suspicious of the theorists’ presumption to guide educators in their practice, and he resented the view of teachers as passive transmitters of knowledge, authorized from above. He mocked the pretentious “expert” whose theoretical principles have limited value for the daily struggles of teachers (Efron, 2005:146).

She also suggests that Korczak appreciated the need for practitioners to investigate their own practice and interrogate their values:

…[He] appreciated that the uniqueness and mysterious nature of the human soul requires subjective, context-related, and intuitive perspective … Korczak’s ideas are still relevant to the current educational discourse and may stimulate new insights into the role of the educator as a researcher and knowledge producer who is an active advocate of change and reform (Efron, 2005:146).
(QUESTIONNAIRE)

Signed: ________________________________________  (Participant’s signature)

SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRES

Sample questionnaires to mainstream classes about experiences in school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What does it mean to be intelligent?</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are learners from impoverished homes dumb?</td>
<td>Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should boys and girls tell their friends about their home environments and conditions?</td>
<td>Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you tell if someone in your class is a lazy student and is struggling to learn?</td>
<td>Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whose responsibility is it to help a boy or girl who finds it difficult to mix with other learners in the school?</td>
<td>Response</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sample questionnaires to teachers and mainstream class peers following the presentation by pupils who participated in my research of their reports on their tour to Durban and what they learned from the experiences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What did you learn about learners in your class from impoverished homes?</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What other questions do you have?</td>
<td>Response</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sample questionnaires to parents of learners on their children’s needs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What are your child’s psychological needs?</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How is your child supported at home?</td>
<td>Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are your child’s coping responses?</td>
<td>Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does your child express his despair and distress?</td>
<td>Response</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 1(b)
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

ORIGINAL LETTER TO PARENTS OF PARTICIPATING LEARNERS REQUESTING CONSENT TO THE RESEARCH

Dear Parents

Re: PERMISSION TO UNDERTAKE RESEARCH (12 AUGUST 2009)

As part of my Doctoral research programme, I am conducting an action research into studying my work so that I can assist to create better learning opportunities for learners so as to reach their full learning potential and be fully inclusive in participating within my classroom.

My data collection methods include tape and video recordings of the children and myself in conversation, photographs, diary recordings, field notes and reports. Since I would be using video recordings I am asking your permission to be in the video and for it to be put into public domain. I guarantee that I will observe good ethical conduct throughout. I promise that I will not reveal the name of the school, colleagues, parents or children at any time. If you wish I would keep you informed of progress throughout. My research report will be available at school for scrutiny before it is published.

I would be grateful if you would sign and return the slip below at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,

_____________________________
DEIDRE CHANTé GEDULD

To Deidre Chanté Geduld,

I ____________________ (parent’s name), give permission for ________________ (child’s name) to partake in your research.

SIGNED: ____________________

(Parent’s name)
Hi A,

I am trying to be a good teacher and I hope you will learn what the best way for you to learn is. I might have to quote responses of you in my writing.

Can I use your ideas to make our lessons better?

Can I tell other children, teachers and other people about our work together?

Thank you,

MRS. D.C. GEDULD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FROM: ________________________________</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12th August 2009
APPENDIX 1(d)
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FROM OTHERS:
LETTERS TO COLLEAGUES REQUESTING THEIR INVOLVEMENT AS A CRITICAL AUDIENCE

Home address:
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
_________ Date: ______________________

Dear B

As part of my Doctoral research programme I am undertaking an action research project to study my own practice as a resource teacher of learners who come from impoverished homes to create learning opportunities so that they can reach their full learning potential. The ethical statement below is to assure you that I will observe good ethical practice throughout the research.

This means that:
• The permission of my Principal, The School Governing Council and the Department of Education has been secured before the research commenced.
• The permission of the children and their written consent was secured before the research commenced.
• Confidentiality will be observed at all times, and no names will be revealed of yourself, the school, the staff or the children.
• Participants will be kept informed of progress at all times.
• Participants will have access to the research at any time and all data relating to them will be destroyed.

I will require critical feedback from you on lesson plans, diaries, field note photographs, audio tape recordings and tape transcripts.

Yours sincerely,

Signature: __________________________

DEIDRE CHANTé GEDULD

To Deidre,

I, B, give you permission to use my feedback as part of your research.

