

## **An untold story**

This thesis is about teacher education. It is a narrative of attempted change in times of a national reform in a newly born African state. It attempts to explain and create an understanding of the forces that influence educational change based on the implicit notion that these forces have to a large extent their basis outside the reform itself, both in time and place. The thesis is divided into four major parts that represent the phases of the intellectual journey.

The first part is called *The Way* as it points out the travel direction. Here the troublesome move from being a participatory practitioner to a critical inquirer is addressed. The trouble is related to the fact that this move is made after eighteen years of concerned practice that has created engravings in the author's thinking and ways of acting that also affect the new position as a critical inquirer. The analytic tools are introduced, including the central concepts of hegemony and counter-hegemony, common sense and good sense.

The second part of the thesis is called *The Landscape*. It introduces the reader to the different parts of the traversing landscape that together build the conditions for reform. It addresses the broad global layers of influence on an African nation state, the prevailing common sense of financial and technical assistance agencies, and the modern school that landed on the African soil. It looks at the specific historical residues from previous educational eras before a detour is made in a different direction. This detour goes through an alternative landscape where attempts are made to connect education and political liberation, outside and inside Namibia. After this detour the journey returns to the main track and places the reform policy in an international perspective, before the positions of the reform participants are addressed.

The third part is called *The Struggle*. Here we enter the reform arena, the goal for our journey, and look at the struggle over teacher education reform. This struggle is carried out at three different levels: At policy level where an imperative reform framework is developed; At programme level where we visit three contested areas; and at institutional level where we visit areas that were instituted to create agency in support of the reform.

The fourth part is called *The View*. This part represents the retrospective view after the journey. It is through this retrospective view that an understanding is constructed of teacher education reform in Namibia as it has been represented and observed along the road and summed up as a transposed reform in a layered society. Before we descend from this viewpoint some holistic views on the whole journey and its conditions as well as some travelling suggestions for the future are offered that can expand the understanding of teacher education reform even further.

The road to Kwanza

## **PART ONE: THE WAY**



## Chapter One

### **Point of departure**

This thesis is about an ancient colonial system and the attempts to introduce something different. It is also about political struggle, conflicting ambitions, and the possibilities of teacher education reform. It is like life itself, full of surprises and challenges, no plain sailing and far from perfect.

It starts and ends in Africa. It tells a story about a different educational reform that was a break with the prevailing trends in development co-operation and teacher education. It all started in a war-torn part of Africa in the early 1980s.

#### **Once upon a time**

It was September 1983. I was a Swedish educator from Umeå University funded by the Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency (Sida).

It is early in the morning and still dark. The vehicle comes to pick me up to take me to the assembly point. I have been waiting almost a week in the capital for this moment because of the recent attack along the road. The rebels took a group of nuns as hostage. We were advised to wait until the road could be cleared by the military. I spent the extra days in the capital to prepare myself for the first visit to a refugee camp for Namibians, organised by the liberation movement South West Africa People's Organisation, SWAPO.

The assembly point is SWAPO's transit settlement just outside Luanda, the capital of Angola, and the lifeline to the refugee camp 300 km south-east from the city. We still have to wait for some hours before the military convoy starts to move. I am both excited and worried about this first encounter with the war situation in Angola and soon realise that it will become a tough journey. At this moment, I do not know that I will continue to

travel along this road for many years until Namibia's political independence in 1990.

The day in the convoy is tense. The convoy commander drives up and down the convoy to see to that the twenty vehicles keep the proper distance between each other. Half of them are heavy lorries with food and other goods for the camp, others are carrying civilians and all of them are loaded with armed soldiers from the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) to protect the civilians. The potholes on the road and the security situation mean that we moved very slowly. It takes us more than twelve hours to drive 300 kilometres. We arrive late in the evening at the refugee camp, the Namibia Health and Education Centre, Kwanza-Sul, which is known as *Kwanza*.<sup>1</sup>

The following day I met the Namibians who were in charge of the school at Kwanza. Some of them became my colleagues for eighteen years. These years were situated in a time of dramatic change. One was the fall of the Soviet Union, a strong ally to SWAPO as a liberation movement. Another important factor was the advancement of the USA as the number one world super power without parallel. A related factor was the entrance of the USA as a partner to the new Namibian government on educational matters. Another factor strongly related to the above was the general advancement of capitalism as the sole world order that the radical Egyptian scholar Samir Amin has characterised as an era of new forms of polarisation and global disorder.<sup>2</sup> These changes had a definite impact on the development of Namibia and teacher education reform. However, the most important change was that the first free elections took place in Namibia at the end of 1989. The previous liberation movement SWAPO became the largest political party and headed the first democratically elected government. Independence was proclaimed on the 21<sup>st</sup> of March 1990. This thesis reports my work from 1983 up until 2000.

