Chapter One

Introduction

But yield who will to their separation,
My object in living is to unite
My avocation and my vocation
As my two eyes make one in sight.
Robert Frost

The first step in enchantment, then, is to recover a beginner's mind and a child's wonder ... then we may discover the nature of the soul and the pleasure of being a participant, and not a master, in the extravagance of life.
Thomas Moore (1996)

My fingers hesitate above the keys. I am aware of an uneasy resistance to write. Although I have been on this journey for more than five years so much remains tacit, reluctant to surface and find expression. The period of this inquiry (2004 - 2009) coincides with significant changes in my professional life that were unforseen when I began.

The story begins on the threshold of my discovery of Action Research. At the time I was directing a successful Masters Degree in Communications Practice designed for professionals working in the media as journalists and programme makers. The programme was attracting students from all over the world - a feature that was

both its strength and liability. Many of the most promising students found the costs prohibitive and, as a result, there were doubts about its long term viability. We could open the programme to more western students, diluting its international character, or re-design it in more cost-effective ways. As Programme Leader I wanted to explore more creative ways of delivering the programme and turned to Action Research.

Working with small cohorts of six to eight mid-career practitioners provided a rich source of experience in curriculum design and adult learning. In giving an account of my inquiry I will describe the overlapping and shifting spheres of influence on my practice that have defined and shaped the dynamic "professional knowledge landscape" (Connelly & Clandinin 1999) on which I have worked. Half way through this period I was invited to build on the experience of the MA to develop a post-graduate (Masters and PhD) programme in Professional Practice. This shifted the focus of my work from a full-time campus based programme to a non-residential, online supported environment; and from facilitating a taught MA, to designing a programme that takes the participant's professional practice as the subject of study and research, privileging their practical knowledge and experience and facilitating a process of action and critical inquiry in their context.

The project was hosted by a small post-graduate research Centre in the UK[1]. Although my formal relationship with the Centre was as a consultant I was fully involved in the work processes of the organisation and I saw my inquiry as an example of insider research (Coghlan & Brannick 2005). I was deeply involved in navigating the micro-political and tactical decisions that are made each day, and the conversations that tilt the work in different directions. However, in the middle of 2008 the project, and with it my relationship to the organisation, began to unravel. By the end of the year I was faced with the complete collapse of the space in which I had worked. I was no longer an insider. This too, of course, is the raw material of professional life and rather than gloss over the pain, the upheaval

[1] I have chosen not to name the Centre or the colleagues with whom I worked for reasons that will become clear later. See also the section on "Ethical Considerations".

became a central aspect of the closing stages of my inquiry, pushing me deeper into understanding the meaning behind the title I had earlier drafted for the thesis.

I notice how much ground is covered in the last few sentences and am aware that, although the full story will emerge later in the thesis, I need to peel back a little more of the detail. I was both frustrated and hurt by the collapse of the project and for months I found it impossible to write. I could see no value in my earlier achievements, and with them I lost interest in the inquiries. My journal of the time is full of painful attempts to make sense of what was happening. Perhaps in disbelief I was searching for ways of recovering the project but every option was blocked and I wrestled with the demons of anger and sadness. I requested, and was granted, a six month suspension from my research. But, as Samuel Johnson said: "Adversity introduces a man to himself" (in Palumbo 2000, 102). In a book that helped me come to terms with the confusion and uncertainty, Frank (1995) recognises the chaotic nature of the stories told by the wounded storyteller. They have no discernible sequence or plot. It was months before I was able to face the wreckage and find the faith to begin again.

This moment is therefore pivotal. As I now begin to write I am defining my 'self' in the present, enriched by what I have learned on the journey but not limited by the conditions (social or political) of the past. I have stepped into a different time and place than the one in which these lessons were learned. The research is, therefore, no longer just about how I might improve my facilitation of professional learning but also about the qualities of my own action whether inside or outside the system. Rather than pointing the research light on the programme, this experience clearly turned the scrutiny onto my own practice. Perhaps ironically, this has exposed the gap that exists between our formal programmes of professional development and the realities of daily practice, obscuring the promise that our work in the world might bring us to wholeness.

So what began as a quest for improvement in my practice as a learning facilitator has become a deeper inquiry into my way of being in the world. This is what Mary

Catherine Bateson (2004) calls a "learning narrative" (2004, 6), not just a narrative of learning, recognising the significant learning that is involved in the choice of anecdote and plot and in the writing process itself. As the journey began I was searching for my voice. As it ends I am most intensely aware that I write from within the story - as both inquirer (the research instrument) and subject of inquiry. And in the alchemy of this process I give shape to my identity - to write is to 'produce' myself. It is a kind of self-making or self-forming activity (van Manen 1990, 126). To invite someone else to read it is to offer my story as a metaphor of life - or in the case of my purpose in this thesis - a metaphor of professional practice.

Ideas from many sources have entered my life on this journey and I will acknowledge their contribution as appropriate. My reading has been eclectic. I make no claim to be an expert in the fields in which I forage. Yet I cannot avoid the influence these people have had on my practice. They have been my conversation partners. The image I have is of a brief exchange in a busy corridor, catching ideas, sometimes just phrases that connect with my inquiry. Occasionally, like a lengthy conversation over a good meal, or the interactions of long term friendship, their contribution has percolated into my practice in more substantial ways. The choices I have made in the light of their insights, however, are entirely mine. They bear no responsibility for my actions.

My experiences have been captured in a journal, in audio recordings of student seminars and group supervision sessions, emails, and meeting notes, to which I will refer frequently. My purpose has been to witness moments of integrity and presence in fractals of my professional life. I explore these using a palette of inquiry practices that I discuss in detail in the next chapter.

This has not been a straight line inquiry. Mary Oliver captures the two threads that weave through the inquiry in a way only poetry can:

"The path to heaven
doesn't lie down in flat miles.
It's in the imagination
with which you perceive
this world,
and the gestures
with which you honor it."
(Oliver 1992, 79)

My intention has been to explore ways in which I have come to experience the world (my world) in fresh ways through changes in the way I perceive it. This has involved, at times, a painful dismantling of old ways of seeing and thinking, enabled by a gradual awakening of my imagination. But without "gestures with which to honor (sic)[2] it" these emerging insights would be of little value. The thesis will, therefore, also show how my practice has changed. This is not a simple formula in which I can trace cause and effect, shifts in perception leading to changes in behaviour, but a process of deepening awareness of myself, learning from experience through my action in-the-moment. In the image suggested by Oliver I am still on "the path to heaven" aware of the twists and turns on the way.

So this is where my inquiry has taken me and what I intend to explore in this thesis. But I hesitate. Five minutes pass and the confusion grows. I want to write but I face the screen and nothing comes out. What can I say about what I know? Can I bridge the gap between my experience and this blank screen - with words? If words appear, what kind of account will they provide of the past five years? How will I know their value? How will others judge them? In what way can a string of words be "true"? My hope is to reveal myself, to narrate what I have become and continue to become as a learning facilitator and programme leader. I know this

[2] I have noted the American spelling in this quotation but will use this footnote to inform the reader that I intend to ignore the difference in spelling in future quotations from American sources.

story is not just my own. Professional colleagues and wider circles of associates have been involved and their contribution to this story cannot be ignored.

There is another factor involved in my hesitation. Although my research has been in my conscious mind for most of the past five years I have confronted a continual tendency to pick up another book or journal article rather than write. The literature I have read has both stimulated and distracted me, sometimes triggering new ideas that I have pursued in my practice, at other times wasting valuable time. Why? I have had to overcome a strong sense that knowledge - at least knowledge that is of value to my purpose - lies "out there", to be discovered in someone else's experience and research. While intellectually excited by the idea that my action in the world is itself a valuable source of knowledge, releasing unique insight into the way things are, I have found it difficult to trust this way of knowing and certainly hesitate to give it form in writing.

Yet I know that I can, and must, write. Although there is a way of knowing, rich and full of colour, that can only be experienced in the moment and is therefore transient, I need to articulate, to connect forms of expression, most often words, to the experience. I realise that the experiences I will describe have passed. Writing about them will create new experiences, for me and for you, the reader. And this form of knowing, what Heron calls 'presentational knowledge' (Heron 1992, 165) can only emerge as I write. So there are feelings of apprehension and excitement as I explore, in this thesis, what I have learned on this journey.

Ways of Seeing

The words, penned by Robert Frost, with which I opened this Introduction, point me in the direction I hope to take. In the past the word "vocation" was used to describe the higher professions, medicine, education or the religious life, for example, and "avocation" referred to the pleasures found away from the job, often in hobbies like writing poetry, sailing or wood carving. Implicit in the term

"avocation" is a tension. Its etymology (with origins in the 16th century) suggests a distraction or diversion (ad, "away" and vocare, "to call") - a calling away from one's occupation. In later use, however, the meanings have been reversed. Avocation now refers to one's work or profession, evidence of the separation of life and work characteristic of the Industrial Revolution. One does not "go to work" to live, but to "make a living", in order to have the resources to pursue one's true vocation away from the factory or office.

So, at the heart of my inquiry and therefore of this thesis, is an attempt to restore the unity between my avocation, my action in the world, and my vocation, what I am becoming, as I explore the questions to which my life is an answer[3], my vocation informing my action and my avocation yielding knowledge that shapes my vocation. This way of thinking about my research emerged through an incident I will recall in the thesis in which I realised that the key to my professional practice will be found in my search for integrity and presence.

My education and professional background have embedded a purpose-driven avocational orientation in my way of being in the world. Although I am now uncomfortable with it and repent of its influence on my behaviour, I was socialised to view the world in primal chaos waiting for human action to create order. I recognise in this the legacy of the Enlightenment and the inheritance of modernity.

Frost works with the metaphor of sight, two ways of seeing, one shaped by a sense of purpose in the world and the other by action in the world. Unless "my two eyes make one in sight" the world is blurred, and impossible to harmonise. Martin Jay (2005) reminds his readers of the ocular-centric bias of modernity - the dominance of sight over other senses. The design of the telescope and microscope, representative of the instruments employed in the pursuit of knowledge, privileged

[3] This is a way of thinking about my inquiries suggested by my supervisor, Geoff Mead, and captured in his concept of "living inquiry" (Mead 2001). It has echoes with Rainer Rilke's challenge to love the questions and not seek answers I will be unable to live with: "Live the questions now. Perhaps then someday, without even noticing it, you will live your way into the answer" (Rilke 2004).

the visual, extending its range and producing knowledge at a distance. Sight objectifies the world, locating everything as external to me. Sight constructs my world, placing things at a distance - in front, to the left, right or behind me, above me or beneath me. With reality "in my sight" I am beguiled into a false confidence. It conveys an impression of certainty and encourages action.

The dominance of sight has produced metaphors of certainty. It is commonplace to speak of a "point of view". We speak of "insight" and conduct research in order to "bring to light" knowledge of the object under investigation. But there is a limit to such knowledge. Sight may provide images that are clear and unambiguous but it does not disclose their meaning. "When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree...was pleasing to the eye...she took some and ate it" (Genesis 3:6)[4]. The actions of Adam and Eve in eating the fruit would have consequences which could not be known through what they saw. And, as the story explains, its meaning was contested.

So the prophet Isaiah warns the people in exile not to rely on what they see, since "truth is lost to sight" (Isaiah 59:15), an idea echoed by Jesus: "You cannot tell by observation when the kingdom of God comes. You cannot say 'Look, here it is', or 'There it is!' For the kingdom of God is among you" (Luke 17:20-21). The avocational eye, active in the world, observing all things, must be "one in sight" with my vocation.

Secondly, as Jay (2005) points out, the Cartesian legacy separates everyday sense experience from the increasingly complex explanations of its cause and "the propositional thoughts or linguistic representations that were fashioned from them" (2005, 39). In seeking to interpret the world we are required to represent it,

[4] Biblical references throughout the thesis are given in the form (book: chapter: verse). I write as a Christian and, as I will explain later in the introduction, I have been surprised by the connections that have emerged between my faith tradition and my inquiry. The quotations are not taken from one particular translation of the Bible - in most cases I have referred to several and present what I hope is the most clear wording of the text.

but once reality has been objectivised it becomes possible to explore its meaning independent of its particular context or specificity. In seeking to make sense of it, it can be examined from different perspectives and described in different ways.

Labelling and Naming

Like my namesake, Adam, I am called to name the world, to engage in worldmaking (Goodman 1978) by giving it expression - to articulate its presence (to link essence and expression in authentic ways). It is much easier to use a label than find its true name. Labels rip reality from its context, leaving the speaker and hearer with arbitrary signs that float independently of the object that gave them birth. While incredibly useful, once a label or concept is adopted, the reality can be ignored. Anthony de Mello (1990) reminds his readers of the advice, attributed to Krishnamurti: "The day you teach the child the name of the bird, the child will never see the bird again" (1990, 121). The word "leaf" applies to all leaves, not just to the one that continues to hang on the lowest branch of the tree we planted six years ago in the corner of our garden, when all the other "leaves" that kept it company through the summer have been blown away. I just noticed that there are two of them, together facing the wild winds and rain of this January day. What reserves of energy hold them in their place?

Learning to write with integrity has become crucial to my research journey. My media career was in broadcasting and I often reflected on the transient nature of my communication. Sometimes I spoke from a script or an outline and audio recordings still exist in the archive. Most of my writing has been driven by external demands - proposals, position papers, project reports, promotional texts and even an occasional journal article have all flowed onto my screen. But none of this compares to the kind of writing I have done as I have pursued my research inquiry, writing myself into knowing, reflecting on what I have written as it emerges "outside myself" and inquiring into its integrity as self-expression. Working with

the text to explore its hidden and unexpected, and even unintended, meanings. Learning to follow the cursor rather than guide it.

Later I will describe an incident in which I broke through my reluctance to freefall writing (Goldberg 1986). There was something about the process I feared, participating in an activity designed to allow my inner self space for expression, permitting it to emerge on the page without editing or correction. As a broadcaster I have the gift of the gab - I am quite comfortable talking, at length, about subjects that interest me, according to the rules of the radio panel game, *Just a Minute*, without hesitation, repetition or deviation. In speech I am not conscious of an inner editor, checking the vocabulary or logic of my argument. In conversation my ideas flow. Why then do they not flow when I turn to written form or computer text?

Merleau-Ponty talks of experience as possessing a "wild logos" calling for its witness to give it thematic expression through interpretation. Its truth does not exist, ready-made, waiting for formal science to disclose it. Its meaning consists "ultimately of contributions from both the given and the interpreter." (Polkinghorne 1988, 30). "True speech...speech which signifies...frees the meaning captive in the thing" (Merleau-Ponty in Polkinghorne 1988, 30). My aim, therefore, is to find appropriate ways of talking about my experience in this thesis that are authentic and not manipulative - to let it be, in reality, and in language. So, for example, I will have reason to talk about others, students and professional colleagues, in this thesis. At times I will be tempted to describe them with labels, possibly adding adjectives to limit the label, like "African" or "young". But the people I will talk about are more than an "African woman" or a "young colleague" and there are lots of things about these people that are not represented by the label.

Labels betray what Peter Senge (1990) calls the "mental models", the cognitive maps, formed from the stories and assumptions we carry into our relationships with people and institutions, shaping our behaviour in organisations. But it is not

enough to acknowledge their existence or even explore the assumptions that lie behind them. The project that has shaped my inquiry over the past five years has involved significant organisational change and my experience suggests that I need a more dynamic way of talking about how we individually and corporately frame reality and the way this has been challenged, developed and changed through time. I have written discussion documents and convened planning meetings. I organised a collaborative inquiry (Reason 2002, 2003a) involving students and staff. I conceived the notion of "relational inquiry" to describe my attempts to make sense, with colleagues and students, of our experience of organisational change. But as the project developed and I now look back on the process, I believe the main way in which I have navigated organisational realities and relationships has been through conversations, not always explicit in purpose, often serendipitous in outcome. This has not been a solitary process. Sometimes we have collaborated intentionally but often the outcome has been a consequence of simply working alongside others, co-constructing the next moment in the day to day exchange of feelings and experience. As a result we have been carried to a place we did not predict but that has favoured our purpose. I will explore this experience in more detail in the thesis.

Writing in the mist where sight is of limited help, naming reality not labelling it - these are the challenges of aligning my avocation and vocation. And perhaps, here, is the root of my hesitation to hit the keys and fill the screen with words. Writing will lead me to disclose the struggle involved in bringing together my avocation and vocation, the struggle of "two eyes" becoming "one in sight", of finding integrity and presence. As a form of auto-ethnography I agree with Mary Catherine Bateson's observation: "It is not easy to use the crises of one's own life as the stimuli for new ethnographic insights." (Bateson 1994, 27).

Metaphors of the Journey

So often in professional life I have pressed on with only partial understanding, experiencing what Bateson calls, "the vertigo of doing without answers" (Bateson 1994, 9). I am reminded of a walk in the mountains near Zermatt in Switzerland. It happened more than fifteen years ago. I had been given sabbatical leave from my work and choose to spend a couple of weeks walking in the Swiss mountains. It was early May and the snows had melted on the lower slopes but one day I decided to follow a path higher up and on a part of the mountain exposed to the north. There was still snow on the ground when I exited the train at Riffelalp and headed along the path. At times the path narrowed and I was faced with a drop to my left of several hundred metres. At other times the space widened, creating even more uncertainty. For a time I was unable to find the exact route of the path through the snow and I wondered whether I should turn around. I thought I might meet someone coming from the other direction who could advise me of the way ahead but I was completely alone.

My thoughts turned towards the amazing ability of my eyes, mind and feet to choreograph the movement of my body, adapting instantaneously to changes in the terrain. Most of the time it happens without conscious thought. I am amazed at the many different ways I might put my foot forward and how, with each step, it is able to commit my whole body weight to another unique place on "terra ferma". But because of the uncertainties here on the mountain, my steps were more carefully planned and I often took time to test the ground under the snow before transferring my weight to my foot. My whole being was engaged in exploring, testing and committing myself to the next move. I made slow progress, being careful not to look down into the vast space beneath me.

In everyday life, and with each step, my foot has to come down somewhere, making a split second decision about where and how to settle. Most of the time this occurs without thinking - it is an intuitive action, occasionally brought to my attention by an unexpected obstacle. My thoughts are out ahead, taking in the

surroundings, possibly searching for a glimpse of my destination. Meanwhile my feet are adjusting step by step to the ground beneath and my brain is instantaneously assessing the conditions and coordinating my torso, limbs and feet in an unconscious and apparently effortless balance in motion. Unless I am in unfamiliar territory or dangerous circumstances when I cannot walk by sight alone.

This experience of walking provides a metaphor for my inquiry. Later in the thesis I will discuss some of the complex organisational challenges I have faced in developing the project. I wrestle with the difficulty of staying mindful during what can be quite intense discussions. The terrain seems to be changing continuously and I have often been hesitant to commit my whole being to the interventions I have made. But in the moment I have to respond to a hunch, take the next step and commit myself.

These situations have felt like the snow covered mountain path and the idea of reflecting later on what I might have done has no value. My recall of the details is incomplete and I had no way of knowing whether a different option would have worked out better. When I have tried to "reflect-on-action" I have felt it to be abstract, even contrived, determined by the subconscious selections of my memory and my current intentions. In the moment I must make do with partial understanding.

Other metaphors for my inquiry tumble around in my mind. I have worked with "critical incidents" since first discovering reflective practice and find the idea helpful in getting students to access the knowledge embedded in their experience. Critical incidents occur at moments of disjuncture (Jarvis 1999) when I am conscious of what Whitehead (2005) calls "living contradictions", disruptions in the routines of my life. Over the past five years I have collected accounts in my journal and written of many such incidents. They now lie like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle around me, as I try to make sense of how I/we have organised ourselves and our resources. Sometimes I think I have seen the picture on the box but then this is not a simple puzzle and there are some odd features to it. The image is not finished.

As I look closer, in my imagination, some of the pieces appear blurred and others are blank. It is not clear where they fit, but as I bring them towards one another they seem to change shape and I can see more of the detail. A bigger picture seems to emerge as they slip into one another, forming clusters of meaning. I am tempted to continue to work with individual pieces but I can now see that it is only as they are brought together that I can make sense of them. Although they are images of times past they seem alive, combining/morphing into shapes that contribute to the bigger picture. It feels risky to work with the material of my professional and personal life in this dynamic way.

But it is not the image of a puzzle or a mountain walk that I have chosen to work with. Judi Marshall in an early CARPP[5] workshop talked about the practice of living life as inquiry, using the image of "facing into the wind". I awoke one morning shortly after hearing this image with a sense that the legend of the voyage of St Brendan could offer a useful metaphor of my inquiry. The thought has remained in the background until recently. Although shrouded in hagiography (the first recorded account of his journey dates to 300 years after his death) it is this story that has helped me make sense of my inquiries, providing "epistemic access" to important and interesting aspects of reality (Boyd on the role of metaphors in Ortony 1993, 483). This story seemed able to hold my experiences in a way that honoured their complexity and yet gave them coherence. It has lived alongside, or underneath, my own story, adding perspective and depth to my inquiries. I was with Brendan on the journey and have had numerous liminal experiences when memories of the journey touched a moment in my professional life, or incidents in my inquiry recalled moments in that voyage in search of the Land of Promise.

Brendan felt a call, an urge, to "go into the ocean that brought his country its winds and mists and dazzling sunsets, and to see what lay beyond, the source from which these things came" (Lehane 1994, 71) and set sail with a group of his followers, including some he had not chosen. They sailed into the mist - landing, from time to

[5] CARPP, The Centre for Action Research in Professional Practice, School of Management, University of Bath, the Centre in which my PhD studies have been located.

time, on islands whose inhabitants provided them food, or offered direction on their journey. They faced dangers at sea and on land yet also experienced remarkable provision by the inhabitants and insight into the purpose of their journey on their circuitous voyage to the Land of Promise. When they finally reached their destination they were shown a great river across which they could not pass - and so returned to the place from which they had begun seven years earlier, wiser, yet with lingering questions of what lay beyond the river.

Brendan took to sea in a curragh, a boat made of hide stretched over a wooden frame and powered by a single sail or two large oars. Brendan and his colleagues were "peregrini" - followers of Christ who believed that they could "find God by wandering". As my inquiry has continued I have found myself aware that most of the time I am "at sea", blown by the wind and pushed by the waves, occasionally pulling against the currents with all my strength at the oar but unsure of my direction in the mist. I have, however, become more intentional in "facing into the wind" and, more aware of the islands on which I/we have been nourished and challenged through the critical incidents that have occurred there. Lahane (1994, 68) describes Brendan's voyage as "a flirtation with the obscure". Severin (Severin 1978, 72) describes it as "an act of faith". Both are apt descriptions for my inquiry. The voyage presented the sailors not only with "challenges from nature but also struggles with their own human topography; wrested from the journey are self-knowledge, patience, courage and compassion" (Green 2005, 124). I am not an experienced sailor and imagine myself starting the journey as a deck hand, but my inquiry has been nourished and deepened by the narrative connections the adventure has provided.

Thinking and Acting Professionally

The first noun in the title of the thesis is "professional" and I would like to explain the way in which I intend to work with this language. It is one of a set of words, such as profession, professional and professionalism, that, in popular use, define

either a field of regulated public practice, or qualities of performance. The term is frequently used of membership in a group of practitioners with a common vocation and standards of performance who enjoy a high level of autonomy in their work. The traditional professions such as medicine, law and accountancy maintain almost hegemonic control of their field, with authority to sanction their practitioners.

Several writers have recognised a crisis in confidence in professional practice (Schon 1983, 1987; Eraut 1994; Furlong 2000). The crisis has developed along several axes. It has involved a growing uncertainty about the nature of professional knowledge and the relationship between theory and practice. Schon's discussion about the "indeterminate zones of practice" (1987, 6) and the limits of technical rationality threaten any confidence in attempts to control the boundaries of professional knowledge. Similarly autonomy, once deemed the essential privilege of professional practice, has floundered on calls for greater accountability and the introduction of publically recognised benchmarks and targets. In recent decades the fields of practice claiming professional recognition have multiplied, diluting the currency of the term in common use. The concepts "profession" and "professional practice" are, as Shaw (2002) has pointed out, socially constructed. They serve socially useful purposes and "the more professionalized an activity becomes, the more codified" (ibid 96). A discourse of word and deed develops that is elevated above the everyday reality of our lives (Shotter 1993) and legitimises "the kind of causality we will use to articulate the nature of our human agency, the kind of difference we can make, the scope and limitation of our power to influence the evolution of events" (Shaw 2002, 96), rendering the practice political. Writing from an overtly feminist position, Fletcher (1998), for example, observes that "the current definition of work in organizational discourse is a social construction premised on a gendered dichotomy between the public and private spheres of life" (ibid, 165).

Rather than pursue the notion of professional as a term to define a sphere of practice, with its accompanying discourse, however, my intention is to consider its use as a quality of practice. Coles (2002) distinguishes technical work from

professional practice by the judgment that is required. While a technician works to achieve the right solution, the professional seeks the best outcome in circumstances of uncertainty. Referring to Aristotle's notion of *phronesis,* Coles points out that professional practice is recognised by its exercise of practical wisdom. The professional asks not just "what can or might I do now?" but "what ought I to do now?" suggesting "the whole enterprise of professional practice is seen as a form of moral enquiry, utilising practical reasoning and practical wisdom" (Fish & Coles 1998, 284). This is an elusive quality. Professional judgment "leaves no empirical evidence on the surface of practice … that such judgement has been made, or of the processes involved" (ibid 257), leading Fish and Coles to describe it as "the invisible heart of practice" (ibid 256).

This helps to position my own inquiry and the search for what "being professional by becoming myself" might promise. The thesis does not attempt to wrestle with the nouns, profession or professional, but with the adverbial form of the word. What has emerged from the inquiry is a way of thinking and acting professionally that breaks down the separation between person and performance, private and public, and gives attention to the underlying qualities of being in the world.

Validity/Quality

I am a practitioner and a storyteller. This may be a dubious claim for the writer of a PhD thesis. Storytellers are not necessarily bound by the facts. Their calling is to weave together the threads of life experience to create an imaginative space where both teller and listener can perceive new insights in the data. But then this is, perhaps, a poetic way of describing what theory-builders also do. A theory is an attempt to pull together the available data in a coherent way so that it may be understood and appropriately used to accomplish worthwhile ends. Even with theory, the question is not about whether it is true or false but whether it can account for the current situation and predict future occurrences of the phenomena. So perhaps what I offer in this thesis is not so far removed from the traditional

thesis than first thought, although it is certainly appropriate to raise questions about the criteria for assessing its validity or quality.

The inquiry falls into the general field of Action Research (Bradbury and Reason 2001a) and, in particular, what Reason and Torbert (2001) call first person inquiry. I describe in detail the approaches I have used in the inquiry in the next chapter. By way of introduction I suggest that the notion of validity, as proposed by positivist research, is too limiting as the criteria for assessing Action Research (AR) because it requires the assessment to meet epistemological standards that include "the trustworthiness of inferences drawn from the data" (internal validity) and "how well these inferences generalize to a larger population or are transferable to other contexts" (external validity) (Herr & Anderson 2005, 50). This assumes a correspondence notion of truth, that words correspond to the world they describe. But this theory of truth "landed the social sciences in a country of things, where nouns (names) matter most. It has been assumed that, once you get your metaphors right, the story will tell itself" (Czarniawska 2004, 134).

Of more immediate consequence, this form of validation raises awkward questions about contamination since I, as the researcher, am deeply embedded in the inquiry and struggle to see the taken-for-granted aspects of my practice from an outsider perspective (Herr & Anderson 2005, 50). For some, this raises doubts about the value of AR as a source of public knowledge. AR is acceptable as a form of local knowledge that may lead to change in the practice setting itself, but not "when it is presented as public knowledge with epistemic claims beyond the practice setting" (ibid 52). Accusations of solipsism have haunted me throughout this work, fuelled in the final stages by a new Dean that frequently questioned AR as idiosyncratic and self-indulgent. Has it all been a grand self-delusion? I find some support in the exercise of critical subjectivity (Reason 1994) that has its echo in what Margaret Mead, the respected ethnographer called "disciplined subjectivity", the intentional inclusion of my subjective responses as data in the inquiry. As Mary Catherine Bateson (2004), her daughter, suggests, "The problem is not to resist falling in love. The problem is to fall in love and be wiser thereby" (2004, 42). Marshall (2001)

describes the practice of tracking "inner" and "outer" arcs of attention as a way of accounting for subjectivity. Ladkin (2005) offers a phenomenological perspective on subjectivity, arguing that curiosity and attention to the "other", enabling the phenomena to "speak for themselves" without interpretation or framing, recognises the interdependence of objective and subjective in the creation of knowledge.

Flyvbjerg (2006) offers a vigorous defence of the single case. "Good narratives ... may be difficult or impossible to summarize into neat scientific formulae, general proposition, and theories." (2006, 237) he argues. Theory may be more useful to the novice. Case researchers are sceptical about "erasing phenomenological detail in favour of conceptual closure" (ibid 240). Moore (1996), in his call for the re-enchantment of everyday life, regrets the loss of the single case. "In our day ... we don't trust the single case, or even a duplication, but trust only infinitely repeatable events. In almost every field a student has to learn how to do statistical analysis, because we rely more on repetition than on rarity" (1996, 361).

There is another aspect to the question of the single case in AR. In a debate, conducted in the pages of the journal *Concepts and Transformations*, several prominent AR scholars respond to arguments put by Bjorn Gustavsen and Davydd Greenwood, addressing the limited influence of AR on the social sciences. Reason (2003b) responds to Gustavsen's argument that AR should place its emphasis on the creation of social movements rather than single cases, by showing the necessity for personal and small group inquiry practices at the roots of wider social change. In my view, since AR is not first of all about proving things but about improving them there will always be an aspiration for social movements yet, as Reason argues, these must be rooted in the quality of personal and small group inquiry. It is my expectation, therefore, that changes to the way we support professional development in the workplace will come through the cumulative effect of individual cases. Reason offers the analogy of homeopathy, a small dose aiding the self-healing of the whole. This is happening first outside the institutions of higher learning where we are seeing,

> "action research not primarily as a form of social science producing cases or influencing policies, but as a form of day-to-day collaborative inquiry at the moment of action for individuals, small groups, organizations, and society as a whole, an enormous groundswell for change" (Reason 2003b, 291).

The limitations of positivist attempts to understand the human world has resulted in a shift from knowledge viewed as a mirror of reality, to a discursive, socially constructed reality, valid knowledge claims being negotiated among members of a community (Kvale 1995). Without a correspondence criterion of knowledge the researcher can no longer rely on method to secure validity. This leads Kvale to propose that validity in post-modern inquiry is located in the quality of craftmanship evident in the work, introducing aesthetics and communication skill as criteria and raising questions about the integrity of the researcher (ibid). Of particular interest to an action researcher is the notion of pragmatic validity - the connection between claims to knowledge and the resulting change in behaviour that it leads to. This raises critical questions about purpose and power, concerns that were never on the radar screen in the traditional ways of thinking about validity.

As the bandwidth of validity (Bradbury & Reason 2001b) has broadened, the language of assessment has changed. Marshall and Reason (2007) write of "quality" that includes attention to framing, different ways of knowing, power, and emergence. These criteria suggest a useful way of reading this thesis. Throughout the inquiry I have been conscious of stepping back, zooming out and in, noticing the different insights that come from the ways I frame the inquiry in the moment, attempting to practice the multi-dimensional attention that Torbert calls "supervision" (Torbert 2004). This is much easier, of course, when reflecting "on" action than "in" action. I have wrestled with questions of power, my own power-over (both given and taken) and power-with, and my responses to the power present in subtle ways in the systems in which I worked. I have faced the limits of reason and reached for what Pascal describes as the "wise ignorance" of someone

who truly knows this. Several incidents recorded in the thesis describe the ways in which emotional and embodied ways of knowing have influenced my actions.

Perhaps most significant, for me, however, has been the emergent nature of my inquiry. I have experienced this at two levels. Each cycle of inquiry has involved a dynamic interaction of experience, personal reflection, and ideas from other sources, influencing one another in often unexpected ways. And, at the macro level, I have been carried by the narrative process to experience each cycle building on the previous one. Readers will probably discern a different quality in my writing as the thesis progresses. I could have evened this out with careful editing but I feel this is important as evidence of emergence. I have come to know as I have written and while in one sense the knowledge is cumulative, in another I want to recognise a provisionality to all forms of practical knowing.

As understandings of validity in qualitative research and action research have developed it is reassuring to see the researcher ascending from the obscurity of objective inquiry. As a first-person inquiry I have found my attention increasingly focussed on myself and the qualities of integrity and presence involved in my practice. My relational practice and presence have become central themes of this inquiry. These are the qualities of "becoming rather than being" (Marshall & Reason 2007, 369), that, to borrow the utopian dream posed by Kvale, may lead to a world where we no longer "have to continually pose questions of validity" (Kvale 1995, 38).

The holy grail of positivist research was, of course, generalisability, the expectation that the theory/story that explains the data in the current situation might predict future occurrences of the phenomena. I make no such claims for this story. However, this does not restrict its value. Schon (1983) writes of the "reflective transfer" of practitioner knowledge, and Greenwood & Levin (1998) describe the "transcontextual credibility" of AR. A key quality in this process is verisimilitude (Bruner 1991, Ellis & Bochner 2000), the possibility of "evoking a feeling that the experience is lifelike, believable, possible" (Ellis & Bochner 2000, 751). Validity,

depends, in this sense, "on the narrative speaking to the experience of others" (Mason 2002, 175), judged not by some external criteria but by the way it moves you as the reader and the integrity you sense as you enter into the story.

I would like to make this more specific and personal. This thesis is autobiographical. It is a personal (auto) narrative of my lived experience (bios). But it is more than this. It is a written account (graphia). As such it purports to represent my lived experience, raising important questions about form and presentation. The complex transfer of experience to words involves critical reflection on the creation of knowledge and it is here that I suggest, questions of quality are relevant. Emerging in this thesis, as you read it, are themes that lay hidden, moments before they arrived on my screen. I am not suggesting that an invisible hand is responsible for the thesis but, to follow Laurel Richardson (1994), "writing as inquiry" discloses perspectives on my life I had not expected. I could have edited some of this disclosure out. Once written these words will remain undisturbed long after I have moved on and even forgotten them, and they may turn up in unexpected places. This makes me ponder, briefly, how you as my reader may approach the text. Although we may only meet briefly in the viva, or never encounter one another face to face, this writing is a gesture, an invitation to dialogue. Can I therefore suggest a few questions, beyond those that have already surfaced in this Introduction, that you may like to bring to your reading? You will, I am sure, also have your own and this will deepen and carry forward the conversation beyond the page, in the spirit of collaborative inquiry.

> Ricoeur (1981) suggests that reading a text is an active process that involves the recovery of meaning by the reader. In the light of your professional experience what connections are you making with the thesis?
>
> In what ways does the narrative description of my journey towards integrity and presence resonate with your experience?

> Does the thesis suggest, to you, ways of enabling professional development that reach this level of self-awareness and personal transformation?
>
> Whether you are a member of my religious tradition or not, is there a sense in which you are moved spiritually as you engage with my story?
>
> This journey has brought me face to face with the limits of rationality and a tendency towards hubris in my professional practice. As you wrestle with the text what insights emerge from your reflection on these features of professional practice?

My first intentions in adopting an AR approach to my practice was to improve it. Only gradually have I come to see my responsibility in the world, not just in terms of solving the presenting problem of the day or hour, but of giving attention to the wider questions of how my action affects the world. The outcome is a story of professional practice. I do not claim to have mapped the territory or developed a theory of personal or organisational change. What I offer is more modest - a way of thinking and acting in the world that I believe has more integrity and presence. This does however suggest, to me, ways of thinking about professional practice that are closer to the lived experience of the practitioner, and therefore offers ways of supporting professional development in practice.

Ethical Considerations

In the early stages of my research I decided to work within the conventional codes of ethical research. I would be working with human participants and so decided to secure written consent from students and colleagues involved in the groups I was facilitating. We talked about my research plans and I obtained agreement to record seminars and quote individuals in my writing. I offered a degree of anonymity by promising to use individual initials rather than names but

participants knew that the groups were small and others would easily be able to identify my sources.

Informed consent is one of the almost sacred requirements of social research. As my work grew I sought guidance from published sources including the University of Bath School of Management "Ethical Implications of Research Activity", the Open University "Ethical Principles for Research Involving Human Participants" and, The Economic and Social Research Council Research Ethics Framework[6]. Most codes of practice are written to ensure that the participant understands the purpose, methods and possible risks involved and the researcher is expected to balance the benefits and potential risks in designing the research and handling the data. I became aware from these guidelines, for example, of the issue of data protection since information from my sources is stored in audio files, journal entries and handwritten notebooks.

The Economic and Social Research Council Research (ESRC) Ethics Framework presents the standard research ethics guidelines and then acknowledges:

> "Methodologies based on participatory, action-oriented techniques also raise questions about the practice of ethics-based social science, especially where there is a strong commitment to qualitative research. Ethics review of qualitative research needs to attend to the iterative and uncertain character of this research process. It must demand the same ethical standards as other approaches while accepting that outcomes and measures of risk or benefit may be less easily defined before the start of the research." (p28)

[6] Accessed at:
[http://www.bath.ac.uk/internal/management/pdf/EIRA1.pdf]
[http://www.open.ac.uk/research/research-school/resources/policy-information-governance.php]
[http://www.esrc.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/Images/ESRC_Re_Ethics_Frame_tcm6-11291.pdf]

In other words, while there is an acknowledgement that iterative inquiry is more messy, the ESRC framework still insists that the same standards apply.

I have taken a pragmatic approach on anonymity and confidentiality. For the first four years of this inquiry I was an insider and was conscious that my account of critical incidents might not only affect my role in the organisation but may also have influenced organisational dynamics. As it happens I no longer work for the institutions that provided the context for my inquiries and I have chosen not to identify them in the thesis. I have changed the names of all participants[7], or identified them in transcriptions with initials, and have tried to avoid attributing intention or motivation to their actions. Those close to the story may be able to identify places and individuals, but I doubt that this would add significantly to their understanding.

As the work has become more clearly a first person inquiry, the ethics of my research has merged into my overall inquiry purpose. I do have concerns about the way I represent others. The kind of inquiry pursued in this thesis inevitably weaves itself around and between others. Their actions have been deeply entwined with mine. I cannot offer an account of my professional development without drawing them into my story. In telling of the action of others (including their speech) I am selecting and interpreting.

I have, however, chosen not to seek agreement on the accounts I provide in the thesis. This is about me, not about others. It is about how I interpreted situations and the action of others and how this influenced my actions. I imagine others would tell a different story. There is no "objective" account of these incidents. This is about the sensations I experienced, the sense I made of them and the choices this led me to. As the inquiry turned inward I was forced to face the inadequacy of my ways of thinking - partial, prejudiced and ignorant. I lost my innocence. No

[7] With the exception of my supervisor, Dr Geoff Mead, and members of my CARPP supervision group, whose involvement has been so important to this inquiry that I want to acknowledge their contribution.

longer can I take for granted that my initial insight is valid. But in my professional life what matters is what takes me forward as I seek to translate my values into action. So, in as much as my reading of the behaviour of others influenced my actions, this interpretation is valid (even if, in the opinion of others involved, I got it wrong). It shaped my action in the situation.

I have adopted a narrative form for the thesis and narrative structure, or plot, is a way of sense making or theorising. I have chosen particular incidents or moments to tell this story and recorded my sense making and action. Many are learning moments which have an edge to them of the unexpected, uncomfortable or disturbing. But this is my narrative, my plot. It is not merely a record of what happened (if this was even possible to provide) and, following Bruner (1990):

> "It does not matter whether the account conforms to what others might say who were witnesses, nor are we in pursuit of such ontologically obscure issues as whether the account is "self-deceptive" or "true". Our interest, rather, is only in what one person thought he did, what he thought he was doing it for, what kinds of plights he thought he was in, and so on." (1990, 119)

Nevertheless, central to my approach is a desire to handle my encounters with others with reverence and respect. In Chapter Four I explore my emerging understanding of relational inquiry and suggest that the old-fashioned virtue of reverence is essential to knowing with and through others. This relational attitude is expressed in gestures and simple ceremony. There isn't a single truth or definitive account of the encounters and mine may differ radically from others, but this is the way I experienced them and acted as a consequence. So the ethical question has become, in itself, an inquiry; what does a respectful, reverential attitude to others I have encountered in my inquiry look like in practice?

I aspire to give an account of this period of my professional life in a way that permits me to continue to gaze into the eyes of those I have worked with. Drawing

from the work of Levinas, Pamela Cooper-White (2007) says, "We cannot use, degrade, or objectify another if we truly see his or her face" (2007, 44). This is the ethical standard I have sought to maintain. I seek truth in my encounter with the other. I may have felt angry, frustrated and even betrayed and I have found it, at times, to be an incredibly difficult emotional experience. Although I may be tempted to colonise other stories, individual and institutional, for my purposes, they are not mine to tell and my reader may therefore sense restraint in what I say. But this tension is a healthy one and forms an inquiry path through the thesis. This is my story and where others appear I have tried to include them respectfully and with reverence. In giving expression to my action in the world and recognising my encounter with others as central to my sense making, the thesis can be read as an account of the ethics of my professional practice.

The Thesis

The thesis is a first person narrative inquiry that traces my professional practice over a five year period from 2004 to 2009. The title for the thesis came as a gift in a brief exercise of freefall writing (Goldberg 1986) when, for a fleeting moment, my inner self was able to escape the censorship of the ego. It has proved to be a strong and lasting focus to the inquiry. I have borrowed the titles for chapters three to five from a little book "on life and living" by Richard Bode (1993) since they capture succinctly my own journey. I had to discover that I could not improve my performance on the high seas of organisational life before I had learned "the relationship between myself and the elements over which I had no control" (1993, 3). I started the journey, learning to keep my balance in a flat bottomed boat, discovering how difficult it really is to work the oars, sitting with my destination behind me, and judging "where I was going from where I had been" (ibid, 13).

I have employed a palette of approaches to inquiry, including action inquiry, relational inquiry and systemic inquiry, that I describe in detail in Chapter Two. This material was first drafted as an introduction to the thesis but as the discussion

developed it seemed more appropriate to offer it in a separate chapter to provide a more substantial framing of the inquiry. In Chapter Two I acknowledge the way in which my encounter with reality trips up my naive assumptions and opens up the possibility of greater insight and wider horizons. It begins to show how I move between action and reflection, opening up my inquiry practice to scrutiny.

I first conceived the thesis in terms of three movements, or cycles of inquiry, that took me deeper into my research. The first, now offered as Chapter Three, describes my early experiences of action inquiry as a programme leader and learning facilitator. It begins at the beginning as I wrestle with my positivist grounding and technical orientation. Gradually, as I gave attention to my practice working with post-graduate students who knew more about their practice than I did, my appreciation for other sources of knowledge and different ways of knowing developed and I caught the first glimpse of the illusive quality that became central to my inquiry - my own presence. This leads me to reflect on critical incidents in which I was confronted with the split between mind and body, rationality and feeling.

Chapter Four, the second movement in the journey, gives an account of my increasing responsibility in managing Master's programmes and the choices I faced in using positional power to achieve productive ends. As my inquiry progressed I launched a collaborative inquiry that opened up questions about post-graduate research and personal values. As I became aware of the difficulties of engaging in intention inquiry with others on a regular basis I began to explore what I call "relational inquiry" to knowing in practice. Again a critical incident, this time in my supervision group, pushed me to address questions of control and I conclude this movement with reflections on a clowning workshop and the virtue of reverence as a corrective to hubris.

The inquiry, to this point, might have turned into a victory narrative. I had begun to introduce changes to my practice as a learning facilitator, had been invited to take responsibility for a new Post-graduate Programme in Professional Practice, and

had secured the partnership of a well known university in London. I begin Chapter Five by describing the ways in which the inquiry had begun to reshape my practice as a programme leader and learning facilitator before I found myself without a job and outside the context in which I had conducted the inquiry up to that time. Unexpectedly, and a result of changes beyond our control, the university pulled out of the relationship after we had recruited the first cohort of students and my contract was cancelled. Chapter Five describes the experience of thinking and acting in the daily reality of these systems, and the trauma of coping with the death of a project in which I had invested so much of my time and energy. Slowly, as the sadness and anger subsided, I was able to see again and looked out across a different horizon that evoked a new consciousness, not contained by physical or systemic limits, that has taken me closer to understanding the meaning of integrity and presence in practice.

Chapter Six, the final chapter, offers a series of meta-reflections on the journey. What have I learned on the way? I had started the voyage with a clear purpose, to improve my practice as a programme leader and learning facilitator, but I had set out to take an attitude of inquiry to my practice and as the circumstances changed I found myself confronted with what lies beneath the activities of professional life - the quality of integrity and presence that I brought to my work. After the project collapsed and I was without work all that remained was myself. But what do I mean by becoming myself?

In addition to the three movements, focused on different axes of inquiry, there are three other dimensions of inquiry that have played an important role in the thesis. Firstly, until I began to write the thesis my experience lay in piles of apparently unconnected anecdotes, notes and journal scribbles. As I have attempted to name reality in written form I have written myself towards understanding (Richardson 1994). Secondly, the thesis is autobiographical, offering an account of my professional life in narrative form. Anecdotes have been selected and sequenced with narrative purpose, the plot giving shape to an emerging understanding of my

theme. This not only gives me the opportunity to think *about* stories but also to think *with* stories, bringing diachronic coherence to the inquiry.

Thirdly, I also describe the inquiry as a religious quest. This has come to prominence as the inquiry has developed and I have found connections between my experience and faith. I use the term "religious" to include notions of spirituality but also to root it in my own faith tradition as a Christian. I have been surprised by associations and insights that interact with the inquiry in numerous ways. My faith is enriched, and I sense my understanding of professional practice has also been stretched, as I engage in theological reflection on the journey. Several authors have recognised the holistic nature of action inquiry (Barber 2005) and some have explored the spiritual dimensions of Action Research (Torbert 1991; Heron 1992, 1998, 2006; Reason 1993, 2000; Chuaprapaisilp 2002; Coghlan 2005, 2008; Nolan 2005). Nolan (2005) and Coghlan (2005) have demonstrated how they have related their personal faith and spiritual practices to their inquiries. I warm to Coghlan's (2005) recognition that "research into one's spirituality is potentially personally transforming and so, in my view, is congruent with action research" (2005, 91).

Although the period of the inquiry has ended, the inquiry itself is unfinished. The final chapter identifies untrodden paths and acknowledges the provisional nature of my conclusions. I also list, in the conclusion, a number of directions I intend to pursue to develop and deepen the insights I have gained from the journey. In the meantime I sense that I have become more intentional in thinking and acting with integrity and presence, and found hope in what, through my action in the world, I am becoming. It is in this light that I offer the thesis as a contribution to narrowing the gap between the rhetoric and pedagogy of professional development and the experience of professional practice.

I invite you to begin the journey by accompanying me on the Voyage with St Brendan.