Name: _____________ Signature: _______________
Contact person: Mrs Deidre Chanté Geduld (Cellno: 072 1355 897)

Dear Parent/Guardian

You are being asked to give permission for your son/daughter to participate in a research study. We will provide you with the necessary information to assist you to understand the study and explain what would be expected of your son/daughter (participant). These guidelines would include the risks, benefits, and his/her rights as a study subject. Please feel free to ask the researcher to clarify anything that is not clear to you.

For your son/daughter to participate, it will be required of you to provide a written consent that will include your signature, date and initials to verify that you understand and agree to the conditions.

You have the right to query concerns regarding the study at any time. Please advise your son/daughter to immediately report any new problems during the study to the researcher. Telephone numbers of the researcher are provided. Please feel free to call these numbers.

Furthermore, it is important that you are aware of the fact that the study has to be approved by the Research Ethics Committee (Human) of the university. The REC-H consists of a group of independent experts that has the responsibility to ensure that the rights and welfare of participants in research are protected and that studies are conducted in an ethical manner. Studies cannot be conducted without REC-H’s approval. Queries with regard to the rights of your son/daughter as a research subject can be directed to the Research Ethics Committee (Human). You can call the Director: Research Management at (041) 504-4536.

If no one could assist you, you may write to: The Chairperson of the Research, Technology and Innovation Committee, PO Box 77000, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth, 6031.

Participation in research is completely voluntary. Your son/daughter is not obliged to take part in any research. If your son/daughter choose not to participate in medically related research, his/her present and/or future medical care will not be affected in any way and he/she will incur no penalty and/or loss of benefits to which he/she may otherwise be entitled.

If he/she does partake, he/she has the right to withdraw at any given time during the study without penalty or loss of benefits. However, if he/she does withdraw from the study, he/she should return for a final discussion or examination in order to terminate the research in an orderly manner.
If he/she fails to follow instructions, or if his/her medical condition changes in such a way that the researcher believes that it is not in his/her best interest to continue in this study, or for administrative reasons, his/her participation may be discontinued. The study may be terminated at any time by the researcher, the sponsor or the Research Ethics Committee (Human) that initially approved the study.

Although your son/daughter’s identity will at all times remain confidential, the results of the research study may be presented at scientific conferences or in specialist publications.

This informed consent statement has been prepared in compliance with current statutory guidelines.

Yours sincerely

_______________________________
MRS DEIDRE CHANTé GEDULD
RESEARCHER
1 January 2009

cc: _______________________________

I freely and voluntarily give my child ________________________________ permission to participate in activities related to your Action Research Project. I understand that all data collected will be strictly confidential and used for research purposes.

Signature of parent/guardian : ________________________________

Name in print of parent/guardian : ________________________________

Date : ________________________________
APPENDIX 1(f)
ORAL INFORMATION

Orally, I will inform participants and their parents/guardians of the importance of the ecosystems in which they live and the availability of their resources there that can assist in the development of the individual learner so as to reach his/her fullest potential.

I will explain the aim of my study and also my modus operandi. If parents value their children, their kids will feel powerful and connected to the people around them.

I will allow opportunity for questions and discussions. I will invite any suggestions or advice, which will help to enrich the individual so that the system can become stronger. Lastly, I will emphasize the importance of relationship building.
APPENDIX 1(g)

LETTER TO SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

36 Amandla Street
Cleary Estate
PORT ELIZABETH
6059

11 AUGUST 2009

THE PRINCIPAL
Sanctor Primary School
Coleus Crescent, Sanctor
PORT ELIZABETH
6001

Dear Sir/Madam

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A CLASSROOM-BASED INQUIRY

As part of my Doctoral research programme, I am conducting a piece of action research into studying my work so that I encourage learners from impoverished communities to research their full learning potential. I am a student at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU), doing full research under the supervision of Professor W.L. Holderness.

My data collection methods will include photographs, tape recordings of myself and my children in conversation, diary recordings, field notes and reports. I guarantee that I will observe good ethical conduct throughout. I will negotiate permission to work with the children. I will secure permission from parents and children to involve them in the research. I guarantee confidentiality of information and promise that no names of the school, colleagues or children will be made public.

I hereby seek permission from you and the School Governing Body to conduct my investigation in the classroom. The investigation will be guided by a strict code of ethics, as prescribed by the Ethics Committee of the NMMU. All data collected during the investigation will be treated in a strictly confidential manner.