---

<sup>1</sup> Dahlström, L. Personal experience, 1983.

<sup>2</sup> Amin, S. (1997) *Capitalism in the Age of Globalization*. London: Zed Press, p. 2

## **Aims and limitations**

My work was positioned in a situation where major educational changes were expected both by people directly involved and outsiders. Some of the expected changes did happen. Others did not. My work was placed at a meeting point between people from different social backgrounds, holding different social positions, and harbouring different social ambitions. It was also placed within the differences between intellectual will and lived experience.

The meeting point that gave rise to my inquiry was what officially has been called the national *teacher education reform* in Namibia. The Basic Education Teacher Diploma (BETD) programme and related developments were at the core of this reform. This thesis focuses particularly on the most intensive period of the national teacher education reform, 1993 - 1998, when I lived and worked in Namibia as the project co-ordinator of the Sida-financed Teacher Education Reform Project (TERP).

My involvement with teacher education for Namibians goes back to my first visit to Kwanza. It passed through three phases. First, the work that followed that visit, carried out by me and my colleagues during the period 1983 - 1992. It laid the ground for my future involvement. Secondly, the national teacher education reform, 1993 - 1998, that is the main focus of my inquiry. Thirdly, the period 1999 - 2000, when I continued to work on a part-time basis in Namibia travelling from my base in Sweden, reflecting more systematically on the reform process.

I will describe and look back on this reform process and the forces affecting it with critical and analytical eyes. By using the *reform* concept I have adopted the official conception. I have also acknowledged that the reform was an expression of an intentional intervention, initiated and sanctioned by the new political and educational leadership in Namibia. As such the teacher education reform was a top down process.

I am using the racial classification of people as whites or blacks, when I consider it to be needed for the understanding that I am aiming at. I apologise if some readers feel offended by this classification. However, my own view is that it is almost impossible to understand anything in a post-colonial African society if we pretend that this classification does not persist as a social signifier in the post-colonial society.

I focus on broad *structural forces* that affected the teacher education reform. These included historically formed forces that affected the formation of a post-apartheid nation state, the influential western educational beliefs and practices, and the global and local constructions of formal schooling. I also aim at identifying how these forces were played out amongst groups of actors and how, in the process, understandings about teacher education interacted with them. My inquiry addresses the following main questions:

- What *structural forces* influenced the teacher education reform in Namibia?
- What consequences of reform could be identified on *structural levels*?

The *structural levels* are related to the policy framework and the official steering documents for teacher education, programmatic imprints, and the institutions involved in the reform, i.e. the colleges of education and the National Institute for Educational Development (NIED). My inquiry is placed within the field of development co-operation organised by national and international donor agencies. I am aware of the controversies connected with international aid. Due to convenience I have chosen to use established concepts, like development co-operation and aid, to describe the activities organised by funding and technical assistance agencies.<sup>3</sup> By

---

<sup>3</sup> Samoff and Stromqvist have noted that there is a current preference for the term *funding and technical assistance agencies* amongst the recipient countries of foreign aid. See Samoff, J. and Stromqvist, N.P. (2000) *Managing Knowledge - For Whom? By Whom? With What Consequences?* Paper prepared for presentation at the Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association.

that I have taken the risk to fall pray of my own critical perspective. But it is a risk I have taken to facilitate communication.

Both teacher training and teacher education have been used to describe the preparations of teachers during the course of my work. I have chosen to use the concept teacher education, as it also became the concept used in Namibia. Teacher education has been chosen as it also reflects the view that the preparation of teachers is more than a technical affair.

My report is not a victory narrative, nor is it an evaluation that focuses on inputs and outputs. Rather, my focus is on a reform process that many have praised, some have scolded, and that has left very few indifferent.

