Extending the 4 walls of the classroom: A return to the classroom to affirm my assumptions, values and knowledge in practice.

Lorraine Betty Connell
Dip.T, B.Ed, M.Ed.

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Thesis declaration

I hereby declare that the work herein, now submitted as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Teaching of the Northern Territory University is the result of my own investigations, and all references to ideas and work of other researchers have been specifically acknowledged.

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis has not already been accepted in substance for any degree, and is not being currently submitted in candidature for any other degree.

Signed: [Signature]

Dated: [Date]
Acknowledgements.

To complete any form of study we are always indebted to many friends, family and colleagues and as this journey comes to an end and another awaits, it is important to acknowledge some of these people.

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As the new journey begins I would like to assure teachers that from my experience I am now even more passionate about teaching and will attempt to do all in my power to advocate for this great profession of ours. Thank you.
Abstract.

This research focuses on my personal journey into the primary school classroom. After a thirteen-year absence from teaching in a primary school while lecturing in a pre-service teacher education course I felt my lack of recent classroom experience was becoming apparent. I wanted to return to the classroom to find out if I was still the teacher that I thought I was. I needed to explore how my personal and professional experiences had affected my assumptions and values. Had they altered because of my continued life experiences or were they still essentially unchanged.

In this thesis I will explore how experiences since leaving the classroom have affected my assumptions, values and knowledge. These experiences include the Theory of Multiple Intelligences, computers and parents. When I was last in the classroom the Theory of Multiple Intelligences and computers were unfamiliar and I had not used them in my teaching and learning with children. I left the classroom to become a parent and so my experiences as a parent of school children impacted upon my assumptions, values and knowledge. By returning to the classroom I would use the Theory of Multiple Intelligences as a teaching and learning strategy, computers as a teaching and learning tool, and parents and the community as integral aspects of the learning environment.

I envisaged that these new approaches to my teaching would help to extend the 4 walls of the classroom so that teaching and learning could be more relevant and accessible to the children and their families. By returning to the classroom I could research my own practice using Action Research methodology and add to the body of knowledge about teaching. To some extent I was the teacher that I thought I was. However, I discovered that the demands of the profession meant that I had little time for personal reflection as the classroom teaching threatened to overwhelm me. Teachers need time to reflect and determine who they are as teachers and people. They need time to reflect and embrace new ideas and teaching strategies so that new knowledge and experience can become part of the teacher's assumptions and values. Extending the 4 walls of the classroom to include the wider community and create learning communities can assist in this process, but ultimately it involves the teacher acknowledging and participating in change.
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Chapter 1

The Classroom – just another brick in the wall?
Chapter 1. – The Classroom – just another brick in the wall?

I left the primary school classroom in 1986 after teaching for twelve years. After a break of four years I returned to teaching as a tertiary lecturer in a pre-service teacher education course and for the next ten years taught about the primary school classroom I had left. During this time it was becoming increasingly apparent that I was teaching about a classroom that had changed. However it wasn’t only the classroom that had changed, I had too. Postgraduate study had introduced me to new knowledge and values and my own life experiences had influenced my assumptions and values as a person and as a teacher. It was time to return to the classroom to not only affirm my assumptions and values about the teacher I thought I was, but also to put some of my new knowledge into practice. By returning to the classroom I would also attempt to extend the 4 walls to incorporate my assumptions, values and knowledge in practice.

The diagram below shows me, the teacher and person that I am at the centre of the research, within the classroom. I plan to ‘push’ the 4 walls of my classroom out into the community so that the children and I can access learning experiences from beyond the 4 walls. The Theory of Multiple Intelligences, the use of computers as a teaching and learning tool and the involvement of parents and the wider community in the learning environment are teaching strategies that I aim to utilise to extend the 4 walls of the classroom.

Figure 1. Diagram of Thesis title, Extending the 4 walls of the classroom: A return to the classroom to affirm my assumptions, values and knowledge in practice.
When I left the classroom in 1986, Howard Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences (1983) was relatively unknown, computers were only just being introduced into schools and I was not a parent. Over the following years I became the mother of two boys, commenced my postgraduate studies and read about the Theory of Multiple Intelligences and began to use computers extensively in my own teaching and learning. When my boys reached school age, I became involved in their education and the school environment as a parent. In my tertiary teaching I encouraged the use of the Theory of Multiple Intelligences as a teaching strategy with my students and I began to encourage them to use computers for their current learning and their future teaching. As a parent and teacher I was beginning to recognise the potential for extending the 4 walls of a classroom to include parents and the community. Involving parents in the classroom and providing opportunities for learning experiences within the community meant that children could have meaningful ‘life’ experiences. My assumptions and values were changing in response to my life experiences, my reading and research.

It was time to return to the classroom and put my assumptions, values and knowledge into practice. By returning to the classroom I could find out whether it was possible to extend the 4 walls by using the Theory of Multiple Intelligences as a teaching strategy, by using computers as a teaching tool and by involving parents in the classroom.

1.1. Affirming my assumptions, values and knowledge in practice.

To affirm my assumptions, values and knowledge in practice I need to determine exactly what they are. Throughout this thesis, the term 'assumptions' is used to describe my personal philosophy, beliefs and values as they relate to me as a teacher and person. Brookfield (1995), defines assumptions as ‘the taken-for-granted beliefs about the world and our place within it that seem so obvious to us as not to need stating explicitly. In many ways we are our assumptions’ (p. 2). Returning to the classroom means that I can explore and acknowledge my assumptions, the impact of these assumptions on my current knowledge of theories of education, and subsequent practice.
As McNiff (1993) states,

So we are now at a point to move into a discussion of the emergence of a new paradigm; a form of research that enables teachers to develop their own understanding of their own practice, and to turn their practice into a form of research. (p.15).

As I become the researcher and explore my assumptions, my knowledge and practice continues to change. McNiff (1993) views this knowledge as educational knowledge, knowledge not only about education, but knowledge that can become educational and has the power to move my understanding of my practice further forward.

There have been many influences in my life, past and present, and as these influences overlap they create a strong, almost indestructible web of beliefs and values, i.e. assumptions that I am made up of. It is my whole life experience that influences my assumptions and the teacher that I am.

I am more than a teacher, and my other roles as parent, wife, student, friend and daughter impact upon me as a person. I rely heavily upon my instincts as I have confidence in them. I have a strong sense of morality and justice. I believe passionately in equality for all and in treating people with dignity and respect. I am generally happy and very optimistic, I have a strong social conscience and believe in 'giving' back to society through volunteer work and involvement in organisations. My family is very important to me and I endeavour to develop a loving and caring environment for them. This personal description contains many of the intrapersonal characteristics that Deiro (1996) identifies in teachers who were successful in communicating their care for students.

1. Genuineness and authenticity – being myself, not hiding behind a façade, being unpretentious.
2. Inner locus of control – readily assuming responsibility for what is happening in my life.
3. Tolerance for ambiguity – being able to deal comfortably with situations that are out of my control.
4. Humour – to find the amusing in life.
5. A non-judgmental stance – to see a child’s potential and not their imperfections.
7. Enthusiasm – energy and interest in what you are doing.

As a teacher I have assumptions and values that determine the teacher that I believe I am. These assumptions and values have been influenced by my experience of teaching as well as by my whole life experience. The points below are the assumptions and values that relate to the teacher I believe I am.

- I believe in developing a learning environment that is comfortable, caring, fair and respectful;
- I have clear boundaries of expectations that reflect my assumptions;
- I am passionate about teaching and the process of learning;
- I am proud of the teaching profession;
- I believe in the importance of reflecting on what I do and know as a teacher and learner and endeavour to update my knowledge regularly;
- I am still excited by the challenge to motivate others to share in the learning experience; and
- I continue to believe in a well-organised, flexible learning experience.

These assumptions and values also impact upon the classroom I will endeavour to create. I believe that my classroom should reflect:

- a child-centered approach;
- the opportunity for integrated learning experiences that are relevant to the child's life and experiences;
- the teacher as a facilitator;
- the teacher as a carer;
- the teacher as a role model;
- a classroom that is a safe, caring environment; and
- the opportunity for multiple entry points to a learning experience and multiple ways of exploring the learning experience.
These assumptions and values reflect the interpersonal skills identified by Deiro (1996) when she observed the teachers who were successful in communicating their care for students.

1. Effective communication skills, that involves being able to listen, summarise, reflect and clarify.
2. Empowering skills meaning that as a teacher I am able to let my students act on their own behalf.
3. Problem-solving skills that as a teacher involve me in a critical-thinking process as the pros and cons are weighed up in the decision making process.
4. Conflict resolution skills that involve the ability to deal with intense emotional issues when they occur.
5. Accountability skills concern my ability to acknowledge my mistakes (Deiro, 1996, p.99).

During my time as a tertiary teacher I have continued my postgraduate studies, read and researched. I have become committed to educational improvement and believe it is imperative for the primary school classroom to extend its walls to incorporate the world in which it exists. There is a demand for education to be more relevant and preparing of children who can survive in the new work place.

As a lecturer within the pre-service teacher education course I have become aware of a perceived distance between the theories of the pre-service course and the classroom practice. By returning to classroom practice I can discover knowledge of education through practice in addition to knowledge about education from outside sources. I also recognise that I need to pursue a number of educational issues that I have discovered since I left the classroom in 1986. They include;

- the Theory of Multiple Intelligences as a teaching strategy;
- the use of computers as a teaching tool; and
- the involvement of parents in the educational environment.

Below is a brief introduction to each of these strategies. They are dealt with in more detail in section 2.2. This is my ‘knowledge in practice’ and these strategies will impact upon me as a teacher returning to the primary school classroom. I will use them in an effort to extend the 4 walls of the classroom.
The Theory of Multiple Intelligences.

During my studies I was introduced to Howard Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences. His theory provided strong academic proof of the importance of the arts in the classroom (Gardner, 1983). Recognition of a musical intelligence, a bodily kinesthetic intelligence and spatial awareness intelligence validated the inclusion of music, dance, drama and visual art in the school curriculum. His theory places these intelligences on an equal footing with English and Mathematics. For teachers to provide meaningful experiences for all children then it was important to consider the Theory of Multiple Intelligences and allow children the opportunity to explore learning experiences and present their understanding of the learning that happens through these experiences in a variety of ways, not just through writing. I will need to be aware of the difficulties that may be faced when using a psychology Theory as a teaching strategy and I explore these issues in the next chapter.

Computers in education.

My teaching within the pre-service teacher education course, has meant that I have had to become very familiar with computers and the flexible delivery of courses. This has led to an increased knowledge and experience in the use of computers for learning and teaching. Computers have become an important part of the way I teach and therefore have become a part of the person and teacher that I am. In my return to the classroom, I hope to explore the use of computers as another teaching tool.

Parents as partners in the educational process.

Becoming a parent was a very important part of my life experience and has impacted greatly upon the person and ultimately the teacher that I am. For my husband and me, becoming parents was a very lengthy, emotional and challenging time. To finally achieve our long awaited family has meant that we are very committed to our boys and concerned about all aspects of their lives. After their fourth birthdays, schooling became
a very important part of our lives as we became involved in schools from a parent's perspective. I have become aware of the issues facing parents and teachers as they grapple with the teaching and learning in classrooms. In returning to the classroom, I hope to involve my parents in their children's schooling by encouraging and planning for their involvement.

The role of the Theory of Multiple Intelligences, computers and parents in the classroom, while helping to form my knowledge of practice, have also become part of my assumptions and values that impact upon the sort of person and teacher that I am. Knowledge of the Theory of Multiple Intelligences, computers and parenting has become inextricably linked to my assumptions and values. They have become tools and teaching strategies that I believe are important for me to utilise when teaching.

My assumptions, values and knowledge in practice also provide the basis for my theoretical position, that it is possible to extend the 4 walls of the classroom. The person I believe I am, the use of Multiple Intelligences, computers and parents, have the potential to extend the 4 walls of the classroom.

1.2. Extending the 4 walls.

My desire to extend the 4 walls of the classroom comes from my personal experiences as a parent and my values and knowledge as an educator. As we enter the new millennium, I believe it is imperative for the primary school classroom to extend its walls to incorporate the world in which it exists. Dewey (1963) believed strongly that schools should reflect the society in which the children would inevitably work in and both Dewey (1963) and Paulo Freire (1972) were concerned that teaching should be relevant to the society in which the classroom was grounded. Society today is no longer confined to a set workplace for life. Employment mobility and flexibility are now the norm and yet we enclose our children in one classroom for seven years of primary school education. Teachers need to recognise that the learning that already occurs and can occur outside the classroom is often more relevant and meaningful to children of today. By
pushing out the classroom walls, education can tap into a world of learning experiences that are not defined by any walls or barriers.

As a parent of two primary school boys I have come to recognise the many shortcomings within a school system that often ignores where children come from. Tom Wagner, an Assistant Professor of Education and a consultant for school improvement in New Hampshire writes extensively about rethinking the school system.

Profound and ongoing changes in the workplace, in the requirements for global citizenship, in the nature of knowledge, and above all, in the needs and concerns of our students—all of these must be taken into account. Such "systemic" reflection—rather than reflexive reaction to outsiders' demands—should be the starting point for developing an educators' methodology for improving schools (Wagner, 1993, p.3).

As teachers we need to recognise where the children in our classroom come from and what experiences they have had and are having within their families. As a parent I am personally and emotionally involved with education's clientele, with my own children, other children and parents while on school council and committees and in fund raising activities. These parents have raised issues such as the inflexibility of the classroom and the lack of partnerships between school and home. Parents are also concerned at the relevance of learning experiences and the discrepancy between schools, home and society. Wagner also discovered this when researching for school improvement.

Ask many middle and high school-age students what's wrong with their schools—as a group from the Institute for Education in Transformation at The Claremont Graduate School recently did—and they will tell you. Schools "hurt their spirit," classes are boring and irrelevant to their lives, and people seem cold and uncaring (Wagner, 1993, p.4).

Schools seem to be 'out of step' with the society that their students live in. I believe many parents are looking for a caring environment that their children can be happy in, while our education system is more concerned with spending increasing time on content and standards. The school system needs to be more aware that while our society has changed, so too have the needs of our children.
Raised in a consumer- and work-obsessed society with less connection to caring adults, many young people seem emotionally needy, hungry for instant gratification, and addicted to passive forms of entertainment. Compared to previous generations, they are less hopeful about the future and less motivated by traditional incentives for learning—respect for authority and belief that hard work will get you where you want to go (Wagner, 1993, p.5).

While our children are often dissatisfied with the preparation they receive in schools for their future, parents too, question the relevance of some school experiences. Parents and children often comment on the need for classrooms to extend into the community to provide meaningful learning experiences for our children. John Abbott (1995) a director of the Education 2000 Trust, maintains in his article, 'Children need communities – communities need children,' that education has in fact done our children a disservice in separating the world of learning from the world of work. He contrasts today's schooling with the past when our children actually learnt about work by working and about the society they were to enter by directly participating in it. He maintains that schooling is confused with learning.

As we come to understand the dynamics of learning, we realise first that learning is essentially a social activity, and second, that learning relies upon knowledge construction more than knowledge transfer. Young people, moreover, are motivated by the wish to belong to groups that value a particular kind of knowledge; the act of learning draws people together around a common task. Conventional schooling, however, has emphasised the individual, and the individual's accumulation of abstract knowledge. It can be argued that over-schooling has removed from the family and the local community (the one-room schoolhouse) the very foundation of community existence (Abbott, 1995, p.2).

Abbott (1995) continues to argue that much of the skills, knowledge and understandings that our children require for entrance into our society cannot be taught in the classroom. He maintains that our communities should be providing active and meaningful experiences for our children. Schools need to recognise that meaningful learning experiences can take place outside the 4 walls of the classroom. Linking schools and communities to create genuine learning communities that are child friendly, can provide a progression for our children into a world of work that is smooth, logical and effective.
By recognising the need for a caring school environment that provides our children with caring and compassionate teachers who can also act as role models, then extending the 4 walls becomes essential for the growth of our teaching and learning.

Core values are an essential aspect of a vision for a better school. Improving the quality of life and relationships in individual schools may be as important as redefining the goals in the change process. Students won't learn and teachers won't collaborate if they don't feel respected. In other words, change involves the heart as well as the head (Wagner, 1993, p.5).

This recognition of the need for a caring environment challenges me as a teacher and person. An 'ethic of care' is fundamental to my research and involves confronting my own assumptions and values. As I enter the classroom, I have articulated what I believe in and value as a person and as a teacher. I have recognised that it is impossible to separate the person from the teacher and as such it is inevitable that the teacher will teach who they are. Articulating my assumptions and values has meant confronting where they came from, the life experiences that have helped to formulate them and make me the teacher and person that I am. I enter the classroom with my knowledge and experiences of the Theory of Multiple Intelligence's, computers for teaching and learning and my expectations of involving parents in the classroom environment.

1.3. A return to the classroom – a valid form of research.

A tertiary teacher returns to the classroom to research his teaching in 1996 (Loughran and Northfield). He continues to teach in the pre-service secondary teacher education course and returns to the classroom to teach mathematics and science and be the home group teacher to a class of year 7 children for a year. Similarly as a tertiary teacher, I will return to the primary school classroom for a semester (20 weeks), but unlike Northfield I will exchange my tertiary classes with the primary school teacher whose year 1/2/3 class I will teach.

