First You have to Row a Little Boat

I daresay you haven't had much practice

The White Queen to Alice
Through the Looking Glass
Lewis Carroll (1871)

How warped the mirrors where our worlds are made

In Sickness and in Health
WH Auden (1945)

In the spirit of Desert Island Discs I can imagine that one of the distractions I might have chosen to fill the hours at sea on Brendan's boat, when I was not at the oar or keeping watch, would be a book of Sudoku puzzles. Sudoku appeals to my linear mind, trained to solve problems. I'm not a master player but I still find myself drawn to the nine by nine grid in a newspaper before much of the news. Once I've worked through the obvious choices it becomes a matter of holding two or more possible solutions in my head of the kind, "if this was two then that would be five and this would mean that would be one", mentally adjusting the options until the choice falls into place. Often it's a case of elimination, paying attention to the consequences and then making a decision. Sometimes I get stuck, my eyes wandering across the grid, not finding anywhere I can make progress. I may set it aside to return later when the next step appears obvious (why didn't I see it earlier?). There is only one right solution to a Sudoku puzzle and it doesn't change while I am trying to solve it. But Sudoku is also unforgiving. If I enter a wrong number in one of its boxes the puzzle cannot be solved. One wrong step and the whole exercise is lost.

I also notice how easily I discard a completed puzzle. I feel no need to keep the newspaper as a trophy. The task is completed, and I am left with a mild sense of satisfaction. This is a metaphor of life and its challenges. Each "puzzle" requires a different level of attention and the tough ones call for increasing mental agility but once the task is accomplished I move on. Yet something remains - a mental ability that has been stretched, or used in different ways, developing techniques that will serve the next challenge.

My early encounter with reflective practice also appealed to my linear, problem solving mind. The experiencing, observing, conceptualising and experimenting (acting) cycle (Kolb 1984, Coghlan & Brannick 2005) made good sense. There was, it seemed to me, a technical/rational way of approaching reflective practice and action research. I was looking for models of good practice I could adopt in my teaching. I assumed that they existed "out there" and my research would find them. Their benefits would be self-evident. I saw action research as a technology (McNiff 2002, 52). I was a technician wanting to manipulate the components of learning in new ways. A little practice and I would be able to use them myself. But, as Mead notes, "action inquiry is not a standard technique that can be applied (like a coat of paint) to meet every need....it must be crafted to its particular circumstances and context" (Mead 2001, 260). What is also clear now, some time later, is that when I first experimented with reflective practice, I gave no attention to my 'self' and took for granted that improving my professional performance would simply involve the acquisition of new skills and the design of new tools. It took time for me to see myself as both the subject and the instrument of research (Richardson 2004).

This was not an easy part of the journey. In what follows I will explore my emerging appreciation for what I have called "living my inquiry" and reflect on incidents in my teaching and consulting practice in which I became aware of my particular presence and action the world. Although drawing from phenomenology and narrative inquiry it is rooted in the reflective practice paradigm first discussed by Schon (1983). This involves attention and reflection, in-action and on-action, on

the assumptions, beliefs, values, motivations and intentions that give direction to my being-in-the-world. It goes beyond what Argyris (1985) called "single-loop" reflection that questions my actions, to include "double-loop" analysis that questions my existing frames of reference. And it moves into the territory of "triple-loop learning" described by Stroobants et al (2007) as addressing the question not just "how can I *act* differently?" (single-loop), or "how can I *think* differently?" (double loop), but "how can I *be* different?"

This has both inward and outward dimensions, looking inward to notice and adjust the way I perceive and act in the world and looking outward to notice how I connect and engage with others. This is what Marshall (2001) calls "self-reflective inquiry", an attempt to understand myself as an inquiring person in both a personal and professional sense. While I am accountable to various stakeholders for the results of this work I am also aware that the impulse for my actions lies in a set of values or standards, what Whitehead (2006) calls "living standards" by which I judge myself.

Recognising Different Sources of Knowledge

In the late 1990's I had an opportunity to set up an MA in Communication Practice designed for media practitioners working in the non-western world. In writing my research goals for the purposes of MPhil/PhD registration, I described the programme in this way:

> "The MA in Communication Practice (validated by the University of
> Wales) was launched in 1999 as a full time residential programme....
> The programme is designed for media practitioners from the
> non-western world and is offered in reflective practice mode,
> privileging the student's professional experience as a legitimate source
> of knowledge. Most students are attracted to the programme because
> of its commitment to explore professional practice from a Christian
> value base, an unusual posture in a profession that espouses journalistic

independence. The success of the programme can be attributed in part
to the enrolment of small cohorts, an emphasis on interactive learning,
the use of peer reviewed journaling, and other social learning
methods."

These features developed through experience. The small group of people who first
gathered to design the programme where mostly practitioners with little
knowledge (and a lot of assumptions) about the requirements of the UK academic
establishment. Our first proposal for validation was quite safe, drawing on the
established curriculum of other institutions. Our assumption was that the
contextual and practical issues that we wanted to explore could be handled in the
cracks of the curriculum, but by the end of the first year it was clear that the course
design was too rigid. The students themselves had taken the initiative to search
out some of the emerging research being done in their own contexts on the edges
of the Western academy. It encouraged us, as a faculty, to explore this terrain for
ourselves, seeking insights from the non-western margins of communication
research.

Even more seriously we had not anticipated the problems the students would
encounter in applying the theory to their practice. They struggled to engage
critically with the literature and floundered in its application. Was this simply the
price they would have to pay to be credentialed through a UK university? Shortly
after starting the course a student from the Middle East posted a message on the
online student common room that echoed the experience of others:

"I have been reading this book on communication since Friday, and I
found it very hard to understand!!..... Studying after 15 years of quitting
school is scary! Especially if you are studying in a different country,
using a foreign language to write, read, comment and even to think. I
am reading and taking notes but I feel my brain is at risk! I really
thought seriously to quit .... afraid I am not up to an MA degree!!! I am

afraid from mistakes, afraid from bad marks, afraid from failing, afraid

of misunderstanding subjects, afraid ..afraid ..afraid..."

In the third year of the programme and with the encouragement of the Academic
Dean we introduced an elective course on reflective practice based on a
self-managed study pack he had designed for another programme. The experience
opened my eyes. Within a month of beginning this course (with just four students)
I recommended that the module be made a core course. It was exciting to read the
formative work prepared by the students and listen to their stories in seminars. I
recall the stimulation and pleasure I felt in re-working the study pack for the
following year to make it more specific to the media field. It was my introduction
to reflective practice and the contribution of action research to professional
practice. The course quickly became the core component of what we called the
Integrative Strand - a feature of the programme that was responsible for forty
percent of assessment in Part One.