I promise that I will make my research available to you for scrutiny before it is published, if you wish, and I will make a copy of the report available for your files on publication.

I am available to answer any queries you may have regarding the nature of my investigation. Thanking you in anticipation of a favourable response.

Yours sincerely

_____________________
DEIDRE CHANTé GEDULD
Persal Number: 51678519

DATE
APPENDIX 1(h)
LETTER TO DISTRICT DIRECTOR

36 Amandla Street
Cleary Estate
PORT ELIZABETH
6059

11 AUGUST 2009

THE DISTRICT DIRECTOR
Department of Education
PORT ELIZABETH
6001

Dear Sir/Madam

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A CLASSROOM-BASED INQUIRY

I am presently an educator at the above-mentioned school, as well as a part-time first year Doctoral student at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU), doing full research under the supervision of Professor W.L. Holderness.

My study involves an intervention to create learning opportunities for learners from impoverished communities to reach their full learning potential. I aim to do a class-based inquiry.

The investigation will include a meeting with the parents of the participants, classroom observations, completion of questionnaires, as well as implementing my own learning and teaching strategies. The aim of my study is to create learning opportunities for learners from impoverished homes so as to reach their full learning potential.

I hereby seek permission from you and the School Governing Body to conduct my investigation in the classroom. The investigation will be guided by a strict code of ethics, as prescribed by the Ethics Committee of the NMMU. All data collected during the investigation will be treated in a strictly confidential manner.

If you require any further information, please feel free to contact me at school (041 4811872) or on my cell (0721355897). You may also contact my supervisor, Professor W.L. Holderness at 083 3892113.

I trust that my request will meet your favourable consideration.

Yours sincerely

________________________
________________________
DEIDRE CHANTé GEDULD
Persal Number: 51678519

DATE
Dear Prof Holderness

PROMOTING INCLUSION IN MY PRIMARY SCHOOL CLASSROOM

Your student, Ms DC Geduld, above-entitled application for ethics approval served at the meeting of the Faculty Research, Technology and Innovation Committee of Education (ERTIC), held on 06 October 2009.

We take pleasure in informing you that the application was approved by the Committee.

The ethics clearance reference number is H09-Edu-CDe-012.

We wish you well with the project. Please inform your co-investigators of the outcome, and convey our best wishes.

Yours sincerely

Mr Salie
Secretary: ERTIC
APPENDIX 3
TRANSCRIPT

The following is a transcript from a workshop with teachers and students at my school, during which I introduced the concept of coaching and mentoring for inclusive education. The meeting took place on the school premises in the afternoon. As of 12 March 2009 (as the coordinator for our school’s IBST and coordinator for IQMS) I spoke to the team, who consisted of Foundation Phase teachers and two students from our local university doing their practice teaching for the year at our school. I talked about my experiences of Continuous Professional Development within the school and particularly inclusive education and implementing it within the classroom.

The title of this workshop was: Why are we here? We also considered what had brought us to education as a profession, and what kept us in the profession. I followed the conversational form of eliciting information from the participants to get them talking. I did not want them to form the notion that I was forcing something new down their throats and that the investigation would benefit my personal studies only. Collective inquiry was my objective, and I did not want to awaken recollections of the enforced implementation of inclusive education by the Department of Education, as verbalised by participants.

I called in the help of a friend, a trained facilitator, because I realised that I would not be able to sustain the dialogue, as the topic confronted teachers’ set ways of talking and thinking. I did not want to get sidetracked into debates, arguments or manipulative consensus-building.

I had not formally planned what I would say: I simply began to speak. The words were recorded on a tape recorder and then transcribed by me.

“Welcome!”

We have introduced ourselves, and I am Deidre Geduld. This is my first school, and I have been a teacher for 18 years. I am very pleased to say that I have been a teacher-researcher and it is because I have been a teacher-researcher, that I am the teacher I am today. I would like to talk through a brief history of the teacher-research group we established here at Sanctor Primary
School. It began four years ago and the beginnings of it were because inclusivity was not being implemented at our school.