In their book, 'Opening the Classroom Door, Teacher, Researcher, Learner' (Loughran and Northfield, 1996), Jeff Northfield writes about his return to the classroom and provides some interesting information for my own return. Northfield discovered that
many of his assumptions were in fact extremely difficult to translate into practice. He recognised this not so much as a failure of the project but rather as a recognition of the struggle that is continual and in itself very rewarding. He also discovered that much of his knowledge and educational theories (assumptions) did not really help him in the day-to-day running of a classroom. Lesson plans, while well organised and formulated on educational theories, did not take into consideration what the students needed. Northfield also discovered that while his assumptions were well developed, the teaching skills needed to support them were not. Northfield had spent a considerable time away from the classroom, involved in pre-service teacher education, and his teaching approach developed in the 1960s, did not match that required by teachers in the 1990s. What he did discover was that knowledge, while teacher specific, needs to be shared with the profession and respected as educational knowledge. The knowledge generated through research must be disseminated to allow teachers and pre-service teacher education students an opportunity 'to consider alternative frames of reference that may lead to deeper understanding of teaching and learning' (Loughran and Northfield, 1996, p.139).

Returning to the classroom to teach provides the teacher-researcher with an 'authority of experience.' (Loughran and Northfield, 1996, p.ix). It can also be interpreted as pre-service teacher educators (lecturers) practicing what they preach. In returning to the classroom, Jeff Northfield acknowledges that while everyone in our society has had some experience with schools and schooling and therefore considers themselves knowledgeable about teachers and schools, there is in fact little understanding by society and even by teachers of what teachers really do when they teach. By returning to the classroom and the teaching experience, the teacher researcher is able to provide first hand knowledge about teaching. Teachers often acknowledge that external research and knowledge of their profession is more important than their own and yet continually recognise the same research and knowledge as irrelevant to their classroom experience. Returning to the classroom provides relevant experience to form new knowledge about teachers and teaching as Jeff Northfield describes after his return to the classroom.

However my time in teaching allowed me to experience the types of tacit knowledge that teachers can develop as part of their teaching role. It is a different form of knowledge, generated in different ways and rarely made more explicit
and disseminated beyond individual teachers. It is not highly regarded, even by teachers, because it is seen as very content specific and not generalisable, yet when it is made more explicit in teacher stories and cases it has a significant impact on other teachers and those interested in teaching and learning (Loughran and Northfield, 1996, p. 140).

The value of this type of practical research is affirmed by McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead (1996) and Altrichter, Posch and Somekh (1993). They recognise that research into one’s own practice, that is documented through Action Research, can extend the body of knowledge about the practice of teaching. As Loughran and Northfield (1996) state, much of our educational research about teaching has been obtained from outside the teaching experience. I believe my own return to the classroom can embody the notion that education is not so much a field of study as a field of practice (McNiff, 1993) and by researching my own classroom experience I hope to be able to add to the body of knowledge about teaching.

It is my intention therefore to return to the classroom and research my own educational practice, my ‘lived theory’ as it relates to teaching and learning. This differs from the knowledge created by educators who are not actively engaged in classroom practice at the primary school level. The former mirrors my research and would appear to have more relevance to the classroom teacher as the knowledge comes from practice. My return and the value of ‘lived theory’ is best described as follows:

In living theory, practical educational explanations are particularly powerful because they form part of the process of trying to improve the quality of professional practice; they involve you in researching your action as you try to bring about improvement by working to reduce the gap between your values and the practice (McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead, 1996, p. 129).

In practice I will use an Action Research methodology, which is explained in Chapter 3. In using an Action Research methodology, I have determined my assumptions and values about teaching and learning and will return to the classroom prior to the commencement of the year to determine what is already there. By continual reflection, I will determine what I can improve upon, develop a plan of practice using the Theory of Multiple Intelligences as a teaching strategy, computers as a tool and involve parents in the learning environment. With further reflection I will then evaluate my practice or may
decide to alter my assumptions and values or my practice. Further action, reflection and change become the cycle as I return to the classroom to research my practice and hopefully answer the following:

- Are my assumptions, values and knowledge in practice affirmed in the classroom experience?
- How can the use of the Theory of Multiple Intelligences as a teaching strategy, impact upon the 4 walls of the classroom?
- How can the use of computers as a teaching/learning tool, impact upon the 4 walls of the classroom?
- How can involving parents and the community as an integral aspect of the learning environment, impact upon the 4 walls of the classroom?

In the next chapter, I discuss the literature that informs my knowledge. This literature review provides the foundations on which my knowledge and some of my assumptions are built. Chapter 3 explores the 'tools of the trade', that is, the Action Research methodology that I use to discover how my assumptions, values and knowledge are affirmed within the classroom. This chapter also explains why an Action Research methodology best suits my research.

Chapter 4 analyses the data collected. By recording my data and analysing it I am able to determine whether my assumptions and values are affirmed, and Chapter 5 provides the conclusion to the project as I address the research questions. These conclusions will ultimately provide further knowledge about the practice of teaching. I will also seek to describe the influence the research has had on me as a teacher and person and how I might share this research with my co-teachers.
Chapter 2.
The foundations – A Literature review.
Chapter 2. The foundations – A Literature review.

In Chapter 1 I explain my reasons for returning to the primary school classroom and describe my assumptions and values and my knowledge about the Theory of Multiple Intelligences as a teaching strategy, computers as a teaching and learning tool and the involvement of parents and the community in the learning environment. These assumptions, values and knowledge will be put into practice when I return to the primary school classroom. They will also assist in 'pushing out' the 4 walls of the classroom and extending the children’s learning experiences to include the wider community.

This chapter provides the foundations on which I have built many of my assumptions and values. It is important for me to acknowledge that much of the impetus for this research has come from my desire to return to the classroom as a different teacher to the one who was there thirteen years ago. Life experiences and my continued professional growth has resulted in a person passionate about teaching, a person keen to provide a caring classroom environment and a person who recognises that education should be utilising more of what is outside the classroom. It is no longer appropriate to assume that the education of children only occurs within the 4 walls of the classroom. By extending these 4 walls, more meaningful teaching and learning can occur.

My knowledge of teaching and learning has been influenced considerably by my knowledge of 'theory-in-literature', that is, by what I have read and researched. This literature review provides a basis for the knowledge that has helped form and re-form my assumptions and clarified many of my educational beliefs. The literature provides the foundations on which I build my classroom practice. I return to the classroom a different person from the one who left in 1986. I return to explore the teacher and person I believe I am, to teach who I am, and to teach a little of what I acknowledge to be central and defining experience in my life (Suhor, 1999). Time away from the classroom has given me the opportunity to read, research and dialogue with colleagues about these issues that have become central and defining experience in my life. These central and
defining experiences in my life include the theoretical foundation evident in this literature review that will provide the basis for my practice in the classroom.

2.1. We are what we teach – the importance of our assumptions and values.

Tertiary educator Judith Newman maintains that, ‘Our beliefs about learning and teaching can only be uncovered by engaging in systematic self-critical analysis of our current instructional practices’ (Newman, 1987). She continues to argue that much of what we do as teachers is based upon our intuition and only by writing down and reflecting upon our practice can we ‘unpack’ our assumptions and beliefs and sometimes ‘repack’ them. Clandinin, Davis, Hogan and Kennard (1993) also recognise the importance of journal writing as a means of articulating what you believe. A teacher’s stories reflect the person’s values and assumptions about teaching and life generally. The whole process of teaching involves making sense of what we do as teachers through the construction and reconstruction of our experiences.

Suhor (1999) argues that life experiences should be acknowledged and used within our classrooms to allow for meaningful learning experiences. ‘Education is a sorry enterprise if we teach little of what we ourselves acknowledge to be central and defining experience in our lives’ (Suhor, 1999,p.14). This wholistic approach allows for the idea of the interconnectedness of the learner, the teacher, the content, and the local and global communities to be explored. McNiff (1993) further explores the importance of values and beliefs within education when she recognises that a teacher’s life may be understood as an expression of ‘values in action’. She continues to argue that,

Teachers must regard themselves as free thinkers, as creators of their own lives, in order to regard themselves as part of the educative process. If they don’t, they remain as implementers, which is wasteful and immoral (McNiff, 1993,p.4).

The implication of such thinking is that teaching is in a continual state of change if one assumes that the teacher is open to new ideas and research that may challenge their values and beliefs, and which may alter their knowledge and practice. This process
continues through the life and practice of the teacher. McNiff (1993) continues by stating the importance of recognising one's values and assumptions when she refers specifically to the 'I' in Action Research.

1. I identify a problem when some of my educational values are denied in practice;
2. I imagine a solution to the problem;
3. I implement the solution;
4. I evaluate the solution;

My return to the classroom underpins the importance of ME, the teacher and person I believe I am, within the classroom, and involves exploring the above process. Further readings of Noddings (1992), Deiro (1996), Gardner's (1983) Theory of Multiple Intelligences, Dewey (1963), and Freire (1972) have also reaffirmed a number of my assumptions and values as a teacher and person. In the early 1900s Dewey advocated a child-centered approach to teaching that used the children's home experiences to teach from. He encouraged an integrated approach to teaching as he determined that this was a more relevant way for children to learn. Freire (1972) also encouraged a problem-solving approach to teaching that allowed the student and teacher to learn together and solve problems that were relevant to their life style. Freire's notion that much of our traditional education is of a 'banking' kind, that is knowledge being deposited into students where it is hopefully stored, is, I believe, still evident in classrooms today. However in teasing out my assumptions and values, I have come to agree with Freire's argument that teachers as facilitators and guides are preferable to teachers as 'bankers' or as 'the sage on the stage,' delivering knowledge to their students.

Deiro (1996) and Noddings (1992), both argue for an 'ethic of care' in the classroom. These authors were writing about the classroom environment as I had always assumed it should be. Deiro (1996), argues that children today often have families that may have only one parent; have little or no contact with an extended family; have both parents at work and may have excessive exposure to television, computers and other societal demands. All of this makes it impossible for the family to even communicate with one another let alone provide a basis for learning experiences that could be used by teachers
in the way Dewey suggested (using the children's home experiences to teach from, assuming that the experiences were 'good ones'). Deiro (1996), argues that because there seems to be many so-called dysfunctional families, teachers often need to take on the role of a prosocial adult, that is, the adult who provides the role model for behaviour, thinking and moral development, a role previously undertaken by a parent, Aunty/Uncle or Grandparent. For some children the school environment is the only stable, caring, social environment they know.

Bonding with prosocial adults has been identified as the key protective factor buffering children against influences of adverse situations. Prosocial here refers to individuals who obey the laws of society and respect our social norms (Deiro, 1996, p.3).

Noddings (1992), 'ethic of care' is based on the notion that teachers need to be carers in order to teach. She states that by connecting with students and providing a safe, caring environment, it is then possible for children to want to explore the curriculum and how it relates to them. The content of the learning experience makes more sense when applied to their situations and when the child knows they are respected and cared for.

One of the challenges faced by our teachers today is the complex classroom. A recent (1998) review of the Northern Territory's Department of Education noted that teachers and parents were concerned about behaviour and adverse learning conditions within classrooms. Deiro (1996) and Noddings (1992) offer a challenge to teachers to work on the classroom atmosphere first with the curriculum then taking care of itself. Both Deiro (1996) and Noddings (1992) suggests that students perform better in class when they have teachers who create a 'family-like' atmosphere in their classrooms. Sullivan (1999) describes this 'family-like' atmosphere further, '(A) family-like atmosphere in which relationships are harmonious but where there are expectations of behaviour and contribution' (p.47). Deiro (1996) who researched a number of secondary teachers in their schools called this 'making healthy connections with students.'

The six teachers observed use one or more of the following six strategies for bonding with students:
1. Creating one-to-one time with students.
2. Using appropriate disclosure.
3. Having high expectations of students while conveying a belief in their capabilities.
5. Building a sense of community among students within the classroom.
6. Using rituals and traditions within the classroom (Deiro, 1996, p.20).

Rogers and Renard (1999) refer to this type of classroom atmosphere as 'relationship-driven teaching'. They maintain that teachers who treat students with dignity and respect, while offering meaningful learning experiences for every child, create happy classrooms where relationships are encouraged that help students see the teachers as people and not dictators, judges or enemies. When the teachers and students collaborate in learning, inappropriate behaviour becomes a non-issue.

For me these aspects of teaching embody what teaching is all about. This is the essence of teaching as 'whoever our students may be, whatever subject we teach, ultimately we teach who we are' (Palmer, 1999). Recognising and articulating what is important to us as a teacher is probably the most important thing we can do for our teaching. We recognise the life experiences that have made us the person and ultimately the teacher we will be. Further experiences will continue to impact upon us as persons and teachers.

It was discussed above that Jeff Northfield, who returned to the classroom reported that while little of his research knowledge helped in the classroom, the unique knowledge about teaching, communicating with and respecting children and his own self-knowledge did. However, Sullivan (1999) commenting on Northfield’s research argues that this unique knowledge that teachers have is perhaps the very aspect that is undervalued.

This inner knowledge about oneself is also confirmed by Gardner (1983), who refers to interpersonal and intra personal intelligence, while Goleman (1995) discusses the importance of emotional intelligence in life. While I refer to Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences further in this chapter it is important to recognise that a teacher’s assumptions and values cannot be underestimated within the classroom, nor should they be trivialised. They are what the teacher is and will ultimately influence what and how
they teach. As I return to the classroom I will be able to determine whether my assumptions and values are evident in the way that I teach, communicate with children, parents and colleagues and create the classroom atmosphere I feel is essential. Will I be the teacher that I think I am and have just articulated in this section? My return to the classroom will reveal the teacher I am and hopefully it will be the teacher I believe I should be.

2.2. Educational foundations – the Theory of Multiple Intelligences, computers and parents.

The Theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI).

Howard Gardner, a neuropsychologist and Harvard education professor undertook research into intelligence in the late 1970s. Up until that time intelligence was generally considered as a unitary system that could be determined by testing a person’s Intelligence Quotient (IQ). Gardner explored the possibility of more than one intelligence and initially identified seven intelligences. In 1998 he identified an eighth intelligence. Gardner, in fact, challenges standard definitions of intelligence and believes that what we think is ‘smart’ is determined more by our culture than by the biology of the brain. According to Gardner (1983):

- People who are intelligent have the ability to:
  - Solve problems they encounter in real life.
  - Generate new problems to solve.
  - Make products or offer services that are valued in one’s culture (p. xiv).

The eight intelligences that Gardner recognises are;

1. Linguistic: the intelligence of words;
2. Logical-mathematical: the intelligence of numbers and reasoning;
3. Spatial: the intelligence of pictures and images;
4. Musical: the intelligence of tone, rhythm, and timbre;
5. Bodily-Kinesthetic: the intelligence of the whole body and the hands;
6. Interpersonal: the intelligence of social understanding;
7. Intrapersonal: the intelligence of self-knowledge; and

It is interesting to note that while Gardner initially expected his research to be of primary interest to psychologists, the great interest educators expressed in the theory surprised him. Educators have embraced this theory for a number of reasons. The Theory of Multiple Intelligences provides,
- information about the human mind,
- ideas for professional practice and
- possibilities for improved student achievement.

While teachers are responsible in part for the intellectual development of children we generally do not know much about human intelligence. 'During pre-service and in-service education, teachers rarely consider the nature of the human learning potential they are mandated to develop' (Campbell and Campbell, 1999, p.2). While offering insights into the human mind, the theory also provides evidence for the statement that 'all students can learn', by recognising that there are different ways to learn and process information. The Theory of Multiple Intelligences validates and dignifies other ways of learning and representing what is learnt (Campbell and Campbell, 1999, pp.6-7). MI encourages teachers to view the 'whole child', which results in a focus shift from content to human development. It also means that teachers do not view student failure as a lack of intelligence but rather as a lack of opportunity to learn and present their knowledge in a different way. This puts the emphasis on classroom practice that is more creative and collaborative in its teaching and learning.

The Theory of Multiple Intelligence can become a catalyst for more innovative and creative classrooms and can provide teachers with the opportunity to create classrooms where every child is accepted and valued for the unique possibilities they have. Gardner's definition of intelligence validates what some teachers have already been doing. By using the Theory of Multiple Intelligences as a framework, teachers can provide students with more 'windows' of opportunity for learning.
The theory reinforces good teaching strategies that involve presenting learning experiences in as many different ways as possible to ensure student understanding. The Theory of Multiple Intelligences provides a model of teaching and learning that affirms my assumptions and values. As Gardner, in Campbell and Campbell (1999) argues, being a good MI teacher means having a deep interest in children, getting to know them, their interests and helping them to use their minds. My acceptance of Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences is evident as it supports and affirms my assumptions and beliefs. It provides further 'bricks and mortar' that go to make up the person and teacher that I am. The theory also provides a teaching strategy that allows the teacher to extend the walls of the classroom. In recognising more than one intelligence I can utilise learning experiences from inside and outside the walls. By using spatial, musical and bodily-kinesthetic learning experiences to explore concepts and ideas I am providing opportunities for children to access experiences from their 'outside school experiences'. Children with musical experiences and knowledge are able to share these with their classmates. Some children who prefer bodily-kinesthetic expression have the opportunity of exploring concepts and ideas through a more meaningful experience. Using the Theory of Multiple Intelligences allows the classroom to be extended from the usual reading writing and computing activities so often found in our classrooms.

A report by Campbell and Campbell (1999) found that schools using the Theory of Multiple Intelligences as a teaching strategy and as a belief in teaching and learning, had students who more motivated by a relevant and self-directed curriculum. In recognising that they are likely to be talented in one or more intelligences, students were no longer afraid of failure and were more determined to overcome challenges, knowing that teachers and the ethos of the school would support them. While the Theory of Multiple Intelligences has no formal strategies and procedures to follow, what it does do is free teachers and students to work from their strengths and pursue different ways of exploring and presenting knowledge and understandings. The Theory of Multiple Intelligences offers the opportunity to extend the possibilities of the classroom and what it can do for teaching and learning.