### **Sources for my inquiry**

The *primary* source for my inquiry is my lived experiences as someone responsible for the largest support project for teacher education reform in Namibia after independence.<sup>4</sup> These experiences are first and foremost engraved as personal experience, but have also been documented in different ways, ranging from field reports to refereed research articles. I have also used a cluster of *secondary* texts in my inquiry. These are documents that are Namibian, representing Namibian interests, and produced by other individuals and institutions. These range from working documents to official publications.<sup>5</sup>

I also carried out retrospective interviews with a small number of representative persons at different levels. These interviews were carried out in March 2001. The interviews reviewed some of my preliminary findings to test their validity and to ask the respondents for their

---

<sup>4</sup> During the period 1993 - 1998 TERP utilised more than SEK 50 Million (corresponding to approximately 5 Million US\$) for fees, reimbursable and operational costs in Namibia. TERP Project Budget Data.

<sup>5</sup> Appendix 1 gives an overview over the type of data and documents used in my inquiry.

conclusions about the reforms. Six interviews were carried out as semi-structured interviews around selected themes from my preliminary findings. An additional interview was carried out in December 2001 with a high-ranking politician, who personalised the vision with the teacher education reform in Namibia. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.<sup>6</sup>

I also carried out classroom observations at two of the colleges in March 2001. I wanted to gain a first hand impression of the teacher education reform efforts after I left the reform arena. During these observations I used a format similar to that used in 1993 and 1994 as part of the data collection for the BETD National Evaluation.<sup>7</sup> The observations were to obtain information in two key subject areas in the BETD, Education Theory and Practice (ETP) and Mathematics Education, and to be able to relate my findings to the observed current status at classroom level. Classroom observations were carried out in each subject area at two colleges. Two female and two male teacher educators were observed. In feasible cases a post-observation discussion was also held with the teacher educator who had been observed.<sup>8</sup> Each observation was documented as a narrative description.

### **A participatory perspective**

Both the object of my narrative, teacher education reform, and the narrative itself have participatory characteristics. From this follows that the traits of my inquiry are affected by my own participation and professional preferences even when I try to objectify my own involvement. The following is an attempt to address this complexity.

---

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix 2.

<sup>7</sup> This observation format was developed and tested by Dahlström, Frykholm and Åsemar in 1994 and revised before they were used in the data collection for the BETD National Evaluation reported by Frykholm, C-U. (1995) *National Evaluation of the Basic Education Teacher Diploma: Broad Curriculum Issues*. Okahandja: NIED.

<sup>8</sup> See Appendix 2.

My own participatory perspective can be placed within the critical action research tradition elaborated by Kincheloe.<sup>9</sup> He has delineated what he considers as the requirements for critical action research. Within this perspective participatory practitioner inquiry is seen as a political action that questions the traditional notions of pure objectivity and truth. It embraces the value commitments of the participant, and acknowledges those of others and of the dominant culture. It accepts that professional consciousness is socially constructed. It attempts to uncover aspects of the dominant social order that undermine emancipatory goals. And lastly, it aims at improving practice.

This type of participatory practitioner inquiry can be characterised as partisan in nature.<sup>10</sup> My work together with Namibians in exile before independence was partisan from both external and internal perspectives. The external partisan aspect was related to the fact that the work was done as part of the activities of a liberation movement. There was also an internal partisan aspect in the sense that the common educational practice within the liberation movement, which was not much different from colonial education, was challenged from within through the work of myself and my colleagues. The partisan position also continued after independence. It attempted, in Callewaert's words, to "de-colonise the colonised mind of the anti-colonial teacher".<sup>11</sup>

My own background can also be viewed from a partisan perspective. I come from a conventional liberal middle class milieu in a

---

<sup>9</sup> Kincheloe, J. (1995) Meet Me behind the Curtain. In McLaren, P.L. and Giarelli, J.M. (eds) *Critical Theory and Educational Research*. Albany: State University of New York Press. 71-89.

<sup>10</sup> Liston, D.P. and Zeichner, K.M. (1991) *Teacher Education and the Social Conditions of Schooling*. New York: Routledge, pp. 133-134; 138-139.