We looked at the role of the school management team in the management and implementation of inclusive education. Back then, I felt it would be an opportunity for SMT members to look at their own practice and improve what we are doing. We had a number of learners with special educational needs who were not adequately taught and it was not as it should be. I had done some research myself to get my M.Ed., and doing that, I had come across the idea of action research and the value it holds for personal and professional development. In discussion with the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University Action Research Team and Professor Bill Holderness, I decided to embrace this methodology and make it part of my living epistemology.

At our school, we have many learners who are not given the support, love and understanding needed to make a success of their lives, especially those who have barriers to learning. What we wanted to do was to be able to deliver a curriculum that was inclusive in catering for all learner needs, in the school. We are using the expertise of the University, their links with the international context, but also use what we know, our own school, our own teachers. Put these into a pond and see what we come out with in the end.

The first intention was focusing on teaching and learning. It was really only later that we brought in action research. It was really like opening people’s eyes. In such a collaborative approach, there is something you want to improve. The simplicity of an action research model; you go through a methodology and you ask yourself if you have succeeded or not. That is simply a good teaching and learning process. Now part of that was using the knowledge teachers had who had taught for many years, who wanted to better understand their own teaching and wanted to get involved.
Our meetings were held once a week. Twelve members of staff who would not normally talk to one another engaged in active talking about how they could improve their practice in school. What can I do better? You think of the theoretical side from the University with the assistance of our four students, “Well actually this is what theory says about this…” Mix all these together and you come up with lots of ideas and you can then go away and try to improve. What was important was that every member of staff who participated in the teaming process accepted that he or she could do his or her job better. I think that that is one of the hardest things for teachers to admit… that we can do it “better” and believing that “Yes, we can”.

*Greater professional confidence, enhanced knowledge, better understanding and improved teaching and classroom management skills were amongst the fruits of successful engagement in these activities.*

The challenge was in convincing teachers who have been teaching many, many years that they could change, that they could improve their practices. They were realistic in realising that they would encounter barriers, particularly in the South African education system, where role-players are very aware of the limitations and challenges that faced education. Teachers felt insecure and limited in improving the learning environment for their learners. We created our teaming group four years ago to see what we could do to assist learners who were socially excluded from participation to reach their full potential.

Teachers committed themselves to this process by giving of their time, to the benefit of all involved. Everything we did was linked to what we are actually doing in the classroom. Teachers’ usual approach to their teaching was isolating themselves from other teachers; teaming was something completely alien to them. I taught English every day in the classroom and I wanted to do my job better; the process was linked to what the others were doing in the classroom every day, so it would not become a burden.
Confirming the importance of the group, as a school, we have observed that each of the team members has filtered into the whole school improvement. Now, looking at the different enquiries, we are starting to ask “How can we make use of these?” We are starting to tap into the wonderful the skills that teachers have. Expert teachers have good, effective teaching skills; those who have actually thought it through know how to do reflective action research, which is very useful in improving teaching and learning in our classrooms. This goal is to create a culture of openness in the school; to bring on board mentoring and teaming and bring about a willingness to work with others, breaking down barriers between learning areas and different phases.

I constantly refer to teaming: it breaks down barriers within the school. The key, I think, is the fact that it took place on a regular basis. Our workshops and discussions were usually held for eight weeks at a time, and then we had a break during which we collected all our data within our classes as a team. Then we workshopped another focus point, a couple of months later. We met weekly, once a week – same place, same time – and quickly settled into a routine. The teachers’ commitment was really phenomenal, because everything was voluntary. There is a real need, a real desire for people to work together.

As part of our evolution and transformation, the teachers compelled the school to use the skills they possessed. A successful group like this one, grew less concerned about keeping their doors closed and was ignited to share freely with their colleagues. Skilled and knowledgeable teachers who teach for inclusivity will ultimately take more responsibility for themselves.

Individuals are now empowered to deliver sessions, improve practice and talk freely talk about the benefits of their practices to themselves and their learners. We arrived at this point deliberately and we think that this is the way forward for us. It allows the group to do more of the teaching itself, using the skills that we have established there.

In terms of the support that we have had from the University, there has been E-mail contact, usually with Professor Holderness, the action research group of the University, and my critical friends. We keep contact through E-mails so we E-mail very often and we draft intervention plans and they provide responses. We have one-on-one meetings in terms of the group, and we have also accessed feasibility of programmes through workshops as the research unfolded.
The next step was trying to strike a balance between students and teachers and being able to stir the more established members of the group on the same level. The key challenge was to bring new blood into the programme since the group has grown and developed for four years, implementing and managing inclusive education at school. That was the most difficult bit getting students convinced to think implementing inclusive education and not theory with all its challenges and newness.