The stories I began to hear in the seminars made me aware of the fund of
knowledge brought by the learner. Although, in my teaching of communication, I
encouraged the students to trust the intelligence of their audience and create
programming that leaves people with questions that would stimulate
self-discovery, I had not connected this advice to my own practice as a teacher. My
theory-in-use conflicted with my espoused theory (Argyris 1999). But as I listened
to the stories I began to change my way of working with the students. Most of
them came from established careers in newspapers, radio and television in Africa,
Asia and the Middle East. I started to tell them, at the beginning of the course, "the
most important textbook you will read this year is your own experience." At first
they didn't believe me. They had come to England to gain exposure to the finest
examples of media practice and their university library card was a ticket to the
source of all wisdom! Why come to the UK to think about what they have left
behind?

Aspirations of Phronetic Practice

This chapter involved me in cycles of inquiry as I worked with students in the development of their inquiring skills. Sometimes this was collaborative in nature. At others I was consciously making decisions "in-the-moment" that influence my actions without the overt participation of others. This was the case, for example, in my attempts to find ways of helping a cohort of students read the text of their own management experience. I began the module by inviting them to discuss amongst themselves a series of questions:

"How do things get done in your culture?"

"How do you decide what needs to be done?"

"Who organises the work?"

"How is success rewarded?"

This line of inquiry with the group was deliberate. My aim was to invite them to read their personal text before being introduced to the vast literature on management. My reasoning was that if they could find the language to voice their own experience and articulate their values and beliefs they would be in a better place to engage in a rigorous dialogue with the literature with a view to improving their practice.

In preparation for a later session I wrestled with the question, "what might open a conversation between "good practice" in the West and their own experiences?" We watched the BBC documentary on "Eldorado", the hugely expensive soap opera launched by the BBC in the early 1990's in a frantic attempt to maintain audience share and justify the continuation of the television licence. The documentary, produced ten years later as a part of the series "Trouble at the Top", exposed a catalogue of management failures that resulted in its cancellation within a year of launch. Even the world's biggest broadcasting organisation can get it wrong.

The discussion following the video was animated. I was pleased to see that everyone had something to contribute and the group was interacting well with each other, picking up and developing each others comments. Poor casting, political interference and an impossible production schedule were quickly identified as causes for the failure. The students were surprised at the way the BBC management tried to solve the problems by firing members of the production team. It soon became clear that this would not happen in their cultures - 'back home', I was told, people are valued more than time.

We hadn't talked about management theory in the traditional sense but they had given voice to their management experience (presentational knowing, (Heron 1996)) and identified several ways in which it differed from western practice. Parker Palmer (1998) talks about the creative tensions, which he calls 'paradoxes', that are essential to good teaching and learning. One of them is the creation of a space which honours "the 'little' stories of the individual and the 'big' stories of the disciplines and tradition." (Palmer 1998, 76). The session had provided an opportunity for little stories to interact with a big story and the experience strengthened my resolve to honour the practitioner as an expert system. Although students are comfortable with their little stories the academy rarely welcomes them and they cannot imagine the value attached to their own stories since "education so seldom treats their lives as sources of knowledge." (Palmer 1998, 81)

It sometimes takes time for students to gain the confidence to realise that their little stories can correct and refresh the big stories. And their stories can find a new depth of meaning when told alongside the big stories "that are universal in scope and archetypal in depth, that frame our personal tales and help us understand what they mean." (Palmer 1998, 76). I tell students to be alert to the possibility, even probability, that the academy and its body of knowledge might be so intimidating that their own stories are silenced.

My inquiries, in the early stages of this work, were fairly quiet, first person affairs. I was feeling my way, practicing my attentional skills (Mason 2002, Marshall 1999,

2004) and trying to understand how to manage my inquiries in the moment (reflection-in-action, Schon 1983). The discipline of "noticing myself perceiving, making meaning, framing issues, choosing how to speak out, and so on," (Marshall 1999) was, and remains challenging. It takes time to develop these qualities but I feel I am now more aware of questioning the assumptions I use and the interventions I choose.

Action inquiry, it seems to me, involves two vital steps. First, it requires the "discipline of noticing" in Mason's (2002) words, a quality of attention that has the potential to answer the question I first learned from our Academic Dean, "What is going on when what is going on is going on?" Torbert (2003, 2004) identifies four territories of experience - outcomes, actions, goals and intentions - and calls the practice of attention in all four territories "supervision" (Torbert et al 2004, 18). Barber (2006) suggests that experiential reality is laminated and can be perceived at five levels: sensory/physical, social/cultural, emotional/transferential, imagined/projective and intuitive/transpersonal. This ability to perceive, to give attention to layers of significance in the familiar and everyday, can turn the ordinary into extraordinary insight.

The second step in Action Inquiry involves intentional choice that results in action resourced by the insight. Assuming speech to be the principle form of action, Torbert (2003, 2004) suggests a choice between four "parts of speech" - inquiring, illustrating, advocating and framing (Torbert et al 2004, 27) - a model that has informed my practice, as some of the anecdotes to follow will demonstrate. The emphasis on inquiry leading on to choice-full action is a feature of "deliberative inquiry" (Coles 2002), making this term more helpful, to me, than the general notion of reflective practice.

Multi-levelled awareness and intentional action is evidence of practical wisdom. Several authors (for example, Flyvbjerg 2001, Coles 2002, Wall 2003, Frank 2004) have recently called for a greater appreciation of Aristotle's third intellectual virtue, *phronesis*, in the social sciences, alongside of *episteme* (scientific knowledge) and

techne (technical knowledge). *Episteme* is concerned with universal laws and *techne* with the production of useful artifacts. After associating *episteme* with the head, and *techne* with the hand, Frank goes on to say,

> "Thinking about *phronesis* after Pascal, I am inclined, perhaps with violence to Aristotle, to think of it as being of the heart, in the sense of that which exceeds reason. *Phronesis* is the type of knowledge for which we lack any contemporary English term, which may be a bigger part of our problem than we realize: contemporary society has lost the understanding that *phronesis* is necessary to becoming a complete human. Thus, we fail to train people for it." (Frank 2004, 221)

The activities described in the teaching incident above can be viewed in this light. Attending to their own experience, bringing attention to "how things get done" in their own context, and working with a visual example of bad practice in the West to highlight their own experience, were steps that I hoped would help the students to probe their own values and therefore developing a phronetic awareness of the choices they might make in the future. As Paulo Freire says, "The starting point for organizing the program content of education or political action must be the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people … The investigation of what I have termed the people's 'thematic universe' - the complex of their 'generative themes' - inaugurates the dialogue of education as the practice of freedom." (Freire 1970, 76-77).