<sup>11</sup> Callewaert, S. (1999) Which way Namibia? Or How to Decolonize the Colonized Mind of the Anticolonial Teacher? In Zeichner, K. and Dahlström, L. (eds) *Democratic Teacher Education Reform in Africa - The Case of Namibia*. Boulder: Westview Press. 222 – 247, p. 222. Professor Callewaert, University of Copenhagen, has followed the education reforms in Namibia since independence variously as a consultant, researcher, and tutor.

small mercantile town. The atmosphere at home was based on a secular mixture of dissenting and liberal beliefs and an opposition to presumptuousness. At an early stage I disappointed my parents' ambitions and became an educator instead of an educated merchant. As a teacher and a teacher educator I started to orient myself towards what was called progressive educational thought in the 1970s. I was influenced by ideas from Freire in Brazil, Freinet in France, and Illeris and others in Denmark.<sup>12</sup> In this way discussions of *conscientisation* became the introduction to a critical political and liberating dimension of education, of *pedagogy of the école modern*, a methodological alternative for the classroom and of *project work*, an example of a participatory educational praxis in teacher education towards social reconstruction. The meeting point between these educational ideas, an interest in international solidarity that had matured since the 1960s, and an intervening state power into my area of work, brought me as a volunteer worker to Botswana in 1980 and back to Southern Africa as a fulltime project coordinator in Namibia in 1993, with ten years of long-distance commuting in between.

The reform process in Namibia was built upon four factors, according to Callewaert.<sup>13</sup> First, there was a pervading political will for change held by the black majority and the political party representing it; secondly, there were only a few qualified Namibians who remained in education after their return from exile; thirdly, NIED was created as the

---

<sup>12</sup> Important publications were Freire, P. (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* New York: Seabury Press; Freinet, C. (1975) *För Folkets Skola* (Pour l'école du peuple). Stockholm: Wahlström and Widstrand; and Illeris, K. (1977) *Problemorienterad och deltagarstyrd undervisning* (Problem-oriented and participatory education). Stockholm: Wahlström and Widstrand. I visited Ballerup Nye Skole, a socialist lille-skole in Copenhagen, several times during the second part of 1970s. These and other international connections confirm that educational thought is influenced across national borders and continents in ways that cannot always be reduced to the simplistic North-South dichotomy.

<sup>13</sup> Callewaert op. cit.

professional wing of the ministry and a centre for the conceptualisation and national organisation of education reforms; and fourthly, the philosophical and professional input of the donor community in the form of projects and their material and human resources.

NIED became my place of work and the point from where the work I was responsible for emanated. Callewaert maintains that my involvement had two strengths; a “coherent progressive plan, tested and transformed by twenty years of African experience in collaboration with highly qualified international scholars” and my “practical involvement with the history of the struggle for an independent education in Namibia”.<sup>14</sup>

If I look back and place myself on the reform arena I would consider myself having had a rather powerful position as the co-ordinator of a foreign project with the main task to assist in the teacher education reform process. However, I would rate the acceptance of my preferential right of interpretation as more dependent on my political and educational capital arising from my previous experiences than on my official position as a project co-ordinator.

The primary accumulation of this capital started with the journey to Kwanza in 1983. Many black Namibians who were sympathetic to the new SWAPO government saw me and the project I was co-ordinating as their allies in the struggle that continued on a different level after independence. For example, Namibians in different positions expressed the opinion that TERP was different from other donor interventions because of its historical credentials. I am referring to the indisputable social and cultural bonds and extraordinary inclusiveness that was created beyond the interpersonal level by the periodic living and working together during the exiled war situation in Angola. This happened in a community literally cut off from the outer world except for the news reports from the BBC World Service and Radio Sweden. The other side of this coin was

---

<sup>14</sup> Callewaert op. cit. pp. 244-245.

that other Namibians, both blacks and whites, who had political preferences other than SWAPO, saw me and other advisers as a strong threat and as hampering their own positioning in the post-colonial era.<sup>15</sup> In addition, my position created a general closeness between myself, the project staff, the project activities and the new establishment symbolised by NIED and the re-born colleges of education. To sceptics of the reform this situation confirmed the common belief that the BETD was a TERP construction, foreign to the Namibian traditions, and therefore legitimate to attack. As Melber noted in his contributions as a peer-evaluator in a critical self-evaluation of the teacher education reform and its support:

It was less risky to blame foreigners for imposing new ideas upon people, than to seek active discourse and exchange with the local agents of such reform projects like the TERP.<sup>16</sup>

From a donor perspective TERP was an example of good practice.<sup>17</sup> It was seen as a good example of the organic development of a small initiative into a national support project by administrators who had followed the life of the project from its beginning. At other times however the project was considered as problematic. Conflicts of interest arose. Some of these conflicts had negative effects as noted in the Critical Self-Evaluation report carried out by a core group of the participants in the

---

<sup>15</sup> At an early stage in the national reforms (1993-94) there were even a number of scam campaigns published in newspapers politically opposed to the new leadership against the new strata of Namibian educators and foreign advisors who worked together for the reform.