It was very uncomfortable to come into a group where people know each other very well. Another challenge was that the students knew very little about classroom management in comparison to the teachers. A lot of thought needs to be given to how one integrates new people into one’s group. I think the students and teachers who were not part of the SMT were somewhat confused, because we were enthusiastically talking about participatory action research and so on, and they did not understand this. We need to give more thought to how we integrate new people and how we cater for different needs, including the needs of established people.

Teaming and mentoring was a massive challenge. We are playing ourselves, as a real mentoring school, but just four years ago before this group was established there was no real mentoring at this school. The little teaming and mentoring that took place did not really do any good at all. We approached this challenge by establishing many networks within the school, in order to create partnerships and relationships. Continuous interaction was also established between myself and Professor Holderness of the NMMU, with whom I had many discussions and contact sessions. I am writing a Ph.D and we are currently conducting an argument through emails that is fantastic, and the other great thing is that he is also my mentor on school leadership. The arguments and disagreements between us on best practices have broken down barriers.

Because we are getting better at teacher mentoring, more staff mentoring is now taking place. There was a tutoring system set up where students get the chance to be mentored. Training was going on for mentors, too, so it is really recognising that mentors need training, and that has all really come about because of the SMT. I think mentoring enables different levels of people in the school to work together; it was fantastic because the school principal came to a number of meetings. He would sit next to a student and you would not recognise that this is the principal talking to a student. It just breaks down all the barriers! There is no worrying about, what can I
say...? It is such an open discussion and that is what helps to release many emotions and yet to have that openness. Teachers claimed ownership to this programme and did not feel it was an idea coming from management forced down onto them.

I think that is brilliant! It is the external recognition and contexts for collaborative learning in which teachers challenge each other to grow. This intervention strategy afforded the teams the opportunity to build connections with one another and decrease feelings of isolation.

Teacher leaders would be able to help new student members “learn the ropes”, become familiar with Grade-Level standards, understand how to use data, and gain skills in classroom management and instructional strategies. Both veteran and student teachers would be able to acquire skills in recognising, identifying and addressing barriers to learning and create inclusive and enabling teaching and learning environments for all learners. At the heart of this mentoring system would be enablement and empowerment. The advocacy of this programme was capable of reassuring participants that they stood to benefit from it. My goal was to establish and implement a coordinated, regionalized system of personal development that would increase the capacity of the school systems to provide early intervening services (with an emphasis on inclusion), parallel with the general education curriculum, to at-risk learners and LSEN who have been socially excluded, as measured by improved learner progress and performance.

We have a running brief called the All Points Bulletin (A.P.B.), the group members were asked to seek the same thing: create better opportunities for learners with barriers to learning who were previously disadvantaged. The knowledge we have created – it gives a real validity to it.

Networking, the working with other schools, this bringing other people on board and you can see it growing. The more we can build in these networks, the better I think it will be. So many staff wants to get involved, but they just do not know how to. We never anticipated that this work here would still be going on expanding into our Intermediate and Senior Phases as well. There was such an amount of momentum and the challenge for us as a school would be to keep it going. You realise what people want, and need to keep them keeping on. This has probably been the single most important thing that I have been involved in and for the school in the last few years…” (Geduld, September 2010).
APPENDIX 5
TEACHER NARRATIVE

The following is a narrative written by Teacher B. This narrative was written in 2010. Our critical friend, *Lynn, asked the team at the time to write a brief narrative account of an episode that they felt they wanted help in dealing with. We then shared and discussed the narratives as a team looking to find solutions and ways of moving practice forward. I further used this narrative in my work with neighbouring schools to enhance effective networking in order to demonstrate the type of Ubuntu and inclusivity I wanted to establish in my work with them.

One response from one of the team member’s was:
“I can’t believe the way that she sums up everything that I come into contact with when working with learners with barriers to learning …” she captures exactly what I am feeling; feelings of fear and apprehension”.