Most of us become educators out of a desire to enhance the quality of life for children... Throughout our years in teaching, we seek out new curriculum and
methodologies, trying one approach after the other, hoping to discover those most effective. Perhaps, the most surprising finding from our study of MI schools is that restructuring is not necessarily achieved through external programs, resources... Indeed, meaningful restructuring first takes place within the minds of teachers and their beliefs about the nature and possibilities of their students. From there, all else follows (Campbell and Campbell, 1999, p.97).

This is the impact the Theory of Multiple Intelligences has had on me and provides an important foundation to my assumptions and values and a major part of the theoretical foundations of this research. In returning to the classroom I will endeavour to create teaching and learning experiences that utilise the Theory of Multiple Intelligences. I will plan specific learning centers based on the intelligences and video tape the children as they explore the learning experience. This will enable me to determine how the children react in these experiences and whether they do provide opportunities for the children to access information and experiences from outside the 4 walls of the classroom.

While I have accepted Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences it is important to realise that it was not developed as a teaching strategy. With this in mind it is important to address some of issues that may arise in using the Theory.

The complexity of the brain and how it functions in learning can call into question some aspects of the Theory of Multiple Intelligences. In defining eight intelligences it could be assumed that these intelligences operate independently of one another, ignoring the fact that combinations of these intelligences may be used in the learning and thinking process. This ambiguity can result in some confusion in the classroom when preparing activities that seem to overlap in the intelligences or else are so intent on providing for each intelligence, that the activity becomes irrelevant. This is perhaps a criticism of how educators have used Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences as an educational tool when in fact he proposed his theory as a psychologist. When applied to the brain the Theory of Multiple Intelligence can be further critiqued as we grapple with what intelligence is. Gardner (1983) defines it as, an ability to solve problems or to fashion a product, to make something that is valued in at least one culture.
Goleman (1996) argues that it is emotional intelligence or common sense that is valued in our society and should therefore be encouraged in our teaching and learning. Employers insist that creativity, innovation and risk taking are more important intelligences. Teachers may argue that by using the Theory of Multiple Intelligences as a teaching strategy teachers are concentrating on other intelligences that are really not valued by our current society.

While Goleman (1996) and Zohar (1997) argue that emotions can effect the way we think, Zohar (1997) also states that a person's experiences, their assumptions and values also effect their thinking. The environment is recognised as having an influence on the brain and a criticism made of the Theory of Multiple Intelligence is that while Mozart was obviously music intelligence, perhaps the fact that he was born into a family and society that valued and encouraged music assisted in his development of this intelligence. Perhaps by allowing children an opportunity to only explore learning experiences through their preferred intelligence may create a child with intelligence in only one area. Similarly by identifying and labeling a child with a particular intelligence this may encourage a child to recognise a weakness in other areas and a determination to only learn through a strength. In fact this is again recognising an aspect of how the Theory of Multiple Intelligences can be interpreted by educators as a learning style rather than as intelligence. Gardner argues that his Theory and learning styles are not the same.

(Learning styles are very different from multiple intelligences. Multiple intelligences claims that we respond, individually, in different ways to different kinds of content, such as language or music or other people. This is very different from the notion of learning style. You can say that a child is a visual learner, but that's not a multiple intelligences way of talking about things. What I would say is, "Here is a child who very easily represents things spatially, and we can draw upon that strength if need be when we want to teach the child something new."

(_checkley, 1997, p9.)

While such criticisms can be levelled at Gardner's theory I still believe it offers a framework for teaching strategies that can provide more meaningful learning experiences for children in our classrooms.
Computers.

At the end of 1986, when I left the classroom, computers had not entered the primary school classroom. They were beginning to emerge in libraries and there was some recognition that they could be useful for student learning. In the intervening years there has been an explosion of technology in schools. However the use of computers for teaching and learning has at times been overlooked by many teachers still struggling to come to terms with the technology skills. My personal experience with computers, in my own learning and teaching, has encouraged me to explore the theory underlying the use of computers and technology in the classroom. By using computers in the classroom I hope to allow for more flexible, collaborative and self-directed learning experiences for the learner. I will also use the computers in activities that utilise the Theory of Multiple Intelligences as well as using them to put my assumptions and values into practice. I believe computers can,

- provide alternative entry points for a learning experience,
- provide opportunities for parents to become more involved in the educational process from home and work via the internet and
- allow for more involvement with the wider community via the internet and CD Roms.

However it is evident that the use of any new technology in the classroom requires a 'mind shift' for the teacher as it challenges the teacher to explore new models of teaching and learning.

Unless educators are willing to reconceptualise curriculum and instruction (and perhaps the organisation and process of schooling itself), they will probably need to be quite patient in expecting transformation to occur through the use of computers and other tools (Majkowski, 1990, p.14).

Computers as word processors; as a means of presenting knowledge and understanding through a variety of software programs, and as a source of information (through the internet and CD Roms) means that the teacher is confronted with a different teaching tool. A rethinking of the teacher's role in the classroom is part of this 'mind shift'. Rather
than passively listening to the teacher, students are encouraged to discuss and learn ideas from themselves and for themselves through technology. This requires that teachers become participants in the learning and create collaborative learning situations for both the teacher and student. Majkowski (1990) again refers to the need for teachers to tackle the pedagogical issues of education in the light of these new technologies. He argues that teachers, administrators and researchers have still not addressed these three major questions,

- How should existing curriculum and pedagogy be redesigned to accommodate and maximise the use of the technology?
- What are the most appropriate ways to bring technology into the curriculum?
- How can computers and other new technological tools be used as catalysts to revitalise existing curriculum and instruction within and across subject areas?

Tapscott (1999) also refers to eight new ways of thinking about teaching and learning.

1. From linear to non-linear as children access information on the Internet and move from one piece of information to another as hypertext links encourage them to follow different routes.
2. From instructional teaching to student construction and discovery where children construct their own knowledge through teacher and/or students devised learning experiences. They construct their own knowledge instead of knowledge that is delivered solely by the teacher.
3. From teacher centred to learner-centred education as the technologies allow the teacher to access more learning experiences that cater for the individual student's needs.
4. From simply absorbing information, the student has the opportunity of interacting with the information, deconstructing and reconstructing it.
5. From school to life-long learning as learners recognise their ability to access learning experiences when and where they want.
6. From one-size fits all to customised learning as students can find their own personal path to learning, perhaps recognising school as a community of learners rather than as separate classrooms.
7. From learning as torture to learning as fun, (a debatable shift, as I believe that much of learning within classrooms can still be fun and exciting without technologies. Tapscott, however, argues that some of the best teachers have been the entertaining teachers and now technology can assist the students to be the entertainer in their own learning process.)
8. From the teacher as transmitter, to the teacher as facilitator. Learning becomes a social activity as students and teacher work together to develop a learning experience (Tapscott, 1999, pp.9-11).
Gilster (1997) supports these changes as he acknowledges that using technology will mean that knowledge can be gathered in an activist way with the gathering and evaluating of materials, integrating network materials with traditional materials and then creating a finished product. Dede (1997) argues that these shifts will require a total rethink of current 'chalk and talk ' practices as well as the pedagogical issues that relate to teaching and learning and how technology can enhance the learning environment. Dede (1997) continues by saying that teachers will need to reconsider their own teaching strategies, their role in the classroom, the contributions students make to their own learning, the authenticity of the curriculum and their evaluation of student work. Teachers will also need to participate in and recognise the value of collaborative learning.

These changes have implications for teachers and the school environment that need to be explored.

- Is it still necessary to have children sitting in classrooms with children who are similar in age but have different abilities, needs and experiences when they could be accessing other learning experiences offered by technology?

It also challenges the teacher’s role.

- Is it more appropriate for teachers to be assisting in the preparation and organisation of learning experiences that can be explored collaboratively, at different times and in different venues?

Lee (1999) supports Tapscott's view of the 'new net education' or 'mind shift' in education and encourages educators to work in harmony with technology rather than risk becoming marginalised by it.

The 'school' system remains basically unchanged, despite an immense amount of effort and investment. Let us as educational leaders, lead, seek to create the desired future, and consider, if we have a new system in our midst how we might best work with that development. Let us also consider whether the origins of the new system might be found in some innate human learning.
structures, that have until this stage been largely suppressed by the 'school' system (Lee, 1999).

While educators are being encouraged to embrace technology in the classroom, the practicalities are sometimes lost in the rhetoric. Zimmerman and Hayes (1998) argue that schools need to use technology for at least three major reasons:

• As a catalyst for the larger education reform effort of restructuring the way students learn and teachers teach;
• Good tools give talented and caring teachers and administrators the power to create successful learning environments; and
• Students who do not have technology skills will be unable to compete in the economy of the future (Zimmerman and Hayes, 1998, p.115).

What challenges a teacher is the use of technology to teach in meaningful ways. As McKenzie (2000b, p.57) states 'The most important thing to remember is that great teaching is more important than great equipment.' He is of course referring to computers and it is important to note that this is technology's greatest challenge - to assist teachers to use technology as a tool to enhance the good teaching they are already doing. Warlick (1999) argues that teachers need to be given the opportunity to be imaginative and collaborative as they attempt to adapt their teaching to a world that utilises technology extensively.

By supporting good teachers with freedom, time and tools, they will invent new ways of teaching and learning that will be relevant to the new world with which we are trying so hard to cope. By collaborating beyond the classroom, learning to use the unique qualities of Internet-based information, and providing students with real audiences for their work, we will raise the windows and pull down the walls of our classrooms, connecting to our community, both local and global. We will make schools a more integral part of the communal fabric (Warlick, 1999, p.18).

Warlick (1999) argues that technology provides for extensive experiences in collaboration. Limited classroom computers require that students often have to work in teams to access information from web sites or CD Roms. As they access the information in groups, they discuss the relevance of information, how to record the information and they make decisions about who does what. In a multi-age classroom more able readers can assist those who are less able. Students with more advanced computer skills can assist others. Using email facilities means that interaction is occurring with others as well as collaboration as the children compose responses to email messages. Technology
can support and enhance student learning, thinking and problem solving in many ways and teachers need time and training to explore how this can be done. Too often attempts have been made to train teachers in technology skills, when what is needed is time for teachers to think creatively about using technology to enhance what teachers already do – provide for meaningful learning experiences for every child. (McKenzie, 2000b.)

This emphasis on meaningful learning experiences is fundamental to the learning process and it is important to realise that technology can enhance the experience not take it over. Healy (2000) observes that some educators and parents think that by adding a computer and software to a classroom that children will learn better, which ignores the essential and often misunderstood dynamic interaction that should occur between student and teacher. Ohler (2000) maintains that teachers will become more important as technology increases in education. '(S)tudents will need teachers for their wisdom and knowledge to help navigate a purposeful path through the glitz and distraction’ (Ohler, 2000, p.18).

Technology offers the teacher another tool to assist in the preparation and planning of meaningful experiences for all children. It can provide many opportunities for students to explore and present knowledge in a variety of ways – supporting the Theory of Multiple Intelligences. It also provides unique opportunities for:

- collaboration;
- a child-centred approach to a learning experience;
- a flexible learning experience, and
- motivation,

all of which support and affirm my assumptions and beliefs about teaching and learning. However how does it really work in practice? By returning to the classroom and using the computers as a teaching and learning tool, I will be able to determine how they provide meaningful learning experiences for children.

Computers can also provide families with more personal and interactive connections with their children’s classrooms and schools. A recent survey has indicated that 60% of
families want to communicate with teachers and view their children's work on-line (Grunwald Associates, 2000). This combined with the potential to extend student's experiences beyond the classroom and family room walls, makes technology a unique and invaluable tool for teachers (Revenaugh, 2000). Computers can be used to involve parents in the classroom through emails and the communication of classroom activities.

I intend to use the computers as a teaching tool with the children rotating in groups to access mathematics, spelling and reading activities on the computer. I will use them to access information from the internet and CD Roms during research activities and Multiple Intelligence activities. They will also be used to write up newsletters that will be sent as emails to parents and pen pals as well as utilising specific software programs to extend the children's computer knowledge and skills. My use of the computer as a teaching and learning tool in the classroom should reflect my assumptions, values and knowledge in practice as well as revealing how using computers in this way can extend the 4 walls of the classroom.

Parents.

Through my experience as a parent, I have become aware of the difficulty that some schools have in involving parents in the educational process. I have often been frustrated by the attitude that parental involvement is appropriate for fund raising and other menial jobs but is not encouraged in educational issues. While this is a personal observation, it is supported by a number of researchers.

Rasmussen (1998) refers to this situation as, 'beyond fundraising and baking cookies'. Schools have relied primarily on parents to fundraise for the school through baking cookies and cupcakes, when it is of equal importance to convince parents that their input into other aspects of the education process is a valuable resource. Extensive research in the US in 1996, identified that there is a strong link between children who are successful at school and their parent's involvement in the school. This involvement is not just
through fundraising but activities that engage parents in working directly with their children on learning activities at home and school.

Research shows that when parents get involved students' grades and test scores improve, their self-esteem is enhanced, and they don't skip school as much... Parents can motivate their children to work harder, serve as educational resources and recruit other parents to school programs. Everyone wins - students, parents and schools - when parents are partners in education (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1998).

It is also important to realise that all parents can be involved when the school recognises that parents need to be offered a variety of ways of participating, and for some this may involve 'baking cookies' while for others it may involve participation in teacher recruitment for the school.

As a parent and teacher I realise that education should be a partnership. While it is important to recognise the role that parents and teachers play individually, it is also important to acknowledge that by working together in a partnership our children/students have much to gain.

By acknowledging parents as our students' first teachers and respecting the role they have played, after all, 'parents have already done the difficult job of teaching them (children) to talk - after that teaching them to read ought to be a doodle' (Wilby, 1982,p.7), we can enter into an equal partnership where one another's strengths and weaknesses are recognised and used.

While parental involvement can have positive effects on student achievement and attitude it can also result in parents understanding and respecting the role teachers and schools play. Parents can act as advocates for teachers and the school within their community. This is a very powerful role and one teachers and schools appreciate. Working in partnerships provides opportunities for diverse involvement in education and for parents this choice is necessary, given the demands on their time and expertise. By offering a range of involvement possibilities, parents appreciate that their contribution to their children's education is valued.
While I believe these partnerships between parents and schools are essential to the well-being of a school, I also recognise the difficulties in creating partnerships. A parent involved in an American district’s decision to forge authentic family partnerships between home and school, writes about these difficulties.

Turning the district’s vision of shared decision making into reality has not been easy. It can be a hard sell to tradition-bound staff used to making decisions on their own. Shared decision making has meant jarring people out of their comfort zones: principals who have called the shots for years; teachers and curriculum specialists who consider themselves the experts; and parents whose attitudes toward schools range from complacency to combativeness. Equally challenging is bringing students into a collaborative process that may ultimately change how they experience school. They can be the most resistant of all (Cavarretta, 1998, p.4).

Cavarretta (1998) concludes that the experience has been worthwhile and that the task of forging partnerships between teachers and parents can be quite formidable when tackling educational and political bureaucracies. Working together has resulted in parents breaking out of the traditional mould of only ‘baking cookies’ and instead has helped to shape the educational landscape of their schools.

My experience as a parent involved in my own children’s education is a new experience that has impacted upon the person and teacher I am. My research and reading to date into this new issue has helped shape my assumptions and values from a teacher and parent’s perspective. I value the involvement of parents in the educational process and acknowledge that parents may wish to be involved in their children’s education in a variety of ways. I also recognise that the learning experience is just as relevant and important, inside and outside the 4 walls of the classroom.

I intend to involve parents in my classroom by asking for their input by providing me with information about their child and informing them that I want to work with them in the education of their child. I intend to encourage them to come into the classroom and participate in morning activities as well as including them in class activities and excursions. My initial unit of work will involve having parents and community members
share their talents. I hope this will convey the value I place on the parents’ and the community’s contribution to a child’s continuing education. I will endeavour to keep them informed of what is happening in the classroom through emails and newsletters and ask for their evaluation of my programs through questionnaires. These planned activities will also help determine how involving parents and the community can also help extend the 4 walls of the classroom.

The readings described provide the foundations on which to build my research. They have helped determine the focus for my research as I explore them in my classroom as part of me and the teacher I am and as strategies that will help extend the 4 walls of the classroom. It is evident that I have been greatly influenced by authors who have researched the importance of who we are as teachers and how our values affect how we teach. The ‘ethic of care’ that comes through much of the literature confirms my belief in the importance of creating a caring classroom environment. The impact of Howard Gardner’s research and development of the Theory of Multiple Intelligences has provided a basis for my belief in the Arts as an important means of teaching and learning, as has the use of computers. Much of my reading and research supports the use of computers as a tool for learning and a means of involving children in a world outside the classroom. Parents can also provide opportunities for meaningful ‘life’ experiences, as they are encouraged to participate in the education of their children. This literature review provides the theoretical foundations, on which I have, built and supported my research and is what I take with me as I return to the classroom. The next chapter describes the Action Research methodology that I will use to explore and validate my assumptions, values and knowledge in practice.
Chapter 3

‘The tools of the trade’ – Action Research Methodology.
Chapter 3 – ‘The tools of the trade’ – Action Research Methodology.

In the previous chapter I have provided a review of the literature that supports and underpins my assumptions, values and knowledge in practice. While the last chapter provides the theoretical foundations for my research, this chapter provides the methodology I will use to pursue the research.