<sup>16</sup> Melber, H. (2000) Comments and reflections by a peer evaluator. In Swarts, P. (ed) *Working Together Toward Teacher Education Reform: A Critical Self-Evaluation of Teacher Education and Support in Namibia*. Okahandja: NIED. 80 – 84, p. 82.

<sup>17</sup> See for example Craig, H., Kraft, R.J. and Du Plessis, J. (1998) *Teacher Development: Making an Impact*. Washington, DC: USAID and World Bank, pp. 32 - 43. This publication comprises a selection of good practices in teacher education support worldwide. The teacher education reform in Namibia and the support from TERP was included in this selection as the only project that was not financed by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

reform process, including myself.<sup>18</sup> And these effects extended to Namibians as well as foreigners involved in the reform process.

### Changed positions

My position as a critical inquirer became new. As a critical inquirer I was no longer an actor in development work. I was more of a retrospective observer. I made inquiries into the reform process instead of getting involved in the process. I acted as an inquirer instead of as a development worker. I was an observer looking at the reform process through my own experiences and the available documentation.

My inquiry had participatory and co-operative features. However, my position as the project co-ordinator of TERP did not allow me to act as a researcher. Even to prepare my future research through active data collection was considered unethical as well as problematic in practice. Therefore, I chose to make my inquiry in retrospect.

It was after eighteen years as an outsider-within and a living through practical encounters within the field of teacher education for Namibia that I stepped out and became a critical inquirer.<sup>19</sup> I am aware that this metamorphosis was to a certain extent an illusory act in the sense that I could not pretend that my previous experiences and my pre-judicious understandings could suddenly be left behind.<sup>20</sup> My pre-judicious

---

<sup>18</sup> This report was an attempt to create a more participatory and holistic evaluation model of a donor sponsored reform effort than what was normally the case at the time. Swarts op.cit. See also p. 232 ff.

<sup>19</sup> The concept *outsider-within* is from Griffiths, M. (1998) *Educational Research for Social Justice, getting off the fence*. Buckingham: Open University Press. This concept is also addressed on p. 35.

<sup>20</sup> I have chosen to construct the concept *pre-judicious* as a way to address the pre-understanding I as an inquirer carry along. By describing this understanding as pre-judicious instead of prejudicial, I want to indicate that the goal with the inquiry process is to create well-motivated and judicious understandings. I want to acknowledge Jörgen From and Carina Holmgren, colleagues at the Department of Education, who triggered me off on this by bringing up the issues of pre-understanding and prejudice in our

position would still guide and influence my inquiry. The best I could do was to make this position explicit and, by that, create an understanding of my move from the level of action to the look-out level.

My critical inquiry perspective parallels my view on pedagogy as a practice. This perspective attempts to uncover forces affecting social situations, just as critical pedagogy is to expose and change undemocratic practices and structures that produce or reproduce inequalities and oppressive social situations. My critical inquiry perspective also attempts to expose the effect of hegemonic powers in society, just as critical pedagogy understands the relations between ideology, power, and culture in the society at large and in the classroom, as a reflection of the larger society. The aim is to create more participatory practices within the formal school system. Critical inquiry is also concerned with the formation of common sense and official knowledge, just as critical pedagogy considers learning and education also to take place outside the school, affecting what is accepted as school knowledge. Critical inquiry and critical pedagogic practice must be related to the larger society by incorporating and unpacking experiences and by encouraging closer relationships between inquiry, pedagogy and society. Lastly, the critical inquirer must uncover his/her underlying assumptions to make it possible to judge the reasoning from the inquirer's expressed positioning just as the critical practitioner in the classroom needs to apply a reflective perspective on preconceived assumptions, values and interests. Through these strategies the critical inquirer and the practitioner can develop strategies in pursuit of social justice.<sup>21</sup>

---

doctoral seminars. From, J. and Holmgren, C. (2000) Hermeneutik. Unpublished paper presented at the Department of Education, Umeå University.