Living My Inquiry

But of equal importance is the way in which my own action inquiry helps develop my phronetic practice *(praxis)*. The Centre where I worked convenes a weekly Research Seminar at which a member of the research community presents their work-in-progress for peer review. In March 2006, an experienced child adoption worker and a new research student (whom I will call Susan), was scheduled to

present her research proposal. She contacted me the day before for advice on the possibility of taking an action research approach to her interest in understanding and improving the quality of attachment involved in the adoption of older Chinese children by western parents. I felt some anxiety for her as she described her intention to journey with adopting families through the adoptive process. While she was interested in understanding the positive and negative relational experiences contributing to the attachment process she seemed particularly aware of the complexity of the older adoptive child. Her own experience of working in adoption had exposed her to problems in the "clarity and consistency of practice in preparation of the adoptive parents."

She had drafted her research proposal in the traditional form, including a set of hypotheses to be tested and describing the methodology (standard quantitative and qualitative tests) she was intending to use. I sensed some frustration in this requirement and asked her to consider what it might be like if she could enter these relationships without a tool box. By initially suspending judgement on what she experienced she might uncover other forms of knowing relevant to her inquiry. I was pleased to hear her share this possibility in the Research Seminar the following day. The response was swift. (Direct quotations are taken from a transcript of an audio recording of the seminar. The identity of individuals involved has been obscured by the use of pseudonyms).

Terry (a member of the faculty): "What do you mean by suspending your judgement - surely you intend to build on what you already know? And, what is your disciplinary background for this work?

Susan: "My undergraduate studies were in the social sciences."

Terry: "You will need to be aware of the state of knowledge in this domain - you must fill a gap on which others can build by taking the research into the representative area. What gap are you planning to fill?"

I felt a slight discomfort and was uncertain about whether to step in but another faculty member jumped in first.

Bill (another member of faculty): "You are talking about a sample of three families that you intend to study. Why three? What do you expect to conclude from this sample? How reliable will your conclusions be?"

I could see that Susan was unsure about the questions. I drew breath and leapt into the discussion.

Dave (me): "Surely what Susan needs to decide is whether she is going to undertake a sample at all. As I understand her goal she wants to get deeply involved in a limited number of adoptive relationships rather than survey the field to identify general principles, as so many have already done. It may not be appropriate for her to be limited to the discourse provided by attachment theory. She has listed a number of hypotheses in her proposal - I suggested to her that she read these as assumptions rather than hypotheses to be tested, and then initially suspend the temptation to "read" her experience through these assumptions."

A research student entered the discussion. "I am still unclear about your field research - what do you intend to show from your field work? Are you interested in the adopted child or in exploring best practice in adoption?"

Susan: "The latter - I want to facilitate improvements in current practice."

Dave: "Sometimes it is not possible to offer generalisations. Donald Schon talks about "reflective transfer", the process by which knowledge disclosed in one situation triggers the adoption of similar approaches to understanding in another situation in a suggestive, almost inspirational, way.

Bill: "It seems to me, David, that you are giving us two options, neither of which I want. Maybe generalisation is not possible but more stories won't help either.

There must be a middle ground in which Susan can offer some guidance and advice to adoptive parents. The research should help people understand what they are letting themselves in for. There are already so many stories..."

Dave: "...often lacking critical reflection..."

Bill: "That may be so but surely you want to offer more than a good story - it is a highly risky and improbable activity to just produce some inspirational literature. I want something more..."

Dave: "But Bill, as I listen to your own experience, I can see the value of Susan's research. You have just told us about your personal experience in adopting two children yourself and the unique challenges you faced." (Bill had described in quite personal terms some of the challenges he and his wife had faced in adopting one child of Greek background and a second who was half Pakistani and half Irish). "You said yourself that each relationship is unique and you had very different relationships with each of them - you actually called it "a mystery". Rather than offer a set of general principles I think Susan wants to enter that mystery. She may not produce universal guidelines but she could offer critical insight into the process of attachment in several particular cases."

Bill: Of course not everything can be contained in a rule book, but could produce useful knowledge.

As I reflected later on the seminar I realised that I had been quite assertive in my interventions and recall a feeling of outrage at the way other faculty were trying to frame the study. I was therefore surprised when the Research Degrees Committee subsequently accepted her proposal, appointing the Academic Dean as her supervisor and inviting me to serve as her House Tutor. The role of House Tutor is primarily pastoral but in this particular case, because of Susan's interest in action research, the Dean included me in the supervision process.

Like so many other research students Susan was part time so it was not until the beginning of November that she returned to the UK. I had no idea that 15 years earlier she and her husband had adopted a four year old Chinese girl. As she began to tell me about the experience I sensed she was beginning to touch an emotional nerve. In the next few days she wrote, "I had never intended to adopt a child and although F (the child) was not the incentive for my research I now realise that she has become my partner in research, along with my husband. The actual driving force (for my research) began 15 years earlier and continued throughout those years of practice."

Later a fellow student told me that the next morning she had found Susan in her study carrel weeping. I learned that she had been writing an account of a conversation she had with her new daughter five days after the adoption (based on her journal records of the time). Reflecting on my invitation to tell her story, she had written,

> "I found myself inwardly resisting, not wanting to go there. I have successfully avoided redressing those experiences for 15 years. Until this morning I unconsciously thought I had found a way to use them for the greater good. I know better, experiences of trauma cannot be stuffed. They remain inside unless we are willing to allow them out. I have only just begun writing and already I am wondering if I can pull myself together sufficiently to meet with my director today."

This experiential knowledge also seemed to influence her approach to the research literature. She had clearly read widely on the topic of attachment. In the same reflective piece quoted above she concluded that her literature survey

> "can be never ending because of the numerous and intricately designed pieces of research found under attachment theory... If I cannot find answers of how attachment and trust develop in the most accepted methods of

research in attachment theory then I must explore the answers within the context of practice. This has become my reason for using action research."

Just a few weeks later, at the end of her residence, I received a brief email from the Dean in which he said, "Susan is very pleased indeed with how she has emerged from her struggles and feels she has made a personal breakthrough in her understanding of herself as a researcher. She feels she is going home a different person."

Developing the Inquiry

Twelve months after Susan's first seminar she was back at the Centre and preparing for a second encounter with the lions. She had struggled to write a paper for discussion in the Research Seminar and was discouraged by the comment she had received from the Tutor responsible for coordinating the seminars that "there is nothing here to present in the seminar." I disagreed. Although her paper lacked structure it contained some very personal accounts of her experience of adoption, including the story of a very personal experience with her daughter 3 years after the adoption. The seminar would provide an opportunity for her to give voice to her methodology and I felt that this would help build her confidence as a researcher. I had been asked to chair the seminar and so encouraged her to press ahead. I met with her two days before the seminar to think with her, of how together, we could create a liberating space (Torbert 1991) that would enable the participants to catch a glimpse of her alternative research paradigm.

The room in which the research seminar is normally held is long and narrow with a large table surrounded by chairs down the middle. It is usually crowded with between thirty and thirty five people sitting cramped in the corners and across the open doorway. The room is not conducive to collective inquiry and I therefore requested a change of room. We met in an open space where the chairs could be arranged in different patterns so that we were able to reconfigure the layout during

the session. At the beginning of the seminar I suggested that the physical re-location was an analogy for the mental shift that would be required during the seminar. I should point out that the weekly Research Seminar is required attendance for all research students in residence and involves most of the resident faculty. Although working in many different fields and at different stages of their research journey most are located in the positivist tradition.

After she had briefly introduced her work and her interest in attachment I asked her to describe the difficulty she had in relating her inquiry to the substantial body of research literature in the field. She explained what happened when she tried to relate her experiences to the studies of attachment disorder which focussed on the pathology. While she could see these features in her own experiences they "didn't work" in her words as a way of explaining what was going on. "All focussed on the problem in one aspect" (direct quotes are taken from a transcription of the audio recording of the seminar). By looking at Bowlby's "internal working model" or the individual patterns of attachment, for example, key features of the overall process of attachment were missing. So she decided "This isn't working so I am just going to write the story so I sat down and wrote it as a story."

Dave (me): "So you've ended up with story - or as you now describe it 'narrative inquiry'. What is narrative inquiry and why do you think it will overcome the problems you have found?"

Susan: "At first I just wrote the story. I didn't think about grammar, but I was careful to bring in the elements of what happened, and around that I wanted to convey the experience, the emotions of it, the continuum of how it evolved. Later I corrected the grammar, etc and then I went back and read it over and "all of a sudden" I saw connections that I hadn't seen before and saw movement in the process ... When I went back in story form I saw the whole picture and I began to identify my adopted daughter's struggle and could see when her attachment system has just clicked in because of what she has experienced. I noticed her facial

expressions and struggle with whether to move towards attachment or stay within what we call "survival." I could see this in the story."

The participants were ready to enter the conversation. Simon, one of the faculty spoke first, informing us that he was an adopting parent himself and therefore has a personal interest in attachment theory. He said, "attachment theory is a descriptive framework not a research method, so I think narrative is the most appropriate methodology to adopt. However, my question is in the distinction you make between narrative analysis and analysis of narrative. Is this distinction valid? Is this semantics?"

A student jumped into the conversation with a different comment so it was a little while before I was able to bring this question back into play. This "time out" was helpful, providing a brief moment for me to reflect on how we might work generatively with Simon's question. Before inviting Susan to comment I invited others to contribute, to tap into the collective knowledge. "Is there a useful distinction between narrative analysis and analysis of narrative?" I asked. Paula, a student involved in analysing life stories, chipped in to explain that she was involved in analysing narratives but that narrative analysis is not just looking at a story. Susan interrupted,

Susan: "I have to create the story ... "

Paula: "She's creating the story and she's bringing into it what she's looking at. Bruner might help here. Have you explained his distinction between paradigmatic reasoning and narrative reasoning?"

Susan: ".. No, I didn't." She was looking towards Paula as she spoke. After a brief silence she added, "... You go ahead .. you're doing fine." They laugh nervously at their hesitation. "You do the paradigmatic and I'll do the diachronic," she offered. And together they offered a brief explanation of the difference. I picked up on the distinction.

Dave: "What Susan is attempting, and this is where the distinction is important, is to use narrative as a form of analysis - this is her methodology. She's got all the raw data of events, notes, memories and so on which she is crafting into a narrative that discloses aspects of the whole which would not be evident in other ways. There is provisional evidence of that here in your paper - you didn't notice things until you wrote the narrative.

Susan: "It was so surprising ..."

I invited her to say more about this but Simon was not satisfied with the discussion.

Simon: "Narrative is too large an entity to analyse as a whole. I guess it's the components that are analysed and not the narrative itself."

I interrupted him, "Ah, you can break down a narrative into its parts, but that is not narrative analysis. Narrative analysis is ..." Simon had not finished and I felt that he was trying to avoid eye contact with me. "What do you do," he continued, "with components such as the patterns she recognises ... there are elements in each narrative that need to be isolated from each other."

Susan: "It won't be just one story - and I am looking for movement, going back and forth. If I analyse it in its components I won't see this process."

Simon: "That's where my problem is."

Dave: "But you are thinking paradigmatically and she is thinking diachronically." The distinction had come out in Paula and Susan's discussion of Bruner and I now used it to drive home an epistemological nail. "It's a different way of thinking".

Another student entered the conversation to explore how Susan put together the narrative plot and the conversation moved on although I sensed that Simon was not satisfied.

In telling the story of my involvement with Susan over this period of time I have provided an opportunity for diachronic awareness. It is my intention to give attention, in particular, to my practice in this fractal of my work. This involved preparatory work in designing the seminar and establishing a communicative space (Kemmis 2001, Wicks & Reason 2009). In discussion with Susan I brought three explicit intentions to the task that can be stated succinctly:

(1) to serve Susan as she developed her inquiry, helping her build confidence in her stories of practice,

(2) to help develop her commitment to a more holistic appreciation of attachment built on "trust", a theme that was emerging from her inquiry, and

(3) to open a space in which other members of the research community might glimpse alternative ways of knowing and value narrative forms of inquiry - to facilitate a shared inquiry around these issues.