Altrichter, Posch and Somekh (1993) describe Action Research as a methodology that supports teachers in their struggle with the challenges and problems related to their classroom practice and as they reflect on these struggles. John Elliott defines Action Research as the 'study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within it' (Elliott, 1991, p.69), and Altrichter and co authors, put Action Research into a classroom context. They argue that teachers use Action Research methodology to explore how they can ‘...improve the quality of teaching and learning as well as the conditions under which teachers and students work in schools’ (Altrichter et al., 1993, p.4). It is because Action Research contributes to the knowledge base of the teaching profession that I have decided to use it as my research methodology.

In this chapter, I will review how Action Research has developed as a methodology and how important the practicing teacher is in the Action Research model. As the practicing classroom teacher-researcher I continue to explore my role in Action Research and develop my personal Action Research model based heavily upon McNiff's (1993) model. I conclude the chapter by describing my data collection methods, what and why I am researching, and how I will research the specific issues.

3.1. Action Research from an historical perspective.

Educational Action Research can be traced back at least as early as 1926 when Buckingham (1926) wrote Research for Teachers. He observed that University lecturers
were appointed not only for their ability to teach but more importantly for their ability to conduct original research. Teachers on the other hand were appointed to teach and not to research. This perception is still very much alive today and yet Buckingham, some seventy years ago, recognised the possibilities of teachers researching their own practice.

The teacher has opportunities for research which, if seized, will not only powerfully and rapidly develop the techniques of teaching but will also react to revitalise and dignify the work of the individual teacher... (Nixon, 1981, p iv).

The term Action Research was first used by the social psychologist Kurt Lewin in 1944. His description,

.... (A) form of research which could marry the experimental approach of social science with programs of social action in response to major problems of the day. Through action research, Lewin argued advances in theory and needed social changes might simultaneously be achieved (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1981, p.13),

provided educators with a cycle of analysis, fact finding, conceptualisation, planning, execution, more fact finding or evaluation and a repetition of the cycle.


- An approach that improves education by changing it and learning from the change.
- It is participatory in that people work to improve their practice.
- It is developed through a self-reflection spiral as one plans, acts, observes, reflects and re-plans, acts, observes, reflects...
- It involves gathering compelling evidence that assists in showing how previous practices could need changing.
- It involves keeping a personal journal that allows for reflection.
- It is a political process because our changes will affect others. (p7-11)

They also provided a visual diagram that was spiral in its format. However, while Kemmis is particularly intent on producing knowledge from the research, another researcher, John Elliott is more concerned with improving practice. Elliott states that Action Research is 'the study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within it' (Elliott, 1991, p.69). Hopkins (1985) outlines his concern for Kemmis'
and Elliott's tight framework and instead prefers to talk about 'classroom research by teachers' and offers methods and techniques that he believes are more empowering and not as restricting as the elaborate step by step models offered by both Kemmis and Elliott.

Hopkins describes his five principles for classroom research by teachers as:

1. The research should not interfere with or disrupt the primary role of the teacher, which is to teach.
2. Data collection therefore should not be too demanding of the teacher's time.
3. The research methodology must be rigorous and reliable enough to support the changes and formation of new knowledge.
4. The teacher needs to identify a problem (or something that you think may need improving) that can be solved or improved and that they are totally committed to.
5. Close attention to ethical procedures (Hopkins, 1985, pp.41-45).

McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead (1996) also support a more personal approach to Action Research. They note that the perceived difference between Kemmis and Elliott's approach to Action Research as a methodology, is based upon a definition of knowledge. Knowledge may refer to public knowledge, that is, the knowledge that may inform others' practice, or personal knowledge, that which contributes to a personal development and understanding. By enquiring into our own practice teachers are able to create a living form of educational theory. In attempting to find answers to questions such as, 'how do I improve what I am doing?' Action Research becomes insider research that can become a form of professional development (McNiff et al, 1996, p.11). In Figure 2, I have adapted an Action Research spiral designed by McNiff (1993) to describe my classroom research and it can be noted that the spiral provides the researcher with the opportunity for personalising the research.
My assumptions about teaching and learning. Are they affirmed in the classroom?

What is there already?

Reflect upon and alter my assumptions and practice.

How can I make it better?

By extending the 4 walls of the classroom.

Plan of practice.
The use of the theory of Multiple Intelligences as a teaching strategy. Computers as a teaching and learning tool.
The involvement of parents and the community in the classroom.

Figure 2. The Active Spiral: The author’s adaptation of the McNiff (1993) spiral.

This visual representation of an Action Research methodology encompasses the important aspects of Action Research outlined in this historical perspective. Action Research is cyclic as there is an emphasis on the reflection that takes place as the data is collected, analysed, reflected upon, a change in practice, further collection, analysis and reflection followed by more change. While the cyclical process could be perceived as continuous, and for the process of teaching I believe it is, the purpose of this research is
to attempt to answer the question – are my assumptions, values and knowledge in practice affirmed in my return to the classroom?

Action Research methodology gives teachers the opportunity to research and reflect upon their own practice which will ultimately impact upon the knowledge and practice of their own teaching, a process that is important for the life and well-being of the teaching profession.

If the teaching profession is to reject the paternalism of traditional research within education, it must develop a radical alternative, which truly serves the needs of teachers. Action research … represents just such an alternative. For it enables them (teachers) to take a major role in developing lines of educational enquiry, and thereby to make a unique contribution to our understanding of what happens in the classroom (Nixon, 1981, p.9).

Sagor (1992) further defines the importance of Action Research for schools. He notes that in almost every profession, except teaching, there is an expectation that practitioners will collaborate, interact and contribute to their profession’s knowledge base. Doctors for example fill medical journals with descriptions of practice, symptoms, and suggested interventions. Educational journals are more than likely to feature articles from professors, consultants and administrators who work outside the primary school classroom. ‘Until teachers become involved in generating the knowledge that informs their practice, they will remain cast as subordinate workers rather than dynamic professionals’ (Sagor, 1992, p. 4).

The concern that much of the knowledge that informs our practice of teaching is coming from outside the primary school classroom means that change is slow. The practice of teaching is tied closely to the teacher. Therefore to change the practice of teaching the change often needs to occur within the teacher. Someone else cannot successfully change a teacher’s assumptions, values and knowledge. The teacher must understand and believe in the change for it to occur. Action Research methodology provides a model for teachers to recognise and reflect upon their practice, change, reflect further and improve. Action Research provides a way to include classroom teachers in the important discourse about teaching and learning.
3.2. The teacher in Action Research.

Altrichter et al (1993) define Action Research as a desire to improve the quality of teaching and learning as well as the conditions in which teachers and students work. McNiff (1996) describes this kind of research as an activity that brings about an improvement in practice. It involves describing, interpreting and explaining practice, while attempting to change it for the better. The essential motive behind this type of research over others lies in the desire to improve the quality of teaching and learning as well as the conditions in which teachers and students work within a classroom. Action Research can provide a support for teachers as they deal with the challenges of practice and innovation in a reflective way (Altrichter et al, 1993). By reflecting on their practice, teachers can make an important contribution to the knowledge base of their profession. The value of this type of practical research is affirmed by McNiff et al (1996) and Altrichter et al (1993). They recognise that by researching practice and documenting it through an Action Research methodology, the body of knowledge about the practice of teaching can be expanded.

In using this methodology I will attempt to embody the notion that teaching is not so much a field of study as a field of practice (McNiff, 1993). While a considerable amount of educational research is pursued through examining sources outside the teaching practice, it is important to acknowledge that the practice can actually assist in creating knowledge about teaching. Knowledge about teaching is best achieved by researching practice, as I intend to do through this project. It is my belief that knowledge about teaching is continually changing and it is the practice of teaching that is changing the knowledge. It is therefore critical for an educational researcher to be involved in the practice of teaching as knowledge about teaching belongs to the teacher and is created and reformed through practice by the teacher.

It is also important to recognise that Action Research provides an opportunity to demystify research for teachers. The importance of action research is not to be underestimated, because it provides teachers with a legitimate and more appropriate
alternative to traditional research designs' (Hopkins, 1985, p.43). This is a critical step in a process that is essential for the progress and well being of the profession, that is, the reflection, improvement, change, and reflection cycles that need to be undertaken by teachers within the classroom. Action Research methodology articulates and confirms what many teachers have sometimes been doing but have not always recognised in terms of research. Hopkins (1985) refers to 'classroom research by teachers' to simplify Action Research methodology further. He recognises that a teacher's perception of research involves time that the busy teacher cannot afford. He also notes that the same teachers doubt the practical value that any research can ultimately offer. By recognising that a teacher's first and most important role is to teach, then any research should confine itself to improving this. The teacher as the researcher in the Action Research model confirms this. Any data collection must not be time consuming for the busy teacher. This is one reason why journal writings are used extensively in the collection of data in Action Research. Journal entries provide opportunities to reflect upon and subsequently alter practice. This systematic reflection provides an opportunity for the classroom researcher to ultimately improve their teaching and learning.

The process of writing and reflecting is a very powerful tool in Action Research. Clandinin, Davies, Hogan and Kennard (1993) acknowledge that the teacher starts with their own personal knowledge obtained through their prior experiences. By writing, re-reading and reflecting the teacher is able to construct and reconstruct their personal knowledge of teaching. The reflective journal can become an enormously powerful tool within the Action Research cycle. Clandinin et al continue to extol the virtues of writing when explaining the importance of using narratives for a larger audience.

Narrative inquiries are shared in ways that help readers question their own stories, raise questions about practice and see in the narrative accounts stories of their own stories. The intent is to foster reflection, storying and restorying for readers... (Clandinin et al 1993, p.13).

Clandinin et al (1993) further describe how assumptions and values can be continually challenged by the teaching experience when recorded in a journal.

Teacher knowledge is experiential, embodied knowledge that is constructed and reconstructed as we live our lives, both in and out of schools. It is emotional,
moral and aesthetic knowledge developed in historical, social and cultural contexts, and work. This view of knowledge acknowledges that teachers’ lives are composed over time and their stories are lived, told and relived and retold as teachers encounter new situations in their lives. Our teacher knowledge, then, is produced by each of us in the on-going experience of composing our lives (Clandinin et al, 1993,p.218).

The process of Action Research can become a powerful mechanism for change within the teacher, the classroom and ultimately the teaching profession. McNiff (1993) argues that teachers must make a break from the traditional research that is done by researchers outside the classroom and through researching their own practice, add to the body of educational knowledge.

This power allows us to apply our educational practices to the process of transforming our lives. If we are not happy with a situation, we change it. Our educational knowledge is the process whereby we know why and how we transform lives… Teachers must regard themselves as free thinkers… in order to regard themselves as part of the educative process (McNiff, 1993,p.4).

Action Research offers classroom teachers a unique opportunity to research their practice and organise this practice in a recognised research manner. It also provides the teacher-researcher with an opportunity to extend their personal knowledge.

**ME- the teacher and person I am in the Action Research.**

The pertinent aspect of the McNiff et al (1996) approach to the Action Research methodology is the personalising of the research. It is referred to as the ‘putting the ‘I’ at the centre of the research’ (McNiff et al, 1996,p.17). My return to the classroom is to be a very personal journey and as such this methodology compliments the process.

McNiff expands the notion of self-reflection further when she advocates the importance of the practitioner in the process. She places the ‘I’ firmly in the centre of the research and encourages self-reflection through journal writing.

I experience a problem when some of my educational values are denied in my practice…My most potent answer is to write it down… My writing becomes both the symbolic expressions of thought (this is what I mean) and the critical reflection on that thought (do I really mean this?) My writing is both reflection-on-action (what I have written) and reflection-in-action (what I am writing). The very act of making external, through the process of writing, what is internal,
in the process of thinking, allows me to formulate explicit theories about the practices I engage in intuitively (Lomax, 1990, p.56).

McNiff (1993) refers specifically to the 'I' in research when she outlines the following process for Action Research.

1. I identify a problem when some of my educational values are denied in practice;
2. I imagine a solution to the problem;
3. I implement the solution;
4. I evaluate the solution;
5. I modify my ideas and my practice in the light of the evaluation (p.7).

This simplified version of the Action Research model identifies the importance of the teacher and the person I am, in the research. Through my personal journey I come to recognise the importance that 'I' play in the research process. My research is intensely personal, as I progress and realise that this personal journey is integral to the person and therefore the teacher that I am.

My research is about me, as a teacher and as a person. My assumptions and values are critical to the classroom as they affect my actions, words and overall interaction with children, parents and colleagues. By researching and reflecting upon what I say and do, I can change and this continual process is fundamental to my teaching and my life. I expect to learn about myself and my teaching from the experience.

Using an Action Research model I am able to recognise what I do (or hope I do) within the classroom and name it. Articulating what we do is an important step it as it authenticates what we do in professional language. By placing Me, the teacher, in the research, I recognise the impact I have, I can reflect and change. The research and reflection is intensely personal and affected by so many internal and external influences. Therefore the teacher is continually changing and affecting the classroom in many different ways.

The question, How can I improve my... takes the researcher into the area of self study because the nature of the question is asking how can I change some part of me; the question turns the action researcher into a learner about himself or herself, as well as about improving the education of children. Action research
can be undertaken without the necessity for the researcher to learn anything about him/herself, but I am now committed to the self study approach to action research that does have at its heart that the researcher reflects on him or herself and on how he or she thinks, feels and acts can affect everyone in the classroom (Evans, 1996, p. 4).

This is the value of Action Research when 'I' is placed in the centre of the research.

3.3. My Action Research Model.

In clarifying my classroom research I have created my own model of research based upon the Action Research model of McNiff et al (1996). I am incorporating McNiff's spiral and placing the 'I' in the research when she uses terms such as identifying a problem, reflection, action, change.

I have identified 3 Rs in my Action Research.

1. Recognition - I recognise who I am, my values, beliefs and assumptions. I write them down and recognise where they have come from, prior to my return to the primary school classroom.

2. Reflection - I reflect upon my assumptions, values and knowledge in my practice. Do I do what I say I value, and believe in? Do I put my knowledge into practice?

3. Rethink - I think about my values, beliefs and values and how I put them into practice as I progress through my journey
Figure 3 describes this process visually.

I recognise my assumptions, values and knowledge in practice.

As I reflect I rethink my practice.

On going classroom practice.

Teaching strategies

Continued influences

Children and parents

Reflection

Teacher
Person

Reflection

Society

Teacher
Person

Colleagues

Figure 3. The author’s adaptation of the McNiff (1993) Action Research model.

I recognise that I am putting ME at the centre of this research.

I am the reason for the research. Returning to the classroom is a personal journey to affirm my assumptions, values and knowledge in practice. I am starting from where I am. After thirteen years away from the primary school classroom, I need to determine whether my assumptions about teaching are still relevant to the classroom of today.
I reflect upon my research questions.

*Am I the teacher that I think I am?* Are my assumptions, values and knowledge in practice confirmed in my classroom experience? Does the use of the Theory of Multiple Intelligences as a teaching tool, computers and the involvement of parents really impact upon the 4 walls of the classroom and extend them? These are the questions I will reflect upon as I reflect upon my data collected.

I rethink my action.

As I reflect upon my experiences I may need to rethink some of my assumptions and values and change my practice.

3.4. Data collection methods.

To reflect and rethink my practice I will need to review the data I will collect. I plan to collect and analyse the data obtained through,

- A daily diary.
- Videos of specific class activities.
- Photos of specific class activities.
- A questionnaire for parents.
- Taped interviews by children of children.

The diary (or journal, as it is sometimes termed.)

This type of data collection supports Action Research in that,

- Writing a diary is familiar and more convenient for teachers.
- It provides written evidence of observations.
- The daily diary provides continuity not readily available in other forms of data collection.
• There are opportunities for reflection during the process of writing (Altrichter et al., 1993, pp.10-11).

The daily diary becomes an invaluable source of data as it can provide the foundations for the Action Research process, as the teacher describes the practice, analyses it, reflects and modifies the practice. By writing in my journal every day I will be able to reflect on the day and articulate issues that need answers,

• Am I being the teacher and person that I think I am?
• Can I reflect and change myself on the basis of reading and articulating my day, week, month?
• Can the process of journal writing provide evidence of my assumption and values in practice and the changes I might need to make to these assumptions and values?
• Is my classroom practice impacting upon the 4 walls of the classroom and extending them?

Clandinin et al (1993) note that our journals can provide insights into the teacher’s assumptions and values as recorded stories unfold in the journal entries and reveal how the teacher responds to children, parents and colleagues and situations. The journal entries are written conversations of classroom practice that evolve over some time and can be returned to in order to gain new understanding of ones’ practice through reflection. The journal becomes the teacher as researcher’s story and is invaluable as a data collection method. Hankins (1998) described her use of a journal as personal and research journal,

It’s a teaching journal, It’s a personal journal, and It’s a research journal. It’s both a personal and teaching journal because John Dewey first and Lucy Calkins later taught me to reflect on my day and my life in the same breath. It’s both a Teaching and research journal because I no longer believe that teaching can be separated from research (Mintz and Yun, 1999, p.113).

This quote reveals the power of the personal journal in the teacher’s life. My journal will provide evidence of my personal experiences in the classroom and how I use the process of journal writing and reading to reflect and change my practice. By writing in my journal every day, I plan to record the day’s events and my reaction to them. I will be able to reflect on what I say, do and think during the day’s teaching. By keeping a daily
journal the information collected will provide the most in-depth and constant data on the experience. It will be in my journal that my innermost feelings concerning myself as a person and as a teacher will be revealed. The journal will provide the most personal account of my reflections during the journey and I will be able to draw upon them when determining whether I really am the teacher that I think I am.

Video taping of classroom practice.