<sup>21</sup> These elaborations are based on Leistyna, P. and Woodrum, A. (1996) Context and Culture: What is Critical Pedagogy? In Leistyna, P., Woodrum, A., Sherblom, S.A. (eds) *Breaking Free - The Transformative Power of Critical Pedagogy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Educational Review. Reprint Series No. 27. 1-11; and Dahlström, L. (2000:c) Participatory and Critical reflections on the Attempts to transform Practice

My inquiry can also be described as an analysis of *text and context* in its broadest sense. The text is the mental deposits remaining from my experience together with the written documents I refer to. Context is what creates meaning for these texts and this context is created in the first instance by my choice of inquiry perspective.

### **An emerging perspective on critical and narrative inquiry**

My *inquiry* is inherently political. It is based on views that according to Griffiths “stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, [and] the situational constraints that shape inquiry”.<sup>22</sup>

My inquiry is placed within the domain of critical theory as developed by McLaren and others.<sup>23</sup> It is based on the view that the power and positions of actors in a reform process are influenced by the historical deposits made into common sense and official knowledge. In that sense my inquiry is based on a view that recognises fluency in human endeavours that connect the past and the present with the future. I adhere to the view of Walker who in connection with her inquiries in South Africa stated,

What is at stake here is the difficulty of stepping outside of one’s own taken for granted reality precisely because that reality is familiar. Unpacking experience depends on the discursive conditions of possibility, not least the interpretative frameworks which mediate that experience.<sup>24</sup>

---

Closer to Vision. In Dahlström, L. (ed) *Perspectives on Teacher Education and Transformation in Namibia*. Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan, 16-32.

<sup>22</sup> Griffiths op. cit. p. 4.

<sup>23</sup> See for example McLaren, P.L. and Giarelli, J.M. (eds) (1995) *Critical Theory and Educational Research*. Albany: State University of New York Press; and Giroux, H.A. (1997) *Pedagogy and the Politics of Hope*. Boulder: Westview Press.

<sup>24</sup> Walker, M. J. (1996:a) *Images of Professional Development*. Pretoria: HSRC Publishers.

My reasoning is influenced by the Bourdieu tradition without being subservient to Bourdieu's assumptions. However, claims in that tradition about capital and transposable habitus are acknowledged.<sup>25</sup> It follows from my tentative reasoning that the historical deposits into common sense in combination with social and cultural capital create possibilities for people to enter positions of power and counter-power. These positions can be used to reformulate common sense by utilising the *degrees of freedom* that are available in hegemonic social settings.

My inquiry perspective is also affected by the narrative inquiry tradition and what Polkingthorne calls narrative analysis.<sup>26</sup> Polkingthorne discriminates between two types of narrative inquiry. The first type, analysis of narratives follows what he calls a paradigmatic cognition that attends to the classification of features into predefined categories, such as finding similarities between a number of life stories. The other type, narrative analysis follows a narrative cognition trait where the outcome of the analysis is an emplotted narrative, i.e. a story building on a range of data that are re-constructed and configured towards the advancement of a plot.

The result of a narrative analysis is an explanation that is retrospective, having linked past events together to account for how a final outcome might have come about.<sup>27</sup>

Goodson has elaborated further on narrative analyses in a way that is adaptable to my inquiry. It is the combination of the critical and narrative analysis perspectives that create the "stories of action within theories of

---

<sup>25</sup> Further readings about Bourdieu's conceptions placed in a Namibian context are found in Geckler, P. (2000) *Impacts of Basic Education Reform in Independent Namibia*. Unpublished doctoral thesis. Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen.

<sup>26</sup> Polkingthorne, D.E. (1995) Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis. In Hatch, J. A. and Wisniewski, R. (eds) *Life History and Narrative*. London: The Falmer Press. 5-23.

<sup>27</sup> Polkingthorne op. cit. p. 16.

context" approach that Goodson proposes as a necessary means to disclose power relations.<sup>28</sup>

### **The construct of shared meaning and fidelity**

Triangulation is often put forward as a method to validate evidence in participatory action research.<sup>29</sup> Griffiths, who includes triangulation in her elaboration, also addresses three levels of bias and inter-related problems of validity.<sup>30</sup> The first level is related to the research process. Here she adds the openness to the perspectives of different socio-political groups and respondent validity to the common mainstream factors. The second level is related to the values and politics of the researcher where “bias comes not from having ethical and political positions – this is inevitable – but from not acknowledging them” as “taking an explicit stance helps to reduce bias, unless the stance is one of neutrality”.<sup>31</sup> This bias is about hiding partiality, which becomes a contradiction in *committed research*.<sup>32</sup> The third level is about the wider context of educational research and the matter of power in the research community as a whole. The value-laden nature of committed research is related to Walker’s statement made in relation to her inquiries into her own role as a researcher in action research in South Africa:

---

<sup>28</sup> Goodson, I.F. (1995) The story so far: personal knowledge and the political. In Hatch, J. A. and Wisniewski, R. (eds) *Life History and Narrative*. London: The Falmer Press. 89-98, p. 97.