Teacher B wrote:

*I thought about what I practise daily within my classroom – all the good things I do, which helped to define me when my self-esteem was at its weakest. It enabled me to initiate discussions with my peers, and through dialogue, we could combine theory and that which we learned within the classroom to improve our school as a whole.*

As a school, we were challenged to plan ahead to accommodate the needs of learners who have barriers to learning.

The numbers of these learners are growing, and we need to have support systems in place for them. Each learner with a barrier needs his/her IEP to create educational opportunities, for these learners have a right to access the curriculum, just as the rest of their peers. Currently, I think the Bill of Rights is ignored when teachers responsible for a child with special educational needs face facts and reality within the classroom.

The teachers in my school are unskilled and under-qualified to meet the learning needs of these learners. Very little training, workshops or support are available to teachers. The teachers need
support groups to assist them in meeting the ever-changing curriculum and administrative demands.

Our school’s teaming group compiled a Master Portfolio File for Learner Intervention. This activity brought new knowledge, skills and a new sense of commitment to teachers to make a difference in the lives of their learners. Through looking at our different lesson plans for inclusive education teachers’ abilities to work with these learners were enhanced through our collective discussions and the opportunities we received in collaboration with our peers, students from our local university and guidance from other experts in the field of inclusivity.

My greatest challenge is making it work within my class – accommodating all my learners and teaching for inclusivity. I now know what is expected of me pertaining to IEPs – now I need to teach. This was a good starting point for progress; immediately the names and faces of my learners with barriers to learning ran through my mind. I do not have the capacity to respond to my learners’ diverse needs. Many of the learners in my classroom speak Afrikaans as a home language, whilst they are educated in English. I neglected to see that all learners in my classroom are also a potential teacher and can motivate other children to acquire the confidence in communicating in English.

For me, the content of my teacher training remains unrelated to the nature of the teaching job and the conditions in which I work; there is a separation between theory and practice. Inclusive initial teacher education requires methods that are themselves inclusive, whilst I do not know how to apply it within my class context. This was an irritating issue for me. This all led her to one awful, daunting conclusion as to what the key issue was: her! What happened to the inspired and creative teacher who specialised in Foundation Phase Education, the HEAD of this Department? What happened to my ability to turn any adverse situation into a moment of triumph? Where is my desire to make every lesson count, to make every lesson perfect? Gone was that one thing prized above all else in the hectic world of a career: motivation.

However, those things were not gone; they would just become buried underneath the heaviest burden of all baggage: lack of self-confidence. I realised that the constant effort to achieve all
those things that had made me successful had become my symbolical albatross. This filled a small portion of my being with a precious and much sought-after quality: hope.

This was going to be a difficult journey, but I had already taken the hardest step, namely realising that there was a lot in this team to be positive about. This was not going to be a “fresh start”, or a “new approach”, but something a lot simpler. I was going to start to believe that what I was doing in that fifty minutes was going to make a difference, no matter how small. And, most important of all, I was going to come here with the power of intention.

I am better motivated now that everything is administratively in place and we received training from our educational psychologist. A more explicit monitoring system is in place and teachers within our school use learning styles that are more appropriate to each child’s educational needs. Liaising with colleagues and convening within our group is necessary to stay on top of problems arising from learner assessment. I now know that teachers will revisit past lesson observations and successful lesson plans. There were many positive points: a great place to work from, build on the successes, and the challenges present new learning opportunities.
APPENDIX 6
QUESTIONNAIRE FOR OLDENBURG STUDENTS

As part of my validation process, I asked eight Master’s Degree student teachers from the University of Oldenburg (Germany) to complete the questionnaire below. The questionnaire was completed following a presentation of my research evidence in support of my claim to have developed a new living theory of teaching for inclusive education in South Africa for learners who were previously excluded from participation.

Dear M

Thanks for the opportunity to speak about my work at the University of Oldenburg (Germany) on 5 November 2009. I am interested in your critical comments on the following questions in order to clarify whether my work is of value to others:

- Was anything in the content new to you?
  Working with so many learners in a class and not having a teacher assistant to accommodate learners with barriers to learning.

- What did I omit that you think that I should have spoken about?
  How you cope daily with all your challenges and still succeed at the end of the year.

- Can you envisage yourself within this classroom environment? What would you do differently?
  I cannot envisage myself within such a classroom with the huge numbers you teach at a time and with such limited resource. The most important resources within your classrooms are teachers – no computers, limited textbooks and reading material.