McNiff et al (1996) note that action researchers are usually at the centre of the action and are therefore not in a good position to view themselves. Video taping provides an opportunity to view the practice and reflect on it. Factual data can be captured through video taping. It can make the context and causal relationships more accessible and provide opportunities to discuss the verbal and non-verbal behaviour as seen on the video (Altrichter et al, 1993). To be able to view the data means that specific focus observations and questions can be asked, such as 'does the video reveal that I contradict what I am?' My assumptions and beliefs of how I interact within the classroom may in fact not be evident in the video.

Video taping will also document the role of Multiple Intelligences and computers at work in the classroom and the way that both can extend the 4 walls of the classroom by involving the wider community and offering multiple ways of learning. Using the Theory of Multiple Intelligences as a teaching strategy will allow for varying entry points into knowledge by encouraging the children to learn and express their understandings in different ways. The use of computers in the classroom as a tool will allow for more flexible learning to occur as well as provide for more collaborative and self-directed learning experiences for the learner. By video taping these learning experiences I will be able to determine whether using the theory of Multiple Intelligences as a teaching strategy and computer use can provide other entry points for a learning experience. I will also be able to view whether they allow for more involvement with the wider community by accessing and communicating through the world wide web.
It will be necessary to consult with colleagues and discuss when to video in the classroom and the specific areas I would like them to video. This prior planning and discussion of the video taping should allow me to draw attention to specific learning experiences as well as to my own classroom management, my behaviour, speech and relationship with the children. I will then be able to view the videos and reflect on the learning experiences I provided and observe myself in action.

**Questionnaires of parents and children.**

McNiff et al (1996), argue that questionnaires provide two useful purposes within an Action Research project.

1. To discover basic information that cannot be obtained easily.
2. To evaluate the effect of intervention, again when it cannot be obtained easily in other ways.

My initial questionnaire for parents will be to ask them to share their knowledge and understanding of their children with me, the teacher. Hopefully this will indicate to parents the importance I place on their knowledge and my interest in their ideas and concerns. This initial questionnaire will provide me with basic information about the children I am to teach and the parents I intend to involve in the classroom. This type of introductory questionnaire is often used by teachers to introduce themselves to the parents of the children they are teaching. It is also a means of obtaining information about the children's interests, hobbies, abilities and the parents' aspirations for their child as well as their values and expectations of the classroom.

The second questionnaire will be devised to assess how useful my classroom activities are in achieving parental involvement and what value parents place on the use of computers in the classroom. This questionnaire will assist in evaluating the effect of my activities in using computers as a teaching tool and involving parents in classroom activities. It will also assist in determining whether computers and parental involvement impacts upon the 4 walls of the classroom.
The use of questionnaires provides specific responses to my assumptions, values and knowledge about parental involvement, community involvement and the use of computers. By reading and reflecting upon the parent’s responses, I will be able to either affirm or modify my assumptions.

**Interviews of parents and children.**

The purpose of my interviews with parents is to discover,

- Parent’s views on their involvement in education.
- More meaningful ways to involve parents and the wider community in the education process.
- How parents feel learning is enhanced when children have the opportunity to work collaboratively.
- Whether they believe teaching and learning strategies based on The Theory of Multiple Intelligences provides for more meaningful learning experiences and the opportunity to work co-operatively.
- Whether they think computers assist in learning experiences.
- Whether parents think that teaching and learning strategies based on The Theory of Multiple Intelligences and computers provide opportunities for extending the walls of the classroom.
- Other ways I could extend the walls of the classroom, and encompass and include the wider community.

An analysis of the responses to these issues will provide me with the opportunity to reform my assumptions and the practice of teaching and learning. In interviewing the children I will use the children’s ‘big buddies’ from an older class to interview the children and record their responses on an audiotape. An Australian educator, Susan Groundwater-Smith, in her co-authored paper entitled, *Students: From Informants to Co-Researchers*, (1999), encourages teachers to strive for a coalition between researchers and students. Students, she argues, have a right to be heard and listened to.
... (T)here has not been a "sustained involvement" by students themselves in investigations which will ultimately have consequences for: the ways in which teachers teach; the manner in which the curriculum is designed and enacted; and, the modes of assessment and reporting which will be employed (Groundwater-Smith and Downes, 1999).

By using older children from another class, I assume that my students will feel more comfortable in expressing their opinions about me (their teacher) and my teaching, to other children, rather than to me. Interviewing the children will give me the opportunity to determine whether the children see me, their teacher, as the teacher and person I think I am. Their responses might challenge or confirm my assumptions and values about the teacher and person I think I am.

**Photos of inside and outside classroom experiences.**

The use of photos can provide a captured moment not available through words. They can provide:

- evidence of children's engagement in an activity;
- evidence that an event has taken place, and
- a means of reflecting further on an experience (McNiff et al, 1996, p.103).

By using photographs in these ways I will be able to add to the videos in providing before and after shots as well as identifying children's involvement. I can use the photos to create books for the class, with the children writing explanations under each picture. This can provide an insight into the children's involvement and perception of the activity. Classroom photos can be processed on a CD Rom as well as in hard copy, which means that the photos can then be sequenced to form a slide show to illustrate the development of my practice.

Using photos is a convenient way of recording events as they happen. Photos can provide a more spontaneous record to reflect upon and can provide a before and after to some of the video taping. By sharing the photos with the children I will again be able to determine whether my assumptions about myself as a teacher are in fact observable to the children in my class.
Using the ‘tools of the trade’ in my return to the classroom.

Action Research methodology provides the ‘best tools’ for my research. Its strength lies in its simplicity in that the cyclic process of action, reflection, change, action... is an integral part of a teacher’s work. By recognising what teachers do, as they go about making meaningful educational experiences for all children in the class, and by naming and validating it as authentic research, teaching is acknowledged as a professional pursuit by teachers themselves as well as by society.

The ‘tools of the trade’ within my Action Research methodology, that is, the personal diary, the videos of specific class activities, the photos of specific class activities, the questionnaires of parents and the taped interviews by children of children, are all manageable methods of data collection for the teacher as researcher. They will also provide a unique source of evidence and opportunities for reflection that will assist in making meaningful changes, within my classroom practice and myself. The use of an Action Research methodology will provide authentic evidence of my classroom journey as I seek to affirm my assumptions and values and the role that Multiple Intelligences, computers and parents can have in extending the 4 walls of the classroom.

As I recognise my assumptions, values and knowledge in practice and articulate them prior to my return to the classroom I am then able to refer to them as I reflect on my daily journal. At the end of each day, week and month I will be able to determine whether I really am the teacher that I think I am. Are my assumptions, values and knowledge in practice being affirmed in the classroom? If they are not I may need to rethink my assumptions or my practice. When I view the videos I will be able to see myself interacting with the children and I may not always be the teacher that I think I am and I may need to rethink my assumptions or my practice. Interviewing and taping the responses of the children in the class will also provide data that might affirm my assumptions of the teacher I think I am. The video taping, photos and parental questionnaires will provide further data to reflect upon as to my use of teaching strategies using the Theory of Multiple Intelligences, computers as a teaching tool and
parental and community involvement in the classroom. The data collected in this way will hopefully provide evidence of how these teaching strategies impact upon extending the 4 walls of the classroom. Chapter 4 will now provide an analysis of the data collected using these methods.
Chapter 4.

Extending the 4 walls - Data collection and analysis.
Chapter 4. – Extending the 4 walls - Data collection and analysis.

In Chapter 1, I explored the reasons why I wanted to pursue a return to the classroom and the assumptions and values I would take with me. Chapter 2 includes a review of the literature on the Theory of Multiple Intelligences, computers and parents within the classroom and my Action Research methodology is outlined in Chapter 3. This chapter includes a record and analysis of the data collected prior to returning to the primary school classroom and during my return. During a visit, prior to my return to the classroom, I sought to gain an insight into the issues that would be explored throughout my journey. How would I use the Theory of Multiple Intelligences as a teaching strategy; were there computers to use; how could I involve the parents and community in the classroom and encourage my class to utilise and explore information from outside the classroom? By exploring what exists in the classroom already, I am able to perceive opportunities for implementing my knowledge in practice.

4.1. The teacher I believe I am.

My first visit.

When I first visited the classroom, the reality of working within a strict timetable became apparent. I had forgotten about the early mornings and the routines that must be adhered to. This will be a major aspect of my return next year as I return to the life of a primary school teacher.

_I am overwhelmed by the need to get up so early and arrive on time. How will I manage this time frame for a semester next year? However I find myself slipping into a familiar role. I reflect on my assumptions and values about the teacher I believe I am and feel that my return to the classroom may in fact be like getting back on the bicycle you never forget how to ride. I enjoy working and singing with the children and am aware of how comfortable I am feeling._

(Author Journal. October 1999)
In my interactions with the children I am pleased with my approach. I recognise that I
am a different person to the one who left the classroom ten years ago, I now have
children and I feel this helps make my relationship with the children less clinical and
hierarchical. I am more interested in connecting with the children, finding out about
them as individuals rather than what academic ability they may have. However I am also
aware that at times my actions and words don’t always reflect the teacher that I think I
am.

*While flying their kites during an outside activity, a child informs the student teacher
and myself that she is 'bored'. We are both disturbed about this comment and I
immediately launch into a statement that I have a 'ban' on the word at home. I pretend to
discuss this with the student teacher knowing that the child is listening. Later I observe
the child crying under a tree and I am suitably chastened by my sarcastic comments.*

(Author Journal. October 1999)

This experience makes me aware that while it is easy to articulate the type of teacher
you think you are, it is another matter putting it into practice. I will be more aware of the
effect my words can have and will try to think a tad longer before I speak.

I am excited at the prospect of my journey. The classroom environment is very
impressive, comfortable and has enormous possibilities for my ideas. I’m fortunate to be
working with a group of children, aged between six and eight (Year 1/2/3) in a school that
is well equipped and has possibilities for outside classroom use. And so I begin my
journey. I have planned for two years for this moment. Over the Christmas break I have
prepared my initial unit of work; planned the first week; prepared name charts folders
and book labels; written my introductory letter to the parents; typed out my research
questions and pasted them to the office windows, and have organised the classroom. I’m
ready but I’m terrified.

The journey begins.

*What have I let myself in for... 10 hour day, still not ready for tomorrow... No door label
... no art paper ready... no readers ready... no blackboard lines... list a mile long of*
things still to do... Have to remember that this is research too... have sticky notices to remind and re-focus. I am so anxious... computers still not connected... graduates wanting help (what sort of role model am I for beginning teachers?)

I’m overwhelmed... responsible for 24 children tomorrow... keeping them occupied... teaching them... making their first day back a good one... what will they say to their parents when asked ‘well what’s Mrs Connell like? How’s school? What do you think it’s going to be like in Mrs Connell’s class? I want the day to flow... be fun... and yet I feel so stressed myself... I want to be organised, feel and sound like I know what I’m doing... and yet work with parents and the children as a team... Will it really come together??

The school is great, very friendly and everyone is prepared to bend over backwards to help. Well, think I’m ready... probably won’t sleep tonight though I feel exhausted.

My family has been wonderful so far but tomorrow will be the tester as we all return to school/work

Hope all goes well tomorrow... must remember the children will remember me and about me rather than what I teach; the how I teach rather than what!

(Author Journal. Week 1, February. 2000.)

The teacher as carer.

In my assumptions and values I recognised the importance of the teacher as a carer, in developing a learning environment that reflects this care and provides for a child-centered approach with well-organised and flexible learning experiences. This is what I wanted to do as the teacher returning to the classroom. However the reality of my return revealed that this did not happen. My initial diary entries reveal a teacher on the edge and when I re-read them I am aware of how close I came to ‘throwing it all in’. It was a frantic experience and one that I was so unprepared for. I had forgotten what the beginning of the school year was like. More importantly I discovered that I was consumed by my own well-being, my own survival and wasn’t even considering the children. All my assumptions, about the teacher I believed I was, had gone out the
window. As for the classroom I believed I should have, I was continually changing it as I frantically attempted to cater for the learning experiences I had planned for.

Ghastly nights sleep... so tired and yet tossed and turned thinking about groups... continual knot in my stomach. Go for an early walk... I'm sick of continually thinking about school/children/groups/ideas/...all the work makes my mind almost shut down!!

And now my son is not well... perhaps I could get out of this now.

Get to school and settle into it all...children work well in short bursts...need to rethink my classroom management...Still conscious that I am not always at the children's level... though getting there and some success...it is only 1 week.

Still sleeping badly...will the knot in my stomach ever go away?... will I ever stop thinking about everything I'm going to do at school... Got cross today... during my release time I noticed how quiet the class were next door... my class is never so quiet, so decided they should be... don't even know why... so got cross and demanded it... not very pleased with myself... Some behaviour hassles that I didn't handle well... should I sit the children in special seats to solve this? Organised room again... slowly getting through my list... need to concentrate on enjoying the children more and praising them... need to celebrate the good things happening.

My mind just continues to go over what I'm doing, how I'm doing it, strategies, new ideas everything... I never give myself a break!! Once I get to school I enjoy getting into the swing of it... still not 100% happy with all I'm doing... preoccupied with what and how I'm doing... forget about the children.

(Author Journal. Week 2. February. 2000)

I am trying frantically to determine what I wanted as a teacher. Trying to keep my class quiet like the next door class is not what I want and I realise how hypocritical I am as I attempt to conform to another teacher's approach, which is not mine. I want my children to talk and share with one another in a classroom that is comfortable for them, fair and respectful of their needs too, as well as mine. I realise that I have never had a quiet classroom, I'm not a quiet person and I enjoy the bustle and hum of working and learning together.
These initial journal entries reveal how unprepared I continually feel and how overwhelmed I am by the responsibility I have for teaching twenty-four children. I feel the children, the parents, and the school are looking to me for all the answers. I feel I need to be in control, organised and the font of all knowledge. Where have all my assumptions and values gone? I wanted to develop a caring relationship with the children and create an exciting classroom environment together. I recognise in myself the need to be organised and in control at the expense of the children’s needs. Perhaps these initial weeks should have been spent following the children’s interests and working slowly together to build our relationships instead of rushing in and expecting that everything would ‘fall into place’. I recognise that over the semester break I will need to reflect on my data and continue my Action Research cycle.

When I began the journey into the classroom, I identified the teacher I thought I was and the classroom I thought I should have, that is, I affirmed my assumptions and values about teaching and learning. I reflected upon these as I made my first visit to the classroom prior to my journey and determined how I could change the classroom and myself to reflect my assumptions of teaching and learning and the teacher I think I am. I developed some of my plans of practice by setting up the computers, involving the parents in the classroom and eventually designing activities that used the Theory of Multiple Intelligences. The actions involved in putting these plans into practice were often overwhelmed by the very practice of teaching and learning. However as I continued the journey, I reflected, changed my practice rather than my assumptions and continually evaluated what I did and said. I have refined the process to ‘fit’ my journey and use my three Rs;

- I recognise my assumptions and values that are integral to the teacher I believe I am;
- I reflect upon how I put these assumptions into practice and
- I rethink some of my practices in light of the teacher I believe I am.

My journal entries during week 5 and 7 reveal my concerns as I continue to reflect on my experience and use the above process.
Children worked well on handwriting and then some great story writing... Mad rush at recess due to we weather! Maths went well— in fact very well, I am pleased with this although I still need to be aware of going from simple to more complex.

In the afternoon we finished off some activities, however I’m not sure how to display their work, need to think on this. I need more time and I need to work on this further... look at more books for ideas.

A very wet day and the children were a bit ratty - me too!! Reading activities went well although I had to get the children to get the box out of my car and I felt a bit disorganised especially with adult visitors in the room...I was shown a great site on the internet for children to participate in, must do more on this and perhaps even work out extension activities on the internet and do during Technology time - more thinking and work to do, can’t do it all at once!! I really have to pace myself and keep remembering one thing at a time!

The day went well and I left school by 3.20!!! so getting better. Still some things need improving, in fact I reckon I’ll never be completely satisfied with everything I do! I worry sometimes whether there will be big gaps there when Marnee comes back!! Must keep on it. Coming down with a cold now! Should be ok tomorrow and then the weekend... Worked on my program during my release time.

(Author Journal. Week 5, March 2000)

What a wet morning and running a bit late... parent teacher meetings coming up and I need to do some running records – when? Sometimes I seem to spend my time trying to catch up. Forgot to photocopy some work and things seemed to fall apart from then on... emails didn’t work, a Mum came into cook piklets and I’d forgotten our arrangement.

Heading into week 8 is this possible! I love the school and if I didn’t get so tired and feel like I’m still trying to get it perfected I would do it forever...I often leave University at the end of the day feeling I achieved/completed something...I don’t always feel like that at school...the continual work... tidying up... organising everything!!!
I continue to pursue this cycle as the journey progresses. During the semester break, I have the time to prepare further units of work, only this time I am more aware of the children's interests and ability levels in my planning. During this break I reflect on my beginning journal and am aware that I need to take myself less seriously. I have become consumed by the curriculum to the exclusion of the children! I am determined to try and work at creating the classroom I believe in and being the teacher I believe I should be. After the semester break I feel more organized and I begin to enjoy the process of teaching and learning. The change in myself is amazing, as is the classroom atmosphere. I can't wait to get to school and my journal entries during this time reflect my changed approach.

Good day... prepared... relaxed... week's break helps with preparation... enjoying the children and they seem happy as well... Sometimes feel we take ourselves too seriously... so hung up on the curriculum issues rather than the children and what they need... am easing up and letting them talk with one another and share what they had been doing... talked a lot... got excited... a fun day. Am feeling very positive... and more relaxed. Another great day... can't get over it... am really enjoying it... on a real high and its all a big buzz... children are fun... they work well... I'm able to gauge timing better... they listen... we're getting used to one another... we're working so well and enjoying it. Maths was exciting... found the pattern in the 3X tables and P ran with it... origami with Mrs L was great... hard but children listened. Comprehension went well... new ideas work... all going well and I'm loving it... - can't get over the change in me... I really feel this is what it's all about... am not so hung up about the content... working with and enjoying the children.