<sup>29</sup> Elliott, J. (1991) *Action Research for Educational Change*. Buckingham: Open University Press.; Tabachnick, R. B. and Zeichner, K. (eds) (1991) *Issues and practices in Inquiry-oriented Teacher Education*. New York: The Falmer Press.

<sup>30</sup> Griffiths op. cit.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. p. 133.

<sup>32</sup> Committed research is a collective concept used here for practice-related activities like action research and critical practitioner inquiry that are based on basic values of democracy and aiming at change towards social justice.

The point is to emphasise yet again the reflexivity of the researcher, so that validity and reliability are not so much about 'truth' or 'falsity' as about shifting the emphasis to the contexts in which meanings are produced and the multiple and contradictory possible readings not only of these contexts but of the research report itself.<sup>33</sup>

Evidence in narrative inquiry is related to the accuracy of the data and the plausibility of the plot. Triangulation is also forwarded as a method to create confidence in narrative inquiry. The plausibility of the plot is of great complexity according to Polkingthorne.<sup>34</sup> This complexity is related to the gap between experienced actions and emplotted explication. However, Polkingthorne expresses that a "storied narrative is not an imposition on data of an alien type but a tightening and ordering of experience by explicating an intrinsically meaningful form".<sup>35</sup> His conclusion is that it is the theoretical perspective that frames the plot. A consequence from this is that "the same data elements can be configured by more than one plot".<sup>36</sup> Fidelity is another concept used in narrative inquiry that connects this type of inquiry with "betweenness" and "believability", according to Blumenfeld-Jones.<sup>37</sup> Fidelity in narrative inquiry is related to making explicit the bonds between inquirer – subject and story – context and a reasonable portrayal of the story as it speaks to the reader. Fisher's construction of a narrative paradigm is sometimes used in arguments in favour of "ways of knowing that an exclusively technical form of argument excludes and inhibits".<sup>38</sup> A basis of the narrative

---

<sup>33</sup> Walker (1996:a) op. cit., p. 45.

<sup>34</sup> Polkingthorne (1995) op. cit.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>37</sup> Blumenfeld-Jones, D. (1995) Fidelity as a criterion for practicing and evaluating narrative inquiry. In Hatch, J. A. and Wisniewski, R. (eds) *Life History and Narrative*. London: The Falmer Press. 25 – 36.

<sup>38</sup> Taylor, J. and Jarvis, J. (2000) The Role of Narrative as a Form of Evidence in Modern Academic Debate. Paper presented at the International Debate Education Association Conference, Budapest, Hungary, October 2000.

paradigm is the notion of humans as homo narrans or homo narrandus, i.e. that people understand the world through the telling and assessment of stories or that people are portrayed as those whose stories have to be told.

### **The route ahead**

This chapter sets the scene and the direction from where my journey of inquiry started. The scenario I have painted at the starting point is one with participatory, contextual, and critical colours. It promises a route through teacher education reform in a new-born southern African nation-state. At the terminus I will exhibit my understanding of the annotated landscape that we will traverse along the route. We will make a few stops at sidings to load necessary goods to be able to observe and analyse the landscape as we travel and to build up the conditions for an understanding.

Before the journey starts I will pick up analytical tools in chapter two with the aim to redress my pre-judicious understanding in a conceptual attire. The journey starts by looking at the broader historical influences that make up an African nation state and its educational landscape in chapter three and four. In chapter five and six we approach an area of new educational features where I will push back the innovative horizon from the national to the international level. The situational specifics come into sight in chapter seven and patterns of reform are outlined in chapters eight to ten. My comprehension of the reform landscape, presented as situational annotations along the journey, are gathered together as an explanatory analysis in chapter eleven. A concluding discussion and recommendations for future African tours are outlined in chapter twelve. Keep your binoculars handy because as in most African safaris we will pass both big and small game!

