**Preamble**

This thesis is a work of commitment to the field which gave me the tag of a professional. For many years, I must admit, I had the misconception that holding academic degrees was enough to ‘understand’ and ‘know’ about people. Obviously I was wearing blinkers! It is through the trials of attempting to understand individuals and the complexities of lives, that I have gained some semblance of understanding and over the years developed a deep, abiding, positive empathy for practitioners. It is so easy to have this regard for all individuals (the training of counselling ensured that) but when one becomes the proverbial ‘expert’ it is easy to slip into the critical & evaluative framework (the assumption being that is what we are expected to do!)

Obviously, in the process of the journey of my life, the doctoral was just a part. But I would like to make a claim – this is not ‘just a requirement for the fulfilment of the Doctor of Philosophy’ as is mandated by the authorities, it is a deep part of who I am, what I believe in, what I value in my life. Just like I have attempted to unravel facets of my research participants’ lives, similarly, I have revealed facets of my life. These are not just revealed explicitly but through the stories I seek to tell – what I chose to ask, what I chose to focus on, what I chose to observe & how I chose to write it.

As a researcher, unwittingly I became a part of the researched landscape. I have written the thesis in first person as it was difficult to remove myself from the participants. It came as a reaffirmation to know that I wanted to do so because of my involvement in ‘being there’.

Before starting to write the thesis, I worried about how it would turn out; now I am more concerned whether I have been able to do justice to the voices of my participants; whose actual words I have used extensively in the text.

All the teachers as a part of this research were more than willing to share their experiences. As a social researcher, I consciously reaffirmed that my writing expressed a more respectful view of the work they do and provided ways to unravel the complexity of their lives and

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1 Miles & Huberman (1994) have noted that the researcher cannot be separate from what is being studied. Marshall & Rossman (1999) have also posited that the researcher’s presence in the lives of the participants is fundamental to the qualitative paradigm and that the researcher is involved in the study simply by being present.
work. Pseudonyms have replaced real names and I have used my discretion to avoid even the pseudonym in many places in the text due to ethical reasons.

I would like to mention that a research like the present one had its share of dilemmas, complexities, ‘muddles’ as it unfolded. I tried to confront and resolve the issues in the best possible way at that point in time. I acknowledge that there may have been multiple ways to solve the same issues.

It was an awesome realization that when I listened deeply, reflected on what each said (I had the technological help of audio and video recording), and tried to fathom the meanings, there was an unbelievably profound connect to the deepest recesses of a person’s mind, including my own. Another revelation was that the meanings that people create from everyday life have a more powerful impact on how life unfolds, than I had thought earlier.

I hope this work communicates an intrinsic recognition of teaching as an art, a science, a craft and alchemy, ‘a dynamic orchestration’ which comes together when all involved work towards the same purpose. My intention was to reach out to the community – of practitioners, professionals, researchers, parents, policy makers, decision-makers in school systems and other concerned adults – and implore that we work together towards developing, honing, sustaining and scaling this magic.

I do not pretend to put forward ‘the last word or only way of seeing what is happening’ but I do aspire to spark debates on some of the issues that have been raised in this piece of work.

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2 Smyth (2006) related ethnographic research in education as having the capacity to provide these kinds of new directions.

3 Eisenhart (2001) has beautifully used the term to bring out issues in ethnographic research that need ‘tidying up’.

4 McKenzie (2004) talked about the teacher who needs to ‘dart and weave, dance and charm’ (page 1) in order to be effective in her teaching.

5 Geertz (1995) elaborated on how ethnographers have the desire to give out ideas in order to encourage others to take an interest in what interests them.

6 Srinivas (2001a, 2001b, 2004a, 2005; personal conversation, 2006) articulated sustainability and scalability as recurrent themes that need to be addressed in education. Both these concerns have been dealt with in the many projects at Illumine Knowledge Resources, where I have worked since 2006.

7 Yates 2004, p. 7