Finally I feel I am being the teacher I think I am. I am enjoying the experience and this is reflected in my relationships with the children. They are responding to my approach and appear to be motivated and excited by the learning experiences I prepare. The video tapes also reveal the teacher I think I am and the classroom environment I wanted to
create. I can be seen speaking to the children with respect and my enjoyment is obvious as I work and laugh with the children. The classroom atmosphere is friendly, safe, encouraging as the children are gently reminded of behaviour expectations.

However there are times when I appear to direct the learning activities too much and other times when I'm not the teacher I think I am. In one sequence I am listening to a child share her information and understanding of an activity, I make a comment to which she responds. However I don't even appear to hear her comment, I ignore her questions and continue with my agenda. I am a teacher who speaks a lot and often does not listen to what the children are saying or asking. I reflect on this and realise I am not always the teacher I believe I am. Sometimes I feel my assumptions and values may be too high, perhaps it's impossible to be this teacher all the time and yet that's what I want to be. I have to continually work on it. As the weeks progress it is evident that my reflections and changes to my behaviour do result in me being a caring teacher. In response to an oral questionnaire given to my class by their 'big buddies' the children's responses provide an insight into how they perceive my 'ethic of care'.

_Does Mrs Connell care about you?_

Yes.

_Do you think she cares about everyone in the class?_

Yes.

_How do you know she cares?_

Child 1. She tells us, she looks at you.  
Child 2. Aw because she said it.  
Child 3. Yep, no, it's because she looks like she does and she acts and treats us like she does.  
Child 2. But she says it.  
Child 4. Um, you can see it in her eyes. (Repeated by another child)  
Child 5. Because she teaches us.  
Child 6. Because I just think so.  
Child 7. Because she has rules and we know what will happen next.  
Child 8. Cos she does.
Because, like you can see that she does.

I don't know.

You can just feel it in her.

These responses make me realise just how insightful children can be. It is also reassuring to know that the children could recognise my 'ethic of care' and obviously valued it.

My final journal entry confirms the responses by the parents, children and my colleagues to my return to the classroom. The journey has come to an end and I survived and I affirmed many of my assumptions and values; I was the teacher I thought I was, most of the time.

Can't believe it, it's all now come to an end and I survived and actually thrived... felt so valued at school... children are so up front in telling you how they feel... the parents all made the effort to say something/or write something nice... very thoughtful... bit of an anti climax... didn't cry although I felt teary at times... all so rushy finishing off things... -- tidying up... excitement... no growling on the last day... Final activities... back into room and final goodbye... very rushed... not the way I planned, but now its all over... packed into car and off home... very sad and quite unreal... Lovely to think I don't have to think for awhile... no work program... Can read some novels and really give myself a break... -- I need it!! Have made some wonderful friends and will love going back to see the class and staff next semester as a supervising lecturer... if it wasn't for the early mornings I could stay as a primary teacher... its very rewarding... very comfortable... but lots of work... I'd get better at my time management... has been a wonderful experience and I really can't believe its over!!

(Author Journal. Week 20, July 2000)

4.2. Extending the 4 walls.

In returning to the classroom I would not only affirm my assumptions and values but also my knowledge in practice. My knowledge and understanding of the Theory of Multiple Intelligences, computers and parents would be put into practice. These aspects of my practice have become intertwined with my assumptions and values and make up
the teacher and person that I am. Teaching strategies that utilise the Theory of Multiple Intelligences, computers as a teaching and learning tool and parents and the community, as integral aspects of the learning environment will also impact upon the 4 walls of the classroom. I planned to use these strategies to affirm my assumptions and values.

- I would endeavour to provide opportunities for multiple entry points to a learning experience and multiple ways of exploring the learning experience;
- I would provide opportunities for integrated learning experiences that are relevant to the child's life and experiences.

These activities would also affirm

- the passion I have for teaching and the process of learning, and
- my excitement in the challenge to motivate others to share in the learning experience.

**The teaching and learning process.**

In planning for the learning experiences that utilised the Theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI) as a teaching strategy I called each activity centre by an Australian identity that typified the intelligence, rather than the MI term.

Ken Done (a modern Australian artist) – Visual and Spatial intelligence. The Ken Done room was the wet area separate to the classroom with access to art supplies.

Cathy Freeman (a well known Australian athlete) – Bodily-Kinaesthetic intelligence. The Cathy Freeman space was the open mat area with access to the tape recorder and our health hustle charts.

Peter Coombe (an Australian children’s singer) – Musical Intelligence. The Peter Coombe corner was where the musical instruments and music charts were kept.

Barry Jones (an Australian politician/scientist and not as well known to the children.) – Mathematical Intelligence. The Barry Jones corner was situated near the corner cupboards that contained our concrete maths materials and aids.

Mem Fox (a well known Australian children’s author) – Linguistic Intelligence. The Mem Fox corner incorporated our library and computers.
Inter and Intra intelligences were explored through the individual or group work aspect of the activity. I did not utilise the Naturalistic intelligence.

Rather than explain the Theory of Multiple Intelligences to the children I simply explained the spaces and the reason for the name. I used the seven intelligences as a strategy for learning experiences in Mathematics – exploration of measurement, Spelling – exploration of the letters B and E, and reading activities with Wombat Stew. I prepared individual workbooks, or group activity books. The activity centres gave children opportunities to explore the concept or skill through a musical, visual art, movement, reading and comprehension or mathematical way. For the letter B activity the children chose which activity they wanted to do and recorded their experience in their own books. The activities included:

Peter Coombe – using the xylophones and letters on them make and play words starting with B or with B in them.

Cathy Freeman – Either on your own or with your group use your body to make some of our B words.

Ken Done – Draw a large B and small b and write and draw b words on the inside.

Mem Fox – using the Dr Seuss books find and write out all the Bb words.

Barry Jones – count up all the b things in the maths corner – eg. Black and blue bottle tops. (See Appendix C for further detail)

For the Mathematics activity the children stayed in the same group that they choose initially and rotated through. The children had their own individual books to work in. The activities for exploring measurement included:

Peter Coombe – measure the length of the long and short notes with rods. Which untuned instruments make the longest/shortest sound?

Cathy Freeman – measure the length of the room using your body, your hand span etc.

Ken Done – dipping a thick and thin brush and finger into paint. Which makes the longest line?

Mem Fox – from encyclopaedias or from the internet find the length of a snake, a komodo dragon.
Barry Jones - make a graph to record your animal lengths and brush stroke lengths. (See Appendix C for further detail)

For the Reading activity the children used their table groups, which had children from a mixture of grade levels on them. They had one large A3 book to work on together and their activities included:

Peter Coombe - play the music to the song *Wombat Stew* and make sound effects for the cooking.

Cathy Freeman - act out the story using props, masks and sound effects.

Ken Done - make masks of the characters from the story.

Mem Fox - determine who will be the characters and write out your part.

Barry Jones - look up information on the Australian animals from the story and decide which ones are reptiles, mammals and birds. (See Appendix C for further detail)

At the conclusion of each session the children were invited to share their experiences and books with the class.

The videos provide invaluable data on these teaching strategies in action. When viewing the video tapes I can see the children exploring measurement, the form and sound of B and a reading comprehension activity, in multiple ways. The children are participating in learning activities that are integrated and relevant to the children’s life and experiences.

For many children tactile exploration and body movement is a better way to understand a concept than reading and writing about it. This was the case for my Year 1 children and many of my Year 2 and 3 boys who were very physical and preferred to be ‘doing’ rather than sitting. As the teacher I enjoyed the excitement and challenge of preparing different activities. I found it easier to motivate the children and the videos show us all very involved in the activities, particularly when sharing our knowledge and understanding of the activity.

In the activity where the children explore measurement using MI activity centres, the children work collaboratively, discussing and exploring the learning experience. They are focused and involved. Some of the children who often had difficulty concentrating
and completing written work take an active role in the learning experience. One of my students, who was often restless and distracted during maths activities from the board, worked with his friends, lying on the floor and following instructions as his friend measured his body length across the room. He remains focused and cooperative through the whole activity which takes over half an hour to complete. On the video tapes the children are talking and sharing their ideas with one another, laughing and involved in the activity. When the children share their learning it is evident that they had connected with the learning experience and have an understanding of what they were doing. Some of the children, who rarely had something to share in usual class activities became animated and interested in sharing and demonstrating what they had learnt. It created a meaningful learning experience for all children and the activities promoted an environment where everyone’s efforts were valued. This was obvious in the quiet and interested way the class listened during the sharing time.

Using the Theory of Multiple Intelligences as a teaching strategy, I planned learning centres and activities, which assisted in creating a classroom that provided integrated learning experiences that were relevant to the children’s lives and experiences. Using musical, physical and artistic activities the children were able to use the skills they had learnt from experiences outside the classroom. Many children, who participated in music and movement activities as a hobby or as an interest at home or during specific lessons within classroom activities, had an opportunity to share their skills with their classmates.

*The thing that (child’s name) loves to do more than anything else is (‘Reading, drawing, tennis, art, computer games, playing.’)*

*The other things (child) is enthusiastic about is (‘Riding bikes, movies, computers, TV, books, music, socialising, family, school, food, pokemon, friends, drawing, animals, space, plants.’)*

These parental questionnaire responses indicated that the children in my class were involved in many outside activities that allowed them a Multiple Intelligence experience. The activities also enabled students to conceptualise learning as happening in an extended range of contexts. Music, movement and art are not always associated with ‘proper’ learning and yet the children did not associate doing these different learning
activities with 'play' or 'free time' (times requested by students during the day as a relief from reading and writing!) These activities provided learning experiences that the children were actively involved in and seemed to respect and value.

Using the computers as part of the Mem Fox corner also assisted in the teaching and learning process. I used web sites that I had bookmarked and CD ROMs to compliment the linguistic resources available in the Mem Fox corner. The videos show the children using the internet to access information on the length of their favourite animals as part of the measurement activities. However the computers were often very slow or would freeze and instead of allowing the children to work through the problems I can be seen taking over and directing the activity, not at all a child-centred activity!

My initial use of the computers involved preparing simple mathematics, reading and spelling activities for the children to access during group work. The children enjoyed the activities and worked well in groups. However preparing these activities was very time consuming and frustrating given that much of my preparation was done at home on a PC which meant reformatting later at school on the four Macintosh computers in our room. I continued using the computers in as many teaching and learning activities that I could think of. We started our class newsletter and discussed and brainstormed on the board and then returned to our desks to either write or draw about what we had been doing in class. The children brought their stories or pictures to me for proofreading and they then typed their final copy on the computer. At home I formatted the letter, added the scanned pictures and emailed it to all the parents with email addresses, providing hard copies to others. We all enjoyed this experience and many parents commented (in their questionnaire and to me verbally or by return email) that they enjoyed the newsletter while the children asked when they could do another one. Some of the children’s comments reflect what they thought about my classroom and the learning activities they were involved in.

Dear parents...we ben(sic) learning abut(sic) the world...we’ve ben(sic) learning abut(sic) our family...we are learning about Getting to Know(sic) you...from Natasha

Dear mum or dad we have bena(sic) watching the king and l and it is a video and we
I continued to use the computers as a teaching and learning tool. However instead of preparing work activities, I began to utilise specific computer programs, such as Drawing, Excel and Powerpoint. After attending computer sessions in the technology room where the children were all introduced to these programs, I prepared specific reading activities that involved using the children's new skills. A large chart was put above the computers with an activity to read and do and the children rotated in groups to complete the activity. Their newly acquired drawing, spreadsheet and database skills were used to draw specific pictures and design graphs. I also used web sites and CD Roms for some reading and spelling activities as well as for morning activities to share with parents and friends.

As we continued to become more confident in our use of the computers, our newsletters to parents became more efficient and we expanded the experience by writing to pen pals at a Victorian school. We were pushing the boundaries of our classroom walls to include our parents and friends in our day-to-day classroom activities and we were using equipment that they could use at home, share with their parents and use in real-life. This was evident during a computer activity where I used spreadsheets to illustrate the meaning of graphs. I had been working on an activity in mathematics and had difficulty in explaining how graphs could be used to represent the information they had collected. During a computer lesson in the technology room I showed the children how you could put in information gathered and convert the information into a graph with the click of a button. Their enthusiasm to create graphs knew no bounds as they collected information on their friend's pets, favourite foods, how they got to school and so on. Through this experience they gained a much better understanding of what a graph did and how it could visually represent their written information.
In some of the MI activities, the video shows the children as avid users of the computer as they share their expertise with others, work collaboratively and seek to gather further information from CD Roms and/or the Internet. Some children continued to pursue research on their computers at home. Others were keen to bring in CD Roms with relevant information, while others produced further Powerpoint generated booklets they had worked on at home.

Using the computers in this way meant that instead of working from the whiteboard and writing in their books the children could do similar activities on the computer and record their responses on the computer or in their books. They worked collaboratively with their classmates in these activities and were very keen to do any computer activity. However the computers were often very frustrating to use. Both the children and I were frustrated by the slowness of the machines. This was evident when we used the internet and CD Roms. The video shows some of the children off task and/or frustrated with the equipment, the computer screen freezes, the sound is impossible to hear clearly, the printer doesn't work and there are too few computers for the children. Instead of encouraging the children to solve these problems I would often take over and attempt to solve the problem myself. In some instances I took the role of finding the information for the children rather than allowing them to direct the experience. However, when the computers worked the learning experience was successful and some children displayed considerable enjoyment and confidence when using the computers and assisting others in the learning experience.

Questionnaire responses from the parents (Appendix C) also support my reflections as do the video excerpts of the computer sessions. Some responses are provided in Table I below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions asked of the parents about the computer activities</th>
<th>Sample responses.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What do you think of the computer activities?</td>
<td>very good and its great to see them being used as an educational tool rather than just for games.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have the children commented on their use?</td>
<td>their children had commented positively on the use of computers in the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel that these activities can assist with the learning experience?</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Examples of parental responses to involvement in the classroom.
Both the parents and children seemed to value the use of the computers and were at times delighted with the different activities that the children explored. One parent commented after observing her child's spreadsheet graph that he would soon be able to use her MYOB software.

Communicating with the parents of my children through questionnaires and by involving them in the classroom when I started my journey was an important part of my research. In the first week of school I wrote to the parents to introduce myself, explain and seek their written permission for my research, and to ask them to complete a questionnaire. The questionnaire (Appendix A) was designed to discover as much information about the children I was teaching and their home backgrounds. From this questionnaire, discussions with colleagues and the meeting of all parents on Acquaintance Night in Week 4, I was able to determine the diversity of parents in my class.

- Three were shared parenting, (parents were separated but both actively involved in the child's life.)
- Three were from a single parent home.
- Eighteen children had parents who were working as teachers (two were also part-time students) or other professional employment, (Dentist, public service positions.)
- Six parents were employed in semi-professional positions.
- Five families had Mothers who were involved in part-time employment or at home with younger children.

Within my class I also had the child of the School Council Chairperson as well as three other parent members of the school council. The majority of parents had actively pursued their right to request that their child be placed in this multi-age class, as the teacher I was exchanging with was well known and respected for her innovative approach to teaching.

Having this information meant I was well aware of my parent clientele and sometimes felt intimidated by their presence in the classroom, particularly in the first week of school.
...Was a bit uncomfortable this morning with parents staying for a long time... even though it's what I want, just feel on show when I still don't feel ready... Parents came in again and I felt more organised for them. Organised the children and onto the mat ready for beginning activities...children were very restless with adults there and I was disinclined to be cross in front of parents, so struggled on!!

...Morning went a little better and the children settled quicker... need to organise what the parents do when they come in a bit more.

(Author Journal. Week 2 and 3, February 2000)

However the advantages of having the parents in the classroom and the responses to my initial questionnaire, meant that I was able to ask the parents for help in changing readers and assisting with some activities as well as finding out important information about the children I was teaching. The responses to my initial questionnaire asking parents for ideas about program planning relative to their child's interests (Appendix A) were very informative. I was able to gather useful information on the children's interests as well as parental expectations of school and ultimately the teacher. I was overwhelmed by the information the parents shared with me and their extensive knowledge of their children. I felt that I obtained not only a wonderful insight into the children in my class but also an example of the parents' ability to articulate their knowledge of and aspirations for their children. It was a humbling experience and I would often comment to parents that it was a privilege to teach their children and I was very honoured by the trust they put in me as I cared for the children they so obviously treasured. Table 2 below provides a sample of the questions and parental responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample of questions</th>
<th>Sample of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24 questionnaires sent out.</td>
<td>17 responses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The thing that (child's name) loves to do more than anything else is...</strong></td>
<td><strong>Reading, drawing, tennis, art, computer games, playing.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Is enthusiastic about... | Swimming, pottery, cooking, music, inventing plays, computers, riding bikes, movies, TV, books, socialising, family, school, food, pokemon, friends, drawing, animals, space, plants.

1. We think it is important for (child’s name) to learn about... | More science, independent reader and writer, other cultures, social and IT skills, reading and writing and social skills, music, computers, art, writing, basics and social skills, justice issues, practical things, social values, wonder and joy of life.

1. We think the following skills are very important... | Listening and ability to express themselves, thinker, kind, confident and creative, team member, intra and interpersonal skills, language and maths, writing, good manners and social skills, compromising, music and art, listening and analysing, cooperation, music/art research, cooking, sewing, building and surviving, sharing and caring.