- What good practices, in similar lines, have you personally used?
Teaming, the value of learners as teachers, and buddy systems.

- Do you think that the approach that I used in my work is relevant for classroom-based teachers, for learning support teachers, or for student teachers and why?
  Yes, because the success you achieve with your learners is evident and it is very practical and implementable and holds many positives for the teaching profession.

Your input is highly appreciated because you have valuable information that can assist in my understanding of inclusive education and the implementation thereof.

Thanks, Didi

The question “Did you learn anything new?” was posed to establish if the new knowledge I claimed was in fact new to those in a different experiential than that experienced by my learners. Everybody answered “yes”, and went on to describe the new knowledge for them.
APPENDIX 7

LETTER FROM CRITICAL FRIEND

Letter of Recommendation
for Ms. Deidre Geduld

In November/December 2009 Mrs. Deidre Geduld was a visiting postgraduate student and guest of the Faculty of Education and Social Science and the Centre for South-North-Cooperation in Education at the University of Oldenburg, funded by the German Academic Exchange Service for a special exchange programme on “Teacher Education and Research with an Emphasis on Disadvantaged Learners in Selected Subject Fields” between Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University and the University of Oldenburg. Being the Coordinator of this programme I had the opportunity and honour to accompany and guide Mrs Geduld. She visited several schools for participant observation and interviewing teachers (in several cases together with me), as part of her project studies for her research thesis for the degree of D.Ed.

She was invited to report on the methodology and results of her research for the degree of M.Ed. in a meeting with academics, students and teachers. Her carefully prepared presentation and her contribution to the discussion were received very favourably.

From reading carefully her M.Ed. thesis and from the experience of visiting schools together with her, I got the impression that Mrs. Geduld is a well trained, competent and committed teacher and member of a school management team. As part of the action research approach in her inquiry into the role of the SMT in the implementation of inclusive education she has shown her extraordinary capability, sensibility and commitment in stimulating and activating such a team as an informal peer leader and supervisor (working together with an Educational Psychologist). I am saying this from my background of a teacher educator and former director of Teacher Education Programmes in Oldenburg, programmes with several integrated internships, which have been developed and enacted (starting in 1974) in close cooperation between the university and representatives of schools and the school administration in Lower Saxony.
As a result of her presentation and after studying the text of her M.Ed. thesis the Centre of South-North Cooperation in Education has offered Mrs. Geduld to publish her thesis as a book in a series of monographs edited by our Interfaculty Centre of Intercultural Communication, Education and Migration.

I am sure that the experiences of Mrs. Geduld in Oldenburg have strengthened her on-going self-and-action research practice as well as her willingness to share her innovative practice with colleagues.

Together with colleagues of our partner-university NMMU, I got the opportunity to visit, interview and discuss with principals and SMT members of very different schools in Port Elizabeth, Uitenhage, Paterson, East London and Cape Town, as well as to contribute to teaching in an ACE course on school management. Based on this comparative experience during the last decade I feel entitled to strongly recommend Mrs. Geduld for a school leadership position in a school with disadvantaged learners and committed to inclusive education.

Professor Emeritus Dr. Wolfgang Nitsch
APPENDIX 8
DATA COLLECTION METHOD

Image 8.1: Pasted labels

Image 8.2: Role-play to name-calling
Image 8.3: Discussion on feelings and emotions

Image 8.4: Report back
Image 8.5: Drawing and writing activity

Image 8.6: Collage – All about me
APPENDIX 9

LEARNER AUTOBIOGRAPHY ENTRY

My name is Rushane Peters, I was born on 14 March 1997 at the Livingstone Hospital, Port Elizabeth. I am the youngest child and the only son of my parents. My father was trained as an electrician at Eastern Training College. He fell sick during September 2007, and died on 26 September 2007 at the age of 36. My mother only received primary schooling and she is currently employed as a domestic worker.

I moved to my father’s grandmother, Ouma Sarie at the age of seven and my aunt Elizabeth enrolled me at Sanctor Primary School. I am playing soccer for my school. I also play golf for the South African Junior Golf Foundation (SAJGF).

A great moment in my life was when our school went on tour to KwaZulu Natal during June 2009. I enjoyed every moment of it especially the challenges placed before us by our teachers. I could at the end of every day evaluate how my confidence levels increased.