Taking an attitude of inquiry in-the-moment of practice involves a quality of attention and deliberation in many different areas. "Supervision" (Torbert et al 2004) over the four territories of experience was needed (and not particularly well practised) in facilitating the participation of different groups in the room - faculty, other research students, and Susan herself. This required attention to the way I and other participants were making sense of the experience and awareness of maintaining the space for others, attending to the process as well as the content. I acted intentionally, for example, to welcome Paula into the discussion and witnessed her slightly nervous exchange with Susan over Bruner's distinction between paradigmatic and diachronic reasoning as opening a space for other tentative voices to be heard. As I review the story however, I wonder, for example, whether my intervention to "pick up on the distinction" was helpful and what was going on for others in the room as I summarised the issue. Although Susan was ready to say more about her surprising discovery, at least one person in the room, Simon, was not satisfied. There were clearly several levels of interaction involved.

The narrative form introduces other choices. There were other voices involved in the discussion that I have chosen to exclude. I have selected particular contributions to the dialogue to offer an account of this experience that I hope is alive and rich so as to give insight into my practice without overwhelming the reader with too much detail. I also acknowledge the way in which attentional skill, deliberative choice and narrative account are interweaved. I notice for example my claim to sense that Simon was not satisfied. He didn't speak again and, as I read the story now I wonder whether this was an interpretation I have made from his actions following the seminar (see below) that I have moved into the narrative at this point. I let the discussion move on in other directions. Was I aware, at this point, that for the group this line of inquiry had reached a point of saturation (Marshall 2004)? This may be nothing more than an intuition that lead me to act, permissively, in the situation. I have confidence that this "knowing-in-action" (Schon 1987) can mature over time, although I am aware that my purposes, prior experience and assumptions shape, unconsciously, my intuitions. Only fragments of this hidden knowledge can be brought to conscious attention in-the-moment. Such inquiries in-the-moment are always on the edge of knowing and not-knowing, of responding to one aspect of the experience at the expense of others. I will return to this aspect of the story later.

A Different Way of Knowing

What I was about to suggest to the group in the seminar, offers an example of an innovation that was ready for expression in my practice. The faculty involved in managing the weekly research seminar have been told, on numerous occasions, that it is "the best research seminar in town". It has many good features: the diversity of research topics and fields of inquiry that are discussed, the variety of research scholars involved (involving senior academics as well as beginning researchers), and the constructive quality of many of its discussions, for example. However it tends to be cerebral, often involving intellectual ping pong between

different positions sponsored by faculty members, and attendees are unable to exercise anything but their brains, sitting cramped in its windowless venue.

In the second half of Susan's seminar I wanted to try something different. The experiment was to engage in a bit of improvisational drama to re-play the story Susan had shared. Although her paper had been circulated in advance I could not assume that everyone had read her story carefully so I suggested that they took some time to read it again. I recall my anxiety about the experiment. The five minutes of silence as everyone read the story seemed like a very long time and I was impatient to move into the activity - something I probably communicated unconsciously by the way I moved in my chair and gave time signals. I was in a hurry to get into the action. Listening now to the audio recording I realise that I provided a very limited description of what I was proposing to do and it was therefore not surprising that when I called for volunteers to play the different roles I ended up having to conscript two of the characters.

We pushed our chairs back and opened up a small stage area. It took a while for the actors to move into role and begin, tentatively, to live the story. They were stiff and hesitant, partly because there hadn't been enough time to enter the story. This was my first time at working "live" with improvisational drama as a research method and there was a lot for me to learn about my facilitation of the process but it proved to be a good humoured activity and as we returned our chairs to a circle at the end it led to some interesting reflections. The academic Dean was the first to comment, having been reminded that when Susan first applied to do this research there was a strong view expressed in the Admissions Committee that she was too close to the topic. He went on to suggest, "In writing up her research doing what you have done would help her distance herself as she sees others make sense of the experience."

Several others picked up on the way Susan had written from within the story but that this activity had helped her become an outside witness. One faculty member who had not been involved in the earlier discussion was reminded of a recent

incident where, for the first time he had told the traumatic story of when he was a young boy and his father had left the family in Hong Kong to find work in the UK. It was, for him, a case of "learning in the telling." Simon, on the other hand, emailed the faculty after the seminar to suggest that it was not necessary to abandon "attachment theory" and that he had located a couple of academics in the discipline who might be added to the supervisor support team for Susan.

Such incidents are intense and unpredictable. Outcomes cannot be "set up" or contrived. Different people in the process move to different places through the process. It is important to acknowledge the "theory" that resides in these practices and is held in the narrative space of the story. There is a danger that, in isolating aspects of the experience for further discussion, they will lose their significance and energy as they are removed from the only place that gives them life. However, I will lift out some perspectives for further discussion, partly to bring these experiences into dialogue with a wider literature and to explore an alternative language with which to acknowledge and celebrate the experience.

Living my inquiry in the way I have described it has led me to value the learning space and work to enrich it. I am not just talking about the physical space, although in the case I have narrated I felt it was important to re-locate the seminar to an environment that would permit more holistic participation. And the change of place was a deliberate attempt at dis-locating and therefore dis-orienting the participants. But the most important aspect of the learning space is in the quality of interaction that it enables. This is what Torbert calls a "liberating structure" (Torbert 1991), a generative social environment in which intense dialogue can lead to knowledge creation. The features of a liberating structure include "a theory of power, a practice of management, and a method of inquiry" (Torbert 1991, 6). This applies whether the setting is business, government or education (ibid, 99).

A Blind Spot

A lot of my work has been with students from cultures other than European who exhibit a natural affinity for social learning environments. In most non-western contexts everyone in the community is both a teacher and a learner and the learning experience is interdependent, not independent (Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner 2007). One of my responsibilities, for several years, was to coordinate a Research Induction School, a six week course designed for beginning research students held twice a year in March and September. In September 2007, for example, we had ten students from eight different countries. Looking back on my journal entries from this period I noted that the group began to bond by the end of the second week and in week five I wrote, "It is... encouraging to see how the group has bonded - it was clear from the interaction in the seminars this morning that they are not only aware of, but genuinely interested in each others work, and are able to contribute quality advice and perceptive comment." This sometimes provided fruitful learning experiences. On one occasion, early in my work with communication students, a Russian student had been helping a Lebanese sort out problems with a virus on her computer. This was mentioned in a class setting and led the group to develop of a model of reflective practice based on the experience which was subsequently shared with the wider community in a seminar on reflective learning.

Torbert (1991) includes the conscious use of all available forms of power to sustain a liberating structure, involving what he calls "a psycho-social jujitsu" (Torbert 1991, 103) that gives the participants more discretion and direction in the process than usual. This was slow to emerge in my practice, for reasons I intend to discuss in the following pages. Ideally a liberating structure provides a safe place in which participants can experience new things (as, for example, the possibilities of different ways of knowing through improvisational drama in the incident described above) and temporarily suspend judgement as they experiment with how this might relate to their prior knowledge. It has some similarities to the liminal experiences (Turner 1995) of initiates in traditional societies. What I was to learn

from my facilitation of Susan's seminar was how easily my interest in the subject conflicted with my responsibility to manage the inquiring space with the consequence that I interrupted, and subsequently silenced Simon.

There is no single way of representing experience. To explore the significance of this I will re-reproduce here a section of the seminar interaction recorded above before discussing it further. I had just highlighted the way in which Susan had noticed things in her narrative that were not apparent in the raw data and she responded:

Susan: "It was so surprising ..."

I invited her to say more about this but Simon was not satisfied with the discussion.

Simon: "Narrative is too large an entity to analyse as a whole. I guess it's the components that are analysed and not the narrative itself."

I interrupted him, "Ah, you can break down a narrative into its parts, but that is not narrative analysis. Narrative analysis is ..." Simon had not finished and I felt that he was trying to avoid eye contact with me. "What do you do," he continued, "with components such as the patterns she recognises ... there are elements in each narrative that need to be isolated from each other."

Susan: "It won't be just one story - and I am looking for movement, going back and forth. If I analyse it in its components I won't see this process."

Simon: "That's where my problem is."

Dave: "But you are thinking paradigmatically and she is thinking diachronically." The distinction had come out in Paula and Susan's discussion about Bruner and I now used it to drive home an epistemological nail. ...

As I re-listen to the audio recording of this exchange I can hear Susan's and Simon's voice in the background while I am speaking but I cannot tell what they are saying and ignored them in the first transcription. But their voices are important to "what is going on when what is going on is going on." Rather than maintaining a shared space my intervention had divided it. I notice from the recording that my voice changed slightly as if I am leaning into the discussion in a more aggressive way and I laugh nervously at the end of my comment as if pleased that I have made my point. I notice this was transferred into my commentary to accompany the transcript when I used the phrase "to drive home an epistemological nail" as if I felt the need, or was in a position to claim the authority, to bring closure to the discussion. I was very interested, in fact passionate, about what Susan was trying to do and I declared my interests at the beginning of the seminar but this was in danger of compromising my facilitation. Duplicity of motive and confusion about my role led to a polarisation in the discussion. For a moment, and for some, I sensed that the learning space collapsed and the interaction became inauthentic. It is too easy for me to dismiss the moment as I did in the first account as a sense that "Simon was not satisfied." I had stumbled in my responsibility to use the power in the room in liberating ways.

There was something missing from my facilitation practice in the first couple of years of my inquiry. Something that I was unaware of and that didn't seem to matter in my years of didactic teaching. Something that was struggling to express itself in my practice as I began my journey into action inquiry but resisted. With the benefit of greater distance from this incident, for example, I can see that while action inquiry remained for me a practical and mental exercise - answering such reflective questions as, "how can I act differently?" and "how can I think differently?" - I had little awareness of and therefore influence over my own presence in the situation. The "I" in those questions was being ignored and I was behaving as if anyone in that situation, with the knowledge I had, would think and act in the same way. Yet, it was as if another "me" had arrived in the room and usurped the power that came with my role as facilitator in order to make a point and, in doing so, undermined my efforts at sustaining a generative learning space.

This blind spot in my practice meant that I was ignoring important information in the experience. I mentioned, for example, my anxiety when I introduced improvisational drama as an inquiry tool but, again, this may have been an interpretation introduced at the storytelling stage. There is no evidence that I was conscious of it in-the-moment in a way that might have influenced my action and improved the learning experience for the participants. With hindsight I can agree with Hanne Heen (2005) when she admits that she thinks too much rather than too little. The breakthrough - although it was gradual not sudden - came as I found myself faced with, rather than fleeing from, discomfort and embarrassment.

Making Sense in Embarrassment

In the autumn of 2006 the faculty was joined by a new member from Asia. She had recently completed a PhD in Missiology at an evangelical theological seminary in the United States. In January she offered a faculty seminar on "contextualisation" (a topic in missiology that attempts to understand the process involved in relating the universals of Christian doctrine to cultural context). In my experience, American evangelicals have developed a highly functional approach to the question and I, and it turned out several others, approached the seminar in the hope that the discussion might bring some critical rigour to the topic. I was a few minutes late arriving at the seminar and noticed as I entered the room that there were two seats vacant, one next to her and the other on the opposite side of the table. I chose to sit opposite her. As I have observed before our physical positions may have enhanced the confrontational tone of our interactions.

During the seminar I was conscious of monitoring my behaviour (choosing when I spoke and when I remained silent) but was not conscious of a meta-reflection on the territories of experience or intervention tactics (parts of speech) proposed by Torbert (2004). My journal reflections following the seminar focus on my intervention style. I questioned the quality of my listening, admitting that I had heard her comments through the ideological frame of the seminary in which she

studied. I asked myself in what ways I had shown respect (witnessing) and was only able to recall one instance when I intentionally tried to witness what I heard her saying, reflecting, as I wrote in my journal that "it could have been helpful to have more intentionally located myself in her argument and worked from that perspective. Instead I (and others) were located in another hermeneutical space trying to bring her over." When I asked myself whether we were working to similar outcomes I concluded in my journal,

> "perhaps her goals were more modest than ours - she wanted to explore the topic of contextualisation and probably hoped for a positive experience in her inaugural presentation to the community. Unfortunately I, and several others on the staff, were concerned with what we judged the theological naivety of the approach and responded accordingly."

I had given no attention to framing a common purpose to the discussion or attempting to work within her frame. Despite her Asian background and gender I received a quite blunt email from her after the seminar which expressed, in slightly hesitant English, her disappointment:

> "I am a bit uncomfortable with your being negative about Evangelical and its education. I may further uncomfortable to work with someone who has that sort of antagonistic feeling toward it. Am I misunderstanding you? If so, you correct me."

She sought out an opportunity to discuss this with me the next day. The conversation began with details of the seminar discussion she had found confusing. This time I was conscious of rehearsing Torbert's parts of speech, even at one point hesitating quite noticeably while I tried to shift my response from advocacy to illustration. I found the conversation quite difficult, although not unfriendly.

I did not realise how her characterisation of my position as antagonistic to evangelicals had affected me until the following day when I gathered with other

members of my CARPP supervision group in Bath. There had been changes in the membership of the group following the MPhil transfer process. As we offered suggestions of how we might use the time together I suggested, with this incident fresh in my mind, that I would find it helpful if we could share our experiences of reflection-in-action.

I began by saying how difficult I found it to decide, in the moment, how to respond using Torbert's model of the parts of speech, referring to the conversation I had had the day before. Geoff, our supervisor, asked me to say what happened and I resisted his request. "We can't help you if you don't give us some data" he said. It was as if my mind went blank and I had difficulty recalling the details. I felt uncomfortable. I began to sweat and wanted to leave the room. But Geoff was too kind and too persistent to let me off the hook, saying that he noticed that I often used the word "feeling" but that I had never described it, "there are no adjectives or adverbs attached to the word, he observed" as he pushed me to say what I was feeling at that moment. There was silence while I pondered the question. I felt supported by the group and my desire to flee drifted away but all I could say to break the silence was, "I feel relaxed." "Relaxed" was a poor label to describe how I felt but I was struggling to get in touch with my emotions and lacked the vocabulary with which to describe them.

Geoff's challenge and the experience lingered with me. Why did this incident have so much emotional energy? What did I mean when I talked or wrote about "feeling"? What would happen if I allowed my feelings to inform my practice, if I gave attention to a more embodied experience?

The split between body and mind, rationality and feeling is deeply embedded in western thought and practice. Emotions have been blamed for disturbing the clarity of the mind. Criticism of this position exists in many forms and disciplines. Perhaps most surprising is the result of recent work in cognitive neuroscience. In discussing emerging understandings of human consciousness, for example, Antonio Damasio (1992 in Bulkeley 2005) rejects the mind-body dualism of Rene

Descartes, arguing that feelings and sensations are products of the neural workings of the brain. Emotions and feelings are the way in which earlier experience and learning are accessed in-the-moment. It is no longer possible to separate the rational soul from the physical body (Bulkeley 2005). As a result Western assertions of reason over emotion (that I suspect unconsciously permitted me to marginalise or ignore embodied information) are false. Bulkeley summarises Damasio's argument by saying, "reason cannot function in a normal, healthy fashion without the active and continuous input of emotional information" (Bulkeley 2005, 26). Damasio concludes, "Feelings form the base for what humans have described for millennia as the human soul or spirit." (quoted in Bulkeley 2005, 26).

Not long after this incident it was as if my body wanted to test whether I had got the message. I felt an initial discomfort in my left big toe - irritating rather than disabling. The next day I felt a more pronounced yet more general ache in my left leg. I was now hobbling when I walked. That night the pain was intense, waking me abruptly at 3:30am. At first I thought it was the minor ache I sometimes feel when I get out of bed in the morning feeling a bit stiff - but this was different. I tried to stretch my leg but I couldn't - the pain was excruciating. I tried to turn over in the bed but lifting my left knee sent pain throughout my body. I tried pushing against the pain. At first it was a struggle but slowly the pain yielded and I was able to straighten my leg. I was exhausted and lay there, a thousand thoughts rushing through my mind.

I must have dozed off when a stab of pain woke me again. I had turned over and unconsciously bent my leg again. Once again I couldn't straighten it and the pain just kept throbbing away. Lying in the bed I tried to "carry" my foot on the top of the other across to the side of the bed - it worked but I was exhausted by the pain. I waited for it to calm down but it didn't.

Perhaps, I thought, if I hung it over the side of the bed it would get the blood flowing in the leg. At least it didn't make it worse...but I couldn't sleep like that. Perhaps it was a kind of cramp and I should try putting some weight on it. I swung

myself up to sit on the side of the bed placing some weight on my right foot. Slowly I tried to transfer the weight across but I had to remain seated. I tried different ways of putting weight on my left foot and eventually I was able to stand with my weight balanced between my right leg and a firm grip on the furniture.

I kept pushing more weight onto the left leg, pulling back again as it responded with screaming pain. But I kept trying and decided, although I still couldn't straighten it completely, to try and walk to the loo. Once in motion the leg straightened and I noticed that this was its most comfortable position. I must have looked miserable - hobbled over, arms stretched out to grab the sides of the corridor, dragging my foot along. Several times the weight would fall at a slightly different angle and my knee would let out a massive pain - I felt on several occasions as if it would collapse. I staggered back to the bedroom and fell into the chair where I sat down to write about the experience - overwhelmed by feelings of dread, fear of losing my mobility, my work...

I finally hobbled back to the bed where I fell into a deep sleep. The next morning the knee was still painful and very weak but I was able to dress and in a few hours it subsided, slowly returning to normal. The pain did not return.

I recall that CS Lewis (1940) wrote, "God whispers to us in our joys ... but shouts in our pain." Yes, I got the message. I need to give attention to my embodied senses. It is one thing to talk about feeling, it is another to actually feel, and to embrace feelings as valid knowledge that can inform action. What happens in my practice depends on my being fully involved - the whole person needs to be in the room. When I first began my action inquiry I found some difficulty in changing my formal academic writing style to include the personal pronoun. But that was a small step by comparison with this shift in my inquiry - attending to my feelings and bringing my whole self into the moment.

Discomfort or embarrassment has the same effect as ecstatic experience, or wonder, that Bulkeley says involves "a sudden *decentering* of the self ... one's

ordinary sense of personal identity is dramatically altered, leading to new knowledge and understanding that ultimately *recenter* the self" (Bulkeley 2005, 4, italics in the original). Until I learn to give attention to these emotions I am neither fully aware or adequately resourced to deliberate on my actions in-the-moment. I cannot be fully present. It is as if my unconscious self holds the sediments of past experience that shape my motives and desires, giving bodily expression to this accumulated knowledge in-the-moment through my emotions.

Numerous authors write of the importance of paying attention (Marshall 1999, Mason 2002, Scharmer 2007) but none illustrate it more graphically, for me, than Auggie Wren, the owner of a small cigar store in Brooklyn, in the film *Smoke*. For the past 14 years Auggie has taken a photograph every day from the street corner outside his store and the pictures are carefully filed in piles of photo albums. "People say you have to travel to see the world," Auggie says. "Sometimes I think that if you just stay in one place and keep your eyes open, you're going to see just about all that you can handle." One of his regular customers is Paul Benjamin, a writer who hasn't published anything since he wife was killed a few years earlier in the cross fire of two gunmen on the street. When he is shown the collection he comments that all the snapshots look alike. It's all a matter of slowing down, Auggie says, pointing out the differences: the seasons, the light, and the look on people's faces. "Slow down," Auggie tells Paul, "You'll never get it unless you slow down, my friend." Moments later Paul turns a page and sees a picture of his wife on the street corner and is overcome with emotion.

Slowing down is an important inquiry skill. Such holistic awareness can be healing for myself and for those with whom I am working. I described an incident in my teaching for the MPhil transfer paper that illustrates this process and I will re-visit the incident here to explore it further.

Arriving in-the-moment

The beginning of 2005 was a very hectic period in my work. We enrolled a further seven students on the MA in Communication Practice in January 2005. It so happened that I had a busy consulting schedule during the first few months of the year and this required frequent changes in the course timetable. In addition we had re-structured the programme, postponing the contribution of adjunct faculty until later in the year, and it wasn't long before the administration started to hear complaints of "false advertising", referring to a promise on the website of an 'international faculty'. Someone in the group complained that they would have been treated better if they had been "customers". What was the benefit of being in the UK when they could do their reading anywhere? By the beginning of April I was finding fault with the casual way in which some of the group were treating the course. I was particularly annoyed when one student was absent without leave at the beginning of a new module on Persuasive Communication, only to walk in fifteen minutes before the end of the session and immediately start contributing at cross purposes to the discussion.

Once again I found myself in a 'performance period' (Eraut in Atkinson 2000) trying to give attention to my feelings and assumptions while managing the session and noticing that reflection-in-action (Schon 1983) can be a rather risky and even haphazard process. I was upset and recall that I was initially tempted to ask the student to leave. Although mildly disruptive it would have allowed us to stay on track for the rest of the session. Instead I invited him to explain his absence (apparently the result of urgent problems related to his accommodation) and then decided to use the last few minutes to have the group review the session. I spoke to the student afterwards to express my disappointment at his behaviour.

The group met a week later to discuss some readings I had given them but it soon became evident that no-one had read the material. I was frustrated and annoyed. "This isn't working guys, what is happening?" I asked. It quickly emerged that everyone was feeling de-motivated. Several criticisms surfaced. I admitted that

although I am normally an optimist, I was finding the group was dragging me down. As we talked about the situation several indicated that they didn't feel they could continue. I suggested that we could reflect on our experience of the course together, using a collaborative inquiry approach. We had, by this time, done quite a bit of personal journal work and were familiar with the action inquiry cycle.

It was agreed. But who should facilitate the process? There were concerns about the involvement of faculty, but this was countered by the observation that "they are part of the problem". It was eventually agreed that CP, a member of staff who had been facilitating the journal seminars, and I would participate and that we should jointly facilitate the process. It was also decided that the purpose was to inquire into the question, "How can we improve the motivation in our group?" I suggested that we ought to agree some ground rules. Although the first few came quickly, it took a further 20 minutes before a consensus emerged on the following:

- Confidentiality
- Don't joke with each other (this can be painful)
- Be appreciative of each other's differences
- Be patient with each other
- Don't be judgmental
- Be aware of the quiet people
- Be committed to action - to doing something about what we discover
- Be open/transparent - to speak from the self
- Be supportive
- No laptops

I asked and was given permission to record the discussion. Once again I will provide excerpts from a transcription of the conversation rather than narrate the incident in my own words. The transcription allows me to engage in a more phenomenological way with the experience. CP, the only other member of staff present, didn't speak in the exchanges that follow.

QM: "Are we ready to make this commitment? One of our negatives is that we haven't built a good relationship with each other."

SA: "Does that mean that you don't want to participate, or are you just saying this to prove you have been listening?"

MG: We've already done some reflection but I don't know, now, where to break into the cycle."

SA: "Finding the problem is itself a process."

QM: "We're taking a long time to get started - I suggest that we start by people expressing where they are.

(silence)

QM: "OK, for me personally, there are things that have de-motivated me. There is not a lot of interaction in the group and not many of you are connecting online. This erodes the value of the course for me. Another thing that has weathered away my motivation are the frequent and abrupt changes in scheduling, making it difficult to have a life outside the course."

HF: "This study is transforming my life, but this transformation is really painful. Being alone without my family is hard. I am not good at starting relationships and spend most of my time in my room. I have reached a point where I want to stop, not continue. I need more guidance from the tutors, especially with essay writing."

(silence)

HP: "I can't say what it is. Being away from home isn't a problem. I don't contribute online, sometimes I'm hesitant or just lazy."

SA: "A few times I've been tempted to give up. My work place would be very happy if I give up. My main stress is from my job. I am working hard but am not appreciated. The aim of my study is to improve my work but when I am not appreciated or criticised for being here it is hard. I am not getting support from my organisation. I don't have time for reading - in the evening I have to choose between doing e-mail or reading."

DA (me): "Can I pick up on that....have you finished?"

SA: "Yes."

DA (me): "My name is Dave. What SA has just been saying reminds me that there are many times when I find a tension between my consultancy work and my work

here. Whether this is an underlying cause of some of the frustration that has been expressed, I don't know, but I haven't yet found that balance since September. I have faced challenges far greater than I anticipated that have demanded a lot - a lot - of my attention. I do feel as if I'm rushing to the next plane, chasing the next appointment. And this might have reflected on the way I have supported the learning process this year. We're not running a conveyor belt that is producing MA's. The nature of this course has a very human touch - a very real sense of engagement with people. If my professional life isn't in equilibrium I need to give attention to this. In the past six months I haven't found it but I continue to work on it.

(Pause)

... and actually as I say that, I'm conscious that there is an emotion there in what I am saying that I'm not able to articulate. I'm feeling something...you know....a little bit of....that is close to the surface.... I fell silent.

The silence lasted for almost two minutes.

HF was the first to speak. "I found it very helpful to express what I felt and to hear others do the same."

MG: "We've made a big step to be honest with one another. I appreciated the way those of you feeling pressure were able to trust the rest of us with your concerns. I need to be more aware."

Gently, the group began to suggest ways we could move forward.

HP: "We could help each other and hold each other accountable for assignments. I want to be more sensitive to your struggles."

In my initial writing of this incident there was a moment when I unconsciously moved away from transcription to talk *about* the experience. Immediately after SA's comments about her struggle between writing emails or reading I wrote in the first draft:

"I had been listening carefully and SA's comments triggered something in myself. I shared my frustration at the lