Chapter one

My values and where they come from.

You will read this first and yet this chapter is the last but one to be written. I was

reluctant to write it but if this had not been written then I would have continued to be

troubled by what I had not said. I would have carried around these unsaid things and it

would have done me no good. My thesis would have remained incomplete.

Think again of the kaleidoscope I wrote about in the introduction and imagine my thesis

as the whole with all the small pieces illuminated. When I began my research I started at

the centre of the kaleidoscope, at the heart of my work in the classroom with the

question " How do I improve my practice?" and I slowly built out from that central

question trying to understand my work with a student, a class, a colleague and in the

school context. As the picture got clearer I lit more pieces to help my understanding;

pieces about the nature of research and the methodology of action research. All the time

I was illuminating more pieces and trying to make the picture of my work clearer. But a

picture needs a frame to keep it together and to make it complete and I did not have one.

I had ideas about the context of my work; in the politics of education and in the academic

community but they weren't enough: the outer edges of the kaleidoscope were in shadow.

As I was struggling with this I was intrigued to see the title of a meeting convened by Pam Lomax and Jack Whitehead " *How can we create educational responses to the politics of oppression ?*" and the words '*educational responses to the politics of oppression*' attracted me. They defined the politics of oppression resulting from:

" • *the imposition of values and practices that disable us from participating as fully as we might in our educational enterprises*
• *imposed change that alienates us by appearing to devalue our educational values and practices*"

and I recognised not only how the politics of oppression affected me in those ways but also how this thesis was my educational response to that oppression. In writing such a thesis I am creating the kind of educational research and educational knowledge that I have wanted to make because it will include liberation - the liberation of an action researcher who can claim to understand her life and work through her own point of view.

I have been reluctant to write because of the politics of oppression in my own life story. That reluctance comes from deep fears. Now there are fears, large and small, that I live with every day. They are the sort that Raymond Carver wrote about in his poem " *Fear*"

..” Fear of the telephone that rings in the dead of night

Fear of electrical storms

... Fear of dogs I've been told won't bite

Fear of anxiety!

...Fear of running out of money

Fear of having too much, though people will not believe this.

Fear of psychological profiles.

Fear of being late and fear of arriving before anyone else.

...fear of having to live with my mother in her old age, and mine.

Fear of confusion

Fear this day will end on an unhappy note.

...Fear of death

Fear of living too long........”

(Carver R. 1986)

But my paralysing fears have not been spoken or shared and they have surfaced with

the writing of this thesis: fears of vulnerability; ridicule; fear of being found out; fear of

not being good enough. They are the fears of someone who casts herself as an outsider.

They stem from the politics of oppression in my own life and I want to explore it as in the

way of self - study / life history as explained by Ardra Cole and Gary Knowles who wrote:

" ... we believe that becoming a teacher or teacher educator is a life-long process of

continuing growth rooted in the personal. Who we are and come to be as teachers and

teacher educators is a reflection of the complex, ongoing process of interaction and

interpretation of factors, conditions, opportunities, relationships, and events that take

place throughout our lives in all realms of our existence - intellectual, physical,

psychological, spiritual, political and social. making sense of prior and current life

experiences in the context of the personal as it influences the professional, is in our

view, the essence of facilitating professional development. Thus we situate professional

inquiry in the context of life or personal histories............As Ardra said in a life history

interview; Teaching is part of who I am. Understanding teaching is my work.... Knowing

myself as a person is very much part of knowing myself as professional. The better I

understand myself as a teacher and teacher educator, the better I understand myself as

a person and vice versa... My whole practice as teacher, professor, and teacher

educator is integrally connected with who I am as a person."