Table 2. A sample of parental responses to program planning questionnaire.

These responses indicated that my class was comprised of children who were very interested in creative activities such as art and music, were very sociable and were very involved in the families that provided them with opportunities, and in many cases equipment such as computers. Using this information I provided opportunities to use the art room, library corner, blocks and computers during morning activity time as the children and parents arrived at school. The parents were encouraged to stay and share in these activities with their children. The responses also indicate a parent body that had obviously thought about what they wanted for their children. The parents expected that the values that they held would be supported in the classroom. These responses supported my belief in a partnership between the parents and myself as the teacher. I was encouraged to continue in my efforts to involve the parents in the classroom and I organised a number of activities that encouraged parental involvement in the classroom. I held morning activities, with parental participation and/or specific involvement through the supervision and involvement in activities. I emailed and/or gave out hard copy newsletters written and drawn by the children and myself three times a term. I involved the parents in units of work and excursions. I prepared a web site where I placed units of...
work that could be accessed by the parents from home or work.
(http://www.blackboard.com)

Photos taken during my journey show the parents sharing their hobbies and occupations during our sessions on ‘Spotlight on Talents’, parents taking care of injured wildlife, playing the guitar, drumming, surfing, playing the recorder, cooking, sharing holiday trips and precious belongings. The photos taken during our excursions show parents actively involved in assisting the children as well as participating in the activity with the children. Photos of our excursion to the Eisteddfod and a unit of work involving science and games show the parents involved as helpers and participants in the learning experience.

I eventually became more relaxed with the parents in the room and I organised the parents as helpers in the morning activities that were planned as part of our unit of work. I encouraged the parents to help a group of children in our garden, or find information on the internet or assist in the art room. I assumed that by giving them more direction I was involving them in their children’s learning and yet the number of parents coming into the room decreased as the term went on! This may have been because they now felt more confident in me as the teacher and my novelty value had worn off or, as I suspect, parents became very involved in their own working lives. Towards the end of the semester I asked the parents to complete a questionnaire while waiting for their parent teacher interviews. (Appendix C) A sample of responses shown in Table 3 below indicate that the parents did value my involvement of them in the classroom and while I initially felt ‘on display’ and ‘intimidated’ by parents in the classroom, persevering meant that I got to know their children more quickly and thoroughly, and some parents were an invaluable resource in our units of work. Their appreciation in having their involvement encouraged and valued meant that we were working together. It was a good feeling and I appreciated their response.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Through the activities I have provided do you feel you have been involved in the classroom?</th>
<th>All the parents agreed that the activities I planned for them were useful in encouraging their involvement. They felt that all my activities were useful.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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Which activities were particularly useful and why?

They particularly enjoyed the morning activities, the talent spot activities, and emails. The reasons given for enjoying these activities included, they had an opportunity to observe their child in the classroom, they enjoyed being involved, they felt informed and involved, they felt like a partner. they felt valued, they were able to interact with their child because they were kept informed. One parent commented that it was ‘nice to know you are interested in us and our children’.

Is there more I could do?

Give more notice to involve parents in planned activities (to get time off work), more emails, encourage other teachers to do the same. no.

Are there more meaningful ways to involve parents and the wider community in the education process?

Not all parents want greater involvement, keep parents informed of what the class is doing, continued use of the internet, we shouldn’t want to interfere too much, be flexible and inclusive, encourage parent involvement in the units of work.

Table 3. A sample of responses to the follow up questionnaire on parental involvement in the classroom.

4.3. Reflections.

I returned to the classroom and the data collected reveals that I do teach who I am most of the time. Using the Theory of Multiple Intelligences as a teaching strategy, computers as a tool and parental involvement all impacted upon me as a person and as a teacher and influenced the teacher that I am and the classroom that I want. Together these ‘forces’ impact upon and extend the 4 walls of the classroom into the community to provide a more extensive learning experience for everyone. The analysis of the data supports this and the next chapter will provide a summary and conclusion to the research questions.
Chapter 5.

The 4 walls of the classroom – conclusions.
Chapter 5. The 4 walls of the classroom – conclusions.

This chapter provides a conclusion to the journey. My return to the primary school classroom provided me with a unique opportunity to reflect on my practice and create some knowledge about my practice and the practice of teaching. This chapter will summarise the preceding chapters, answer the initial research questions and provide some knowledge that informs the practice of teaching by way of some recommendations. While the experience has affirmed what I do as a teacher and person I hope that it will also impact upon my practice in teaching within the pre-service teacher education course.

5.1. A summary of the journey.

In Chapter 1, I describe why I would return to the classroom. After thirteen years away from the primary school classroom, with most of that time spent teaching future teachers, I realised that I had lost contact with the practice I was teaching about. At a tertiary level I was encouraging students, by example, to be caring, compassionate teachers who should work at providing meaningful learning experiences for all children in their classroom. This was the teacher I thought I was and believed I should be. By returning to the classroom I would affirm whether I put these assumptions and values into practice and whether I really was the teacher that I thought I was.

This preparation for the journey gave me an opportunity to determine and articulate my assumptions and values and reflect upon where they had come from. I also recognised new ideas, theories and knowledge about the practice of teaching that had developed since my time in the classroom. These included the use of the Theory of Multiple Intelligences as a teaching strategy that could provide more meaningful and inclusive learning experiences within the classroom, the use of computers as a teaching and learning tool and the involvement of parents and the community in the teaching and learning environment. I also recognised that the use of this theory, the computer as a tool, parents and the local community could assist in extending the 4 walls of the classroom. Extending the 4 walls of the classroom was what I hoped to do through my
return to the classroom and in Chapter 2, I presented the literature that explains why the 4 walls of the classroom should be extended.

The literature review provided compelling reasons for the use of the Theory of Multiple Intelligences as a teaching strategy. By recognising that there are other intelligences besides linguistic and mathematics the emphasis on reading, writing and mathematics is shared with visual arts, music and movement activities. Children have the opportunity to learn through a variety of ways and share their learning in ways that are meaningful to them. Using the Theory of Multiple Intelligences as a teaching strategy values other ways of learning and recognises everyone's contribution as valuable and relevant to life outside the classroom.

The chapter also provided information on the use of computers as a teaching tool and the impact it can have on the 4 walls of the classroom as the children access and utilise information from outside the 4 walls. The literature described how parents and the community are the first teachers of our children and their continued involvement can have positive effects on their children as well as extend the classroom-learning environment into the parent's working world. Involving parents and the community provides children with 'real-life' experiences and recognises the value and importance of learning experiences from outside the 4 walls of the classroom. Chapter 2 provided the theoretical underpinnings to the knowledge I put into practice when I returned to the classroom.

Chapter 3 described the Action Research methodology I used in my research. In identifying the Action Research method I explored McNiff's (1993) cycle of reflection, action, change, reflection and adapted it to my research. I recognised and articulated my assumptions, values and knowledge before I entered the classroom; I reflected upon them in my practice and I analysed them and my practice. This type of methodology is extremely useful when researching one's own practice as it encourages the researcher to reflect upon and improve their practice. It places the researcher firmly at the centre of the research and allows the teacher to research and inform the practice of teaching.
In Chapter 4, the data is presented and provides answers to the research questions asked in Chapter 1. The data collected through a journal, videotapes, questionnaires and photographs gives evidence of the teacher I was and the children learning and sharing using multiple intelligences, accessing and utilising the computer in their learning experiences as well as communicating with the wider community. Parental involvement is evident and ultimately the 4 walls are extended to include 'real-life' experiences that are valued and encouraged in our learning environment.

5.2. The end of the journey?

Are my assumptions, values and knowledge in practice affirmed in the classroom experience?

Was I the teacher I thought I was? Did I develop a learning environment that was comfortable, caring, fair and respectful?

Did I have clear boundaries of expectations that reflected my assumptions?

Was I passionate about teaching and the process of learning?

Was I proud of the teaching profession?

Did I reflect on what I was doing and know as a teacher and learner and try to update my knowledge base regularly?

Was I still excited by the challenge to motivate others to share in the learning experience and did I provide a well-organised, flexible learning experience?

The data I collected during my journey would suggest that in practice I did do most of this and more importantly I came to realise that I still valued these assumptions in my practice. The data reveals the teacher I am. I work excitedly with the children, continually smiling and enjoying the experience. It is obvious that I love what I am doing and the classroom appears as a comfortable and organised environment. The children's comments when interviewed indicate that I am a caring and fair teacher and a child's comment very early in the journey of 'you get so hypo when you're talking to us' indicates that my passion and enthusiasm for teaching and learning is still evident.
The data revealed my continual reflection as I sought to improve my teaching strategies and develop meaningful learning experiences for all of the children. As the journey progressed and we got to know one another, the children recognised my expectations and always sought to meet them. I became confident in my assumptions and values as they were affirmed in my practice. The data reveals me as a person and teacher who reflects Deiro's (1996) identified intrapersonal characteristics of teachers who are able to communicate their care for students. I am an unpretentious teacher; I assume responsibility for what is happening in my life and am able to deal with situations that are out of my control. (I didn't give up and I saw the journey through!). I find the amusing in life and am always looking to find a child's potential, not what they can't do. I am a dynamic, involved teacher who displays enormous energy and interest in what I am doing and I do have a good balance between care-giving and risk-taking traits (Deiro, 1996). However I wasn't this teacher all of the time and by continually reflecting on my practice I was able to rethink my teaching strategies to help me be the teacher I thought I was, more often.

Since returning to the university I have been able to share the experience and my research with the pre-service teachers and have often used my journal as an example of a teacher's initial reaction to the classroom. By sharing my experience, neophyte teachers recognise that they are not alone in their initial worries and stress, and that even experienced teachers feel this way! My Action Research reveals that there are strategies to work through and people who can help, and that through reflection, organisation and care for the children, the teaching process is a very rewarding profession. During lectures and tutorials I have encouraged pre-service teachers to recognise who they are and how who they are impacts upon the teacher they are. I share my assumptions and values as they relate to me as a person and a teacher and encourage them to do the same, particularly in the last practicum unit they complete before becoming neophyte teachers.

Can the theory of Multiple Intelligences impact upon the 4 walls of the classroom?

As I reflected on my assumptions and values I recognised that the teaching strategies
that used the Theory of Multiple Intelligences did provide the children with an opportunity for multiple entry points to a learning experience and multiple ways of exploring the learning experience. The data revealed children actively involved in the learning experience in a classroom where children were encouraged to explore and find new ways of learning and sharing their learning. However, how did the activities help to extend the 4 walls? Using the Theory of Multiple Intelligence, as a teaching strategy, the boundaries of learning experiences were 'pushed' past the specific reading, writing and mathematics activities that are often perceived as the most important tasks of the classroom, into more integrated and meaningful life-learning experiences. The children were able to access knowledge, skills and experiences that they had obtained from outside school and apply them in the classroom. For some children this was very empowering, as they hadn't had the opportunity to do this before. Some children who excelled in activities 'out of school time', such as music, sports, art and craft activities were able to use the skills they had in these areas in some of the Multiple Intelligence activities. Mary was able to show her friends how to play the xylophone and read the notes, David was able to move with agility and precision when measuring bodies across the room and Katie was able to share her ability to create and attach ears to her koala mask. The Theory of Multiple Intelligences recognises the importance of 'other' ways of learning and has the potential to make the classroom and learning experiences cater for all children. Children come to recognize and value other intelligences that are obvious outside the classroom pursuits. By providing opportunities for children to explore concepts and demonstrate their understanding in other ways, the child who dances, is well coordinated, can paint and make things, is able to plant and care for the garden, is able to assist with the running of the computers, plays a musical instrument and enjoys making music, can excel in the classroom and recognize the value of these abilities in the real world. MI has the power to open up the classroom to further real-life experiences.

In my teaching of the Arts to pre-service teachers I am able to share my experiences and provide ‘in context’ anecdotes that relate to the value of the arts in the curriculum, as many of the intelligences are art-based. I can provide examples of how children can
further their understanding and experience of language and mathematics through music, movement, visual arts and drama activities. I also recognise the need to provide alternative ways for tertiary students to express their understanding of what they learn and know in a variety of ways and I attempt to offer a range of assessment items for the student teacher. I use a range of teaching and learning tools to assist students to explore content in a variety of ways. By modelling this I hope to encourage students to consider this approach in their own teaching.

**Can the use of computers as a teaching/learning tool impact upon the 4 walls of the classroom?**

... (C)omputers and telecommunications increasingly enable students and teachers to have rich interactions with resources outside of classroom walls. However, the walls – literal and metaphorical - that make up a traditional school will become far more permeable as practitioners from the outside become more involved in the educational process. (Gordon. 2000, pp174, 178)

The computers in my classroom also allowed the students to access people, places and information from outside the classroom’s 4 walls. They could communicate with their parents, teachers and pen pals from interstate through emails and some children sent emails to the classroom from home during the weekend, or when they were sick. Some children continued their interest outside the classroom by creating their own Powerpoint booklets and sharing these with the class. The data collected revealed that computers do have the potential to provide for meaningful and child-centered learning experiences. However, the data also revealed that unless working well, children can become distracted and frustrated and the teacher can dominate the learning experience instead of allowing the children to control it.

Although frustratingly slow, the computers do have the potential to allow students to access people and places well outside the 4 walls of the classroom and incorporate them into their learning experiences. However, I feel I need to explore further the integrated learning possibilities of computers in the classroom and further extend my knowledge in
this area. In my work with pre-service teachers I am using computers extensively as a teaching tool and I encourage them to use it as such in the classroom.

Can involving parents and the community as an integral aspect of the learning environment impact upon the 4 walls of the classroom?

Involving the parents and the wider community in the classroom was an integral part of my journey and provided opportunities for people, experiences and knowledge to come into our classroom as well as opportunities for us to go out into the community to explore learning experiences. In this way the children, parents and myself were able to tap into other resources, recognise the wealth of further learning experiences outside the 4 walls and value them. The children were involved in their local community, they used community resources such as library facilities, play equipment in the shopping centre and ate at a local Indian restaurant. The community librarian prepared a learning experience to compliment our study of animals and the local restaurant provided us with a delicious meal that was shared by parents and their children. A science technician from the Northern Territory University came into our classroom and provided the children with some interesting experiments that complimented our unit of work. Involving the parents and wider community in this way not only assisted in extending the 4 walls of the classroom but also showed how real-life experiences can compliment and even extend the classroom learning experience. The classroom became a community of learners with the teacher, children and parents as participants.

5.3. Where to now?

Returning to the classroom was a personal journey to affirm my assumptions, values and knowledge in practice. I also wanted to try and extend the 4 walls of the classroom by using new teaching strategies, tools and ideas and while I have documented these I feel I must also highlight other issues that arose during the journey. While I affirmed my passion and pride in teaching and the profession I also became aware that this pride and passion was not evident in the profession itself. I observed the increased workload
placed upon teachers and the expectations that school, parents, the education department and society has on teachers. That teachers are undervalued was evident, I was surprised at the low morale among teachers and more particularly at the acceptance of their conditions. McNiff (1993) called this the institutionalisation of teachers and I reflected upon my own experience of this when in the classroom. I was overwhelmed by the classroom teacher's work. It was constant and never-ending. It required continual thought as the teacher endeavours to provide meaningful learning experiences for every child. The two hours mandatory release time allowed for preparing worksheets, whiteboard activities and administrative requirements. Recess time and lunch time, if not taken up by yard duty was time for a quick relax with a cup of tea and a bite to eat, controlled by the bell that rang and demanded an instant response, cups in the dishwasher, collection of pigeon hole notes and back to class.

Teachers are controlled by bells and respond accordingly. Top-down administration and teachers themselves have held our educators in this role for so long that many know of nothing else. Many have no solutions, no time to think of solutions and are often eager to grasp alternatives to teaching in the classroom, by becoming administrators, office workers and/or subject specialists. By keeping our teachers tied to the classroom, administration is able to control a workforce who responds to their demands with little dissent. Teachers are suffering, from a disproportionate workload, a disinterested administration intent on keeping teachers in their place and by a society that generally undervalues teachers and continues to expect teachers to do the job once assigned to parents.

Life in a classroom is life in the fast lane. Given the way most classrooms and schools are structured these days, interruptions are common. Teachers and students have to run fast just to stay in place. By the end of a day, most people are just too tired to take courses, read professional articles, or write brief reflections in a journal (Newman, 1998,p.3).

So what is to be done? The only ones who can do anything about it are teachers themselves. We must make the time to reflect on what we are doing and refresh ourselves as individuals. We need to demand the time and we need to say 'no' to the numerous requests made on our time. We need to wrest back the control of education.
and argue that as professionals we know what is best for education and the classroom. We need to respect our own professional judgement and expertise and encourage others to do the same. We need to become more proactive and search for the answers. Teaching needs to become for teachers what it is for our class of children, a search for knowledge, risk taking and the trialing of creative ideas to solve problems. Learning is a life-long journey and should not stop once we become teachers. If we don't start by respecting ourselves and what we do, move from the victim mentality and start driving the educational debate, who will?

This institutionalisation of teachers means that we have little time for reflection, and little encouragement to engage in it. Consequently teachers don’t have the opportunity to review their assumptions and values and continue growing as people. Instead they often feel crippled by their workplace. As McNiff (1993,p3) states, ‘I began to see that the institutionalised pressures on me as my functional self had left no space for my personal self’s development.’ My initial journal entries indicate that I too had little time to consider my own assumptions and values as I dealt with the daily concerns of the classroom and the demands made by the system in which I worked. Before I commenced my journey I was able to recognise and articulate my assumptions and values and I had researched and reflected upon new ideas and strategies. However once I returned to the classroom, I observed that the ‘busyness’ of schools and classroom teaching can almost make this impossible to do for the classroom teacher during teaching time.

Judith Newman (1998) who is involved in the professional development of teachers offers some suggestions to the problem of institutionalisation, and like McNiff (1993) she argues that teachers themselves must make the changes. In her discussion with teachers and the reflections she collected from them, Newman (1998) determined that school reform could only occur if teachers were encouraged to reflect on their practice, reinterpret their personal experiences and to discuss and analyse their reflections. Change would only occur in the classroom when teachers changed themselves.

… (C)hange in education comes about only when teachers are helped to change themselves. Talking about "school reform" makes no sense, for there is no such thing as "school" reform. Schools are made of bricks and steel, and they don't
reform themselves. It's the people, the teachers and administrators who live and work in schools, who change or don't change (Newman, 1998,p.5).

McNiff (1993) argues even more strongly for the recognition and emancipation of the person from teaching. She recognised, once she left the teaching profession, due to illness, that the educational system had institutionalised her.

...I was a child of the empiric initial and in-service training that cripples the individual by the straitjacket of institutionalised expectations. I had served as a teacher. Now I am concerned that other teachers are also, systemically and deliberately, being cheated by the expectations of the policy makers (McNiff, 1993, p.3).

Newman (1998) also spoke about teachers conforming to the expectations of the school and not trying out innovative approaches for fear of 'rocking the boat'. The school system in which the classroom and the teacher works encourages conformity and the submission of personal assumptions and values for the assumptions and values of the whole. Prior to my return to the classroom I had articulated my assumptions and values. I took them into the classroom with me and they impacted upon:

• the way that I taught,
• how I interacted with the children,
• my planning of activities and
• the way I created a classroom atmosphere that reflected these assumptions and values.

However, I often found that the task of teaching gave me little time to reflect on these assumptions and values. Away from the classroom again I am able to reflect on this lack of time for a teacher's personal development. Teachers need to recognise the importance of reflection for their personal growth as teachers and as people and they need to demand the time for it because ultimately we are what we teach and if we loose sight of who we are, our teaching will become meaningless.

Extending the 4 walls of the classroom may in fact be one way that teachers can access expertise that can give them the time they so desperately need to reflect and change. Perhaps it's the 4 walls of the classroom that keeps our teachers so institutionalised.
The 4 walls of the classroom are not just made up of bricks and mortar they also contain the assumptions, values and knowledge of each individual who inhabits them and to extend these 4 walls each individual needs to change.

Teachers, by being encouraged to reflect on their practice, to reinterpret their personal experiences, and to discuss their reflections with colleagues, have demonstrated that they can indeed look at their world as if they could be otherwise.

That in a nutshell, is the reality: change in education comes about only when teachers are helped to change themselves. Talking about ‘school reform’ make no sense, for there is no such thing as ‘school’ reform. Schools are made of brick and steel and they don’t reform themselves. It’s the people, the teachers and administrators who live and work in schools who change or don’t change (Newman, 1998).

How then is this possible in the current climate where our teachers are constantly grappling with the pressures of the job? There is little enough time in their days to reflect on their assumptions and values let alone view change and how it could impact upon them. In our present system there is little encouragement given to the individual to think about change from a personal perspective. In many instances change is simply demanded and expected.

Students’ needs have become increasingly diverse and the classroom environment does little to cater for this diversity. Experiences from television, access to computers, travel and increased after school activities often mean that children enter the classroom with knowledge and experience that is not considered or utilised in our curriculum.

Many parents are more interested and feel more qualified to participate in their children’s education, while other parents may be more content to leave the responsibility of their child’s education to the school. Our community is more isolated as most adults are employed outside the home. Family structures are more diverse and are less likely to have strong family or community support systems through church or organisational activities. While there is increased flexibility in working at home using technology, many families are unsure of using their time and are often insecure or unhappy in their work. All of this helps creates a community that is isolated and uncertain.
It is imperative to consider the changes occurring now and in the future. For the development of our teachers and schools we need to be aware that while many may consider that, good schools may make good societies, the opposite may also be true, that good societies make good schools (Goodlad, 1994). The schools, the society, the whole community involved in education must also be involved in change. However, for any meaningful change to occur, all participants need to communicate and discuss with one another what this change means to them and to one another.

Through devolution, the NT Education Department has sought to make school councils, made up of parents, teachers and community members, responsible for the financial running of their schools. Unfortunately this change (with little consultation as to whether the main players, that is, teachers, parents and school community members wanted this) has not been allowed to progress to its natural end. Parents, teachers and community members are unable to move past the financial responsibility to the next stage where they can take responsibility for determining what they want for their school and then working together to achieve it. Strategic plans are developed with little involvement from parents or community members. The Department mandates curriculum content and depending upon the Principal and teachers, parents have little input into educational issues. An opportunity for honest devolution may allow for more meaningful change to occur in our schools that is responsive to the needs of teachers, students, parents and the wider community.

For classroom change to occur teachers require encouragement and time to reflect on their own assumptions, values and knowledge. For this to occur the system itself needs to offer opportunities for teachers to access time, explore new teaching strategies such as the Theory of Multiple Intelligences, computers and resources. Some suggestions could include:

- Provide for more release time through the creative use of staff. Specialist arts, technology, PE and language teachers (which would allow for more teacher release and an opportunity for teachers to rotate into these positions), outsourcing of yard duty, the reorganisation of school into morning and afternoon schools. This would provide time to:
• Value and encourage personal and group reflective time to continually evaluate personal, school and community progress.

• By recognising schools as a community of learners where teachers, parents and children work together to create a learning environment that they all want to be in. Determine what each group wants from the school environment and compare, discuss and create a joint philosophy for the school environment.

• Open the school to the community after hours so that parents, children and teachers can access the school and its resources (particularly computers and libraries) after hours.

• Develop creative ways of utilising staff by perhaps rotating staff on a yearly or semester basis into evening classes rather than daytime classes.

These suggestions could provide our teachers with what they so desperately need, the time to reflect upon the philosophies they started out with, to reflect upon their assumptions and values and how they are reflected in their teaching and their classrooms. This personal reflection would also enable them to determine where they need further professional development and access it. The time would also give teachers the opportunity to determine the path of educational debate, to participate in it and influence its progress. The time to create a community of learners means that the entire school community of teachers, parents and children are working together and learning together. The community has ownership of the process not some bureaucratic system that determines what is best for a school. The bureaucratic system could assist in this change by formally recognising the value of teachers' work by providing:

• A Northern Territory Department of Education excellence in teaching award - for educational travel, training and/or research.

• After five years of full time teaching a teacher could be entitled to a one year sabbatical. This could be done through salary sacrificing (a teacher may elect to have part of their salary put away each week to use at a later date for an extended time of paid leave.)

• After three years of full time teaching a teacher could be entitled to one a year study leave/professional development, again through salary sacrificing and Northern Territory Department of Education study assistance.
• Rotation of teachers of excellence and/or teachers who are studying into associate lecturers positions within the pre-service teacher education courses.

While these suggestions could provide the time that teachers so desperately need they could also give teachers some ownership of the changes in schools being advocated.

This personal journey has been a highlight of my personal and professional life. The experience continues to impact upon my teaching and learning and my assumptions and values. I have been able to return to the primary school classroom I left thirteen years ago and teach successfully again. It is an experience I hope to repeat as I have come to recognise the importance of returning to the primary school classroom to affirm my assumptions and values and put more knowledge into practice. I am the teacher I thought I was, but I can never be complacent in that knowledge as I must continually reflect upon what I am doing to ensure I am the teacher I think I am. I must continually work to ensure that our future teachers benefit from my experience by sharing the experience, my assumptions, values and knowledge in practice and how to create a classroom with no walls.
Appendix A: Questionnaire to parents to elicit program-planning ideas relative to the children’s interests.

Dear Parents,

I am just beginning to get to know your child and would appreciate your insights to assist with my program planning. As parents you know about your child’s learning and how your child puts those skills into action outside school. I would like you to consider your child’s abilities and interests as well as your own expectations. You can use the section below or write in the comment section only. Please return as soon as possible and I look forward to working with you this semester.

Thank you,

Lorraine Connell.

Dear Parents,

The thing that .......(child’s name) loves to do more than anything else is-----------------------------------------------

When ........ starts talking about...................... he/she just can’t seem to stop.
The other things .......... is enthusiastic about are...............
-----------------------------------------------

I/We remember reading a book called ..........................
when ........... was little. We read the book over and over again. These days he/she likes to read.................................
Right now we are reading ........................................
to him/her.

I/We think it is important for ........ to learn about...............
the following skills are very important.

I/We are very busy but will try to find minutes each week to help with school work.
I/Our preference would be to do with him/her.

One thing never likes to miss is. But he/she would be quite happy to avoid.

One thing you might find out about is.

Our wish for in the coming year is.

Please call or email.

If you need to talk to us about learning at school.

From
Appendix B: Learning experiences using the Theory of Multiple Intelligences.

MATHS - MEASUREMENT.

Ken Done Room.

1. Dip your thick brush into paint and paint a straight line.
2. Dip your thin brush into paint and paint a straight line.
3. Dip your finger into the paint and paint a straight line.
4. Draw the word Long very long.
5. Make the word short look short.
6. Put your name on your paper and hang it up. You will need it later.

Peter Coombe Comer.

1. Measure the length of the notes using orange rods, red rods and your ruler.
2. Look at the drums. Some have a big area of skin, some have a little area of skin. How does this change the sound?
3. What instruments make a long sound?
4. What instruments make a short sound?
5. Make a short musical piece followed by a long musical piece.

Cathy Freeman Space.

1. Measure the length of the room using your feet, your bodies, your hands.
2. Make a short movement by yourself.
3. Make a long movement with 2 other people.
Mem Fox Corner.

1. In the Encyclopedias or the internet find out the

- Length and height of a lion
- Length and height of the longest snake.
- Length and height of the komodo dragon.
- Length and height of a polar bear.

Any other interesting information.

Barry Jones Corner.

1. Measure the length of your brush strokes and add to the graph.
2. Using your information about animals make your own graph on your paper.
SPELLING - B

Peter Coombe corner.

1. Using xylophones and letters on them make words,
   Make B words and other words too
   Play them.
2. Write out a piece of music using words.

Cathy Freeman space.

1. Make the letter Bb with your body.
2. With a partner make a B or b word.
3. With the others in your group try to put some words together using movement.
4. Write out your words and draw your movement pattern underneath.

Mem Fox corner.

1. Find all the B words in the Dr Seuss books.
2. Write them down and draw a picture for them.
3. Put them on cards and play snap.

Barry Jones maths corner.

1. Make a list of 10 things in the room that start with b.
2. Under each b word count how many there are.
3. Draw a chart to show which b word has the most.
The Ken Done room.

1. Draw a large B on one side of your paper.
2. Draw a large b on the other side.
3. Write as many b words in the b letter.
4. Draw pictures for each word in your B.
5. Decorate your page with bs.
SPELLING - E.

Ken Done Room.
Cut out a very large Capital E.
Using magazines find pictures of e words and paste them on, writing the word beside it.
Make a hole at the top and tie some string through it so that your E can hang.

Barry Jones Corner.
Find all the words with e in them.
Put them in these columns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>E words</th>
<th>e words</th>
<th><em><strong>e</strong></em> in the word</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Put the number of words you found under each column.
Make a graph if you have time.

Peter Coombe Corner.

Make some music that starts with E and finishes with E.
You can write down the letters.
Or write down the music.

________________________
________________________
________________________
________________________

99
Act out any three of the following sentences,

1. Eating Easter eggs.
2. Entertaining Esther.
3. Elephants eating everything.
4. Energetic Evan.
5. Enjoying eleven eggs.
6. Electricity.
7. Earthquake.
8. An eagle with an ear ring.
10. The eldest of eight elves.
11. The end of the enemy.
12. The starship Enterprise.

Look up our Encyclopaedias and books as well as the internet to find out about Easter.

1. Why do we have Easter eggs at Easter?
2. Who is the Easter Bunny?
3. Why are eggs made out of chocolate?
4. Write out one song and one poem about Easter.

The internet sites have been bookmarked.
READING - WOMBAT STEW.

Ken Done Room.

1. Using paper plates, or cardboard or any other material, make a mask for the characters in the story. Get each person in your group to make a different character.
2. When you have finished and they are dry put them in this envelope.

Barry Jones Corner.

1. Look up some information on Australian animals, or you may know the information already.
2. What animals are found only in Australia?

3. Put the animals in their right column.

Mammals

Reptiles

Birds

4. Show on your graph paper.

Peter Coombe Corner.

1. Try and play the music to Wombat Stew.
2. Make sound effects for one of the following scenes.
   - Platypus adding mud to the stew
Emu adding feathers to the stew.
- Lizard adding flies to the stew.
- Echidna adding creepy crawlies to the stew.
- Koala adding gumnuts to the stew.
- Dingo tasting the stew.

Cathy Freeman Space.

1. Act out a part of the story of Wombat Stew or your own story you have written about your animal.
2. You can use the masks you have made.

Mem Fox Corner.

1. Write out the story of Wombat Stew as a play. Choose who will be what character and they can write out the parts as one person reads,

OR

Write out your own story or play about your animals in your group.
Samples of children's work.

Ken Done Room.

1. What made the longest line? the thick
   Thin brush. thick brush. your finger?

2. Draw your long word.

   ![Long word drawing]

3. Draw your short word.

   ![Short word drawing]
Cathy Freeman Space.

1. The length of the room is _____ feet.
2. The length of the room is _____ bodies.
3. The length of the room is _____ hands.
4. Here is a drawing of my short movement.

5. Here is a drawing of a long movement with my friends.
Peter Combe Corner.

1. How long is the A note? orange rods
2. How long is the C note? red rods.
3. How does the area of the skin change the sound? Shot to HEWY

4. What instruments make long sounds?
   ![Illustration of a triangle]

5. What instruments make short sounds?
   ![Illustration of a square]

Write out your music.

![Musical notation illustration]
1. How long is your think brush line? ______ cm.
2. How long is your thin brush line? ______ cm
3. How long is your finger line? ______ cm
4. How long is your long word? ______ cm
5. How long is your short word? ______ cm.
6. Using the graph below mark in how tall your animals are.
Mem Fox Corner.

1. I found my information

2. The length/height of a lion is 2.5 m

3. The length/height of a snake is 10 ft

4. The length/height of a komodo dragon is 10 ft

5. The length/height of a polar bear is 12 ft

6. Other interesting information

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
-
Ken Done Room.

Cut out a very large Capital E.

Using magazines find pictures of e words and paste them on, writing the word beside it.

Make a hole at the top and tie some string through it so that your E can hang.
Find all the words with e in them.
Put them in these columns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>E words</th>
<th>e words</th>
<th><em>e</em> in the word</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>egg</td>
<td>Eli</td>
<td>Lee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>elephant</td>
<td>emu</td>
<td>see</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellen</td>
<td>echidna</td>
<td>seed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eleanor</td>
<td>evil</td>
<td>need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>excellent</td>
<td>electricity</td>
<td>bee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>tree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Put the number of words you found under each column.
Make a graph if you have time.
Peter Combe Corner.

Make some music that starts with E and finishes with E.

You can write down the letters.

Or write down the music.
Cathy Freeman Space.

Act out any three of the following sentences.

1. Eating Easter eggs. ✓
2. Entertaining Esther.
3. Elephants eating everything.
4. Energetic Evan.
5. Enjoying eleven eggs.
6. Electricity.
7. Earthquake.
8. An eagle with an ear ring.
10. The eldest of eight elves.
11. The end of the enemy.
12. The starship Enterprise.
Mem Fox Corner.

Look up our Encyclopaedias and books as well as the internet to find out about Easter.

1. Why do we have Easter eggs at Easter.
2. Who is the Easter Bunny?
3. Why are eggs made out of chocolate?
4. Write out one song and one poem about Easter.

The internet sites have been bookmarked.

Did you know that the kings' leave
Appendix C: Questionnaire to parents as follow up to their involvement in the classroom.

Name(Optional)..........................................................................

I am interested in discovering more about your views on your involvement in education.

As you are aware I have tried to involve parents in the education/school process through
- Response to my questionnaire at the beginning of the year
- Email/hard copy newsletters
- Morning activities
- Talent spotlight
- Excursion to the community library and restaurant.

Have you found these useful?..........................................................

Which ones in particular.............................................................

Why..........................................................................................

Is there more I could do?............................................................

Are there more meaningful ways to involve parents and the wider community in the education process.................................................................

................................................................................................

................................................................................................

................................................................................................

................................................................................................
We have 4 computers in the classroom and I have used them in the following ways,

- As an activity for reading, maths and or spelling activity, children rotate.
- To send and receive emails.
- As a drawing tool,
- For information gathering through CD Roms and the internet,
- Activities in the morning – learning games.

What do you think of these activities?

Have the children commented on their use?

Do you feel that these type of activities can assist in the learning experience?

Can technology provide the opportunity for extending the walls of the classroom and exploring the wider community?

What’s the most important thing you want out of school for your child?

Am I meeting this?

What more could I do?

Any other comments.
Appendix D: Audio Taped interview of the children in my class.

Questions to ask children.

1. What's it like in your classroom?
2. What's Mrs Connell like as a teacher?
3. Is she fair?
4. Is she kind?
5. Does she like to have fun?
6. Does she make learning interesting or a bit boring?
7. Does she care about you?
8. Do you think she cares about everyone in the class?
9. How do you know she cares?
10. What do you like best about school?
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