(Cole, A. and Knowles, G. 1995)

Engaging in some self study means that I will feel vulnerable and I am uncomfortable

with this. I am not alone in these feelings as they were explored in a group at the recent

International Conference on Self- Study of Teacher Education Practices at

Herstmonceux Castle, August 1996. The group were exploring the use of story as a

means of representing their implicit theories about practice:

" *M....just explore vulnerability. Why don't you think it's a bad thing? What do you mean*
by that?
P. If you can afford to be vulnerable, you can also be strong, I think. If you can afford to
let other people see the weakness or tenderness about things you value strongly, then I
think you're being strong..........

M.   I like this idea but I need to develop the courage if it is to be an idea to which I can wholly subscribe. Perhaps the answer hinges on whether one can afford to let the other people see the weakness. Just because you reveal it, does it mean you can afford it? Or might you give it up without affording it, and without realising it? Why can one person afford it and another cannot? Could Ardra Cole afford it? Is the whole situation fraught with political implications? Is that why people cannot afford it? Might they lose their credibility in their job if they expose their vulnerability? Can we engage in self study if we are not willing to expose vulnerability?"

(Lomax, P. Evans, M. Parker , Z.1996)

I'm not sure whether I can afford it or not but I do know that in finding the courage to explore the origins of my fears of writing I have re-discovered the origin of my values as a teacher and have understood why the politics of oppression that devalued my values and practices caused me so much pain. My response to that oppression is thus a creative and educational one.

As Judi Marshall pointed out in her book on women managers much of the research on such women explores issues of identity and self and that the women that she worked with wanted to make senses of themselves that " *they could validate internally, and which could then provide firm, alive, bases for knowing and acting".* (Marshall 1995)

Marshall used the work of Goldberger *et al*   (1987) who researched into *constructed knowing*

"Women... overcome the notion that there is One Right Answer or a Right Procedure in the search for truth. They see that there are various ways of knowing and methods of analysis. They feel responsible for examining, choosing, questioning, and developing the systems that they will use for constructing knowledge" (Goldgerger, N.R. 1987)

It is argued that women's knowing is a thoroughly grounded, personal process, not of the intellect alone. "*intimate knowledge of the self not only precedes but always accompanies understanding. (Women) are intensely aware of how perceptions are processed through the complex web of personal meanings and values; they resist excluding the self from the process of knowing for the sake of simplicity or 'objectivity'. They strive to find a way of weaving their passions and their intellectual life into some meaningful whole. All the polarities - self and others, thought and feeling, subjective and objective, public and private, personal and impersonal, love and work - lose their saliency* (Goldberger , N. R.1987).

So let me return to those fears - fears of vulnerability; ridicule; fear of being found out; fear of not being good enough. Where do they come from? I'm going to use the work of Valerie Walkerdine to help me reconstruct what I've felt about my past so that I can use that construction of the past to move on. I must stress that for me, it's the moving on that is the most important. When I read Walkerdine's work I was struck by the clarity of what she wrote and was shocked by the recognition of what I knew to be true but had never put together in my own mind. She wrote:

"I call myself an educated, working class woman... This may be a fictional identity like all the others, but it allows something to be spoken and some things to come together: educated, working class and woman - three terms which I thought were hopelessly fragmented. Terms which assert my education and my power with pride but as part of a narrative which allows me a place from which to struggle, a sense of belonging"

(Walkerdine 1990)

In my self study I want to explore this idea of why I see myself as an outsider with these identities of woman, working class and educated and how they relate to my work as a teacher and researcher. I didn't find the writing of this easy. I had tried before in response to questions form the Bath Action Research group but I obviously wasn't ready at that stage of my work to write about my personal experiences. My discomfort and anger comes over in what I wrote then:

" I thought I wanted to understand why I am so determined to hold on to what I believe in: justice; equality; fair play and so on. I know these values lie in my past and the past is full of stories. I could write about my grandmother who gave away one of her twin sons at birth because she had so many children and she was tired of coping with the relentless poverty of the 1930s. My grandfather was one of Brynmawr's 74% male unemployed. I could write about my father and his brothers and sisters being fed in a Salvation Army soup kitchen and the insecurities and indignity of a family on the dole.

Growing up with these stories is a good reason to strive for social justice. I know my working class background informs my views of the present in the same way as my experiences as a girl informs the way I live as a woman. I don't need to write about my past because I don't want the past to become sentimental. To write about my past in my research seems self- indulgent and unnecessary. It is also intrusive. My values were formed because of where I was from and the sort of people I came from. Enough said. I need to know that, not you. Why should I explain why I have the values I do ? " (November 1993)

When I wrote that I showed my confusion - proud of what I was but reluctant to share it because of fears unspoken. In confronting those fears through writing this thesis I was able to write the following:

~~ Until I was 10 years old I lived in the South Wales valley town of Brynmawr. I lived in a small terraced house with my parents and younger sister. I attended the local Council Board school. The woman who taught me to read had also taught my father. I saw one set of grandparents almost every day and the others at least once a week as they lived a short bus ride away. We seemed to know everyone and be related to everyone in Brynmawr. I was young and I felt safe. We didn't own a car and the furthest we ever went on the train was Newport.

When we moved to Chepstow it was very different. My father had moved from his job in the steel works at Ebbw Vale to a new one in Llanwern, near Newport. Steelworkers from all over the valleys were encouraged to take up work in this new, modern works and new housing estates were built to accommodate them and their families. We moved into a new council house on a large council estate just outside the town of Chepstow. Until then I hadn't realised that earth could be brown. The earth in Brynmawr had been black from coal. My grandparents were proud of my mum and dad as they thought they had done well to have a house with a garden front and back, a bathroom and central heating. My grandparents still lived in houses with front doors onto the street; outside toilets; no proper bathrooms and coal fires for heat. The estate was full of valley people from all over South Wales. Our Welsh accents were strong and we had the same roots. There were stories of coal mines and experiences of war; chapels and rugby. The community was young with people like my parents in their 30s with young children and we helped each other out. The people of Chepstow were not so welcoming of this huge influx of Welsh workers. I remember going to school one morning and reading on a wall in huge letters of white paint " Taffs go home!"

I completed two terms at my new primary school, sat exams and was then notified I had passed to go to the local grammar school. Larkfield Grammar school served an area that spread from the outskirts of Newport almost to Monmouth in the Wye Valley. Many of my new friends went to the Secondary Modern at the other end of Chepstow. Everyone in my family was delighted and proud. My grandparents bought me a new leather satchel and I was kitted out in an awful uniform. ~~

As Walkerdine (1990) wrote, going to grammar school was being chosen for success

"They held out a dream. Come, they told me. It is yours. You are chosen. They didn't tell me, however, that for years I would no longer feel any sense of belonging, nor any sense of safety. That I didn't belong in the new place, any more than I now belonged in the old."

~~ At the end of the first term we sat more exams and the 90 of us who had been chosen for a grammar school education were again sifted and sorted into classes based on ability. I was placed in the top 'Latin' class; the next class was 'North' the final class 'South'. The Latin class did not do any kind of technology or practical subject. Again I was split up from friends. I didn't work hard but did what had to be done so that I did not draw attention to myself.

My teachers wore black gowns and seemed distant. The boys were called by their last names. Of the women who taught me only one was married and not one of them had children. ~~

I now see that a school pastoral system was non- existent and that I could have benefited from it as those fears of vulnerability; ridicule; fear of being found out; fear of not being good enough were strong fears when I was in grammar school. I was happy enough at school. I had a 'best friend' and a small group of close friends. To be honest, I

didn't think very much about what was happening. Life just went on in a very ordinary

way.

Those experiences informed my present work as Head of Upper School as I try to give

students support in their learning in the following ways: predicted grades and reports are

used to identify those who appear to be under- achieving; a target list of under- achieving

students is circulated among staff; all students expect and receive one- to one interviews

with their tutors for personal development planning; the career service interview all

students in the Upper school; all students are issued with homework diaries and study

skills pamphlets; some departments hold after - school sessions where students can go

for advice; the school library is open from 6-00pm until 8-30 pm four nights a week for a

homework club; parents are invited into meet tutors and subject teachers three times a

year.

~~ Home and school were entirely separate for me. My father had left school at

14, my mother at 15; no-one in my family had received further or higher education and

so they had no concept of what it was to study for O and A levels. I had no desk in my

bedroom and downstairs there was one through room and a kitchen. The television

always seemed to be on downstairs and could be heard throughout the house because

my mother was slowly going deaf through a disease of the inner ear. The local library

was a bus ride way and consisted of a small prefabricated building only for the exchange of books. I never saw any one work in there as there was only one table and the opening hours were restrictive. I remember groups of us doing homework in the cloakrooms at school - quickly before the start of a lesson. I remember trying to please at home and at school and finding it difficult. ~~

Walkerdine (1990) again; " *... we might argue that ... the success of working class children and girls depends upon the effectivity of disavowal and therefore upon intense and persecutory pain experienced by such children. They have been chosen to succeed, yet the very possibility of their success depends upon a splitting - the negotiation of an impossible array of identifications in which they, becoming what the school wants, can no longer be what their family wants, and vice versa. They feel desperate that they can exist in neither, that everything is lost in painful isolation, that nobody understands, neither at home or at school...*"

At home I didn't want to make demands that my parents would interpret as 'getting above myself '. At school I would never have used home circumstances as an excuse for poor work. I was far too proud and protective of my family. Writing this now is very difficult. I have no wish to sound like a victim because at no point did I feel like one. I have been relieved to read other accounts by women who have experienced similar feelings.

"*My grammar school education reveals a class and a gender ideology at work on my language. I managed to conform and meet the linguistic requirements of the school, but*

they could only be used within the school. I had to abandon them when I left the school gates and had to change my language for home. Such ' bilingualism' is not without its disadvantages and can work to make one feel inadequate and unconfident in all language use. Mistakes at school could be an offence, but so too could mistakes at home.... It was like leading a double life, for neither side would have recognised me in the other context. I was straddling two very different worlds and felt considerably threatened by the fact that I didn't belong to either. I had a constant sense of being different, which I interpreted as inferiority. I was always aware of the possibility of making a mistake and being exposed as fraudulent." (Payne, I. 1980).

~~ I was vague about what to do when I left school. I didn't know any women who had a career, except my teachers, and I didn't have a clue what to do. Teaching seemed the obvious choice. My family held teaching in great esteem: as it was a profession; it was a profession to be proud of and it was a good job for a woman. My mother said it was a good job to 'fall back on' - when I married and had children. My close friends were as vague as I was. Receiving no career advice as the person in charge of careers was also the geology teacher and preferred rocks to children I said to anyone that asked that I'd like to work with people - whatever that meant. My history teacher sorted me out. He saw my name on a list of people who were making a visit to the local teacher training college and asked to see me. I told him that I thought I'd go to college and train to be a history teacher. He explained the difference between University and College and told me to apply to University. At parents evening he took the time to explain to my parents that going to University would mean four years of higher education - three for a degree, one for a PGCE but that I would get a grant. So I went to London, studied history and didn't think about getting a job for three years. Finishing my degree meant a decision about what to do next and a combination of a lack of determination, ambition and imagination meant that I drifted onto a PGCE course. My parents were delighted that I'd have a job to 'fall back on' even if I chose to do something else for a while. ~~

I felt that I'd lived in two worlds while at school I felt this more acutely at University. While at school my movement between the two worlds was easier to mark by the wearing of school uniform. At University I met people like no-one I had met before and I went into middle class homes for the first time.

~~ My tutorial group was invited to the home of our tutor who lived in Chalk Farm, North London. I had never been into a house with so many books - on shelves in alcoves; on the floor; in the toilet; on the stairs. My impression of that house was of relaxed chaos where posters were stuck up with pins, old jeans and jumpers with holes could be worn, coffee cups were everywhere, people swore and men cooked. I loved it because it was so different from my world where to be tidy and proper was the only thing to be. I remember my mother coming back from Chepstow one day shocked that she had seen our GP with his children doing the Saturday shopping - and his jumper had holes in the elbows and the children had on wellingtons ! In our house there were working clothes and clothes for going out . To be clean and respectable were most important.

My mother found me being at University very difficult. She was proud of me but disappointed in me. She liked the idea of me being at University but hated the reality. My clothes, my hair , my lifestyle and my increasingly radical politics she found impossible to understand. I didn't help matters by being distant and uncommunicative. My mother was pleased that I got my degree, proud when I got my first teaching job but cried with

pure relief and joy when I told her I was getting married. When I had a baby a few years

later she thought that at last I'd come to my senses !

My father was clear why teaching was important: it gave something back to the class you

came from. If working class children were to be given chances in life they needed

teachers like his daughter. ~

Why are these stories from my past relevant here? Because it is what has passed that

makes me what I am. The politics of oppression were as real for my grandparents and

my parents as they are for me. They had little choice but to leave school at a young age

and find work. I had a choice but the 'splitting' from one world to another was and

sometimes still is, difficult and painful.

In becoming educated I became what can be called middle class but was uncomfortable

with that. In becoming educated I was able to have a professional job and become an

independent woman and that caused me even greater problems with my mother. I feel

uncomfortable with these ideas of changing class. I cannot be exact about definitions of

class here as it isn't appropriate. I am pleased that I know my feelings aren't unique as

Walkerdine (1990) wrote:

" becoming middle class in the seventies was like entering a new world peopled by those who designated themselves special. I felt split, fragmented, cut off... where I couldn't tell my mother what was happening. Where nobody knew what academic work was (and where it would have been better to announce that I was going to produce a baby, not a thesis). I felt, in the old place, as in the new, that if I opened my mouth it would be to say the wrong thing. Yet I desired so much, so very much, to produce utterances which, if said in one context, would not lead to rejection in the other ".

The politics of oppression for me in the seventies resulted from values and practices that disabled me from engaging fully in my school and university life. My way of life appeared to me to be devalued by those whose education I valued.

How did I resolve these conflicts with my family ? My father resolved them for me. In my final year at university I returned home for a short holiday. I was full of what I'd done and what I thought. I was arrogant and rude and dismissed something offered by my mother in a way that made it clear I did not value anything from women like her who had done nothing with their lives except have children! My father took me aside and spoke eloquently and quietly. He told me to remember this:

' never forget from whence you came. You are at university and we wish you well. Your

mother and grandmothers never had the opportunities you had. You represent them.

You are there because of women like them. Working people need people like you to go

to university - but not if you forget them. Become a teacher and give something back to

the class you are from. Don't cast us aside because we will always be there. Make a

difference for all of us..'

I've never forgotten what he said. It pulled me up short and made me think a great deal.

Why is it relevant to my research? Because I wanted to explain what my educational

values are and that they come from other values, deeply held. The values of truth,

justice, equality and democracy are mine through, I would argue, my background. As a

young teacher the values I brought to teaching were as a result of my own experiences: I

wanted to value my students as significant human beings and I wanted to teach in a way

that valued their experiences and didn't alienate them. The research I was involved in

during the time of this thesis enabled me to see how these values motivate me, how I

attempted to live them out in my work, and integrated them in the explanation of my

educational development.

When I believed others were talking for me and in doing so denied my experiences I

wrote about my work with a student in my own way. When change was imposed on me

at school that appeared to devalue my practice I gave an account of my work with a

colleague and a class. That this thesis is completed is important because it shows that

the politics of oppression can be overcome in a creative way through an educational

response. I still cast myself as an outsider. But writing has enabled me to feel less

vulnerable. Tony Harrison wrote " *The dumb go down in history and disappear"*

(Harrison 1984) . I recognise that in the act of writing them my experiences won't

disappear and that seems to me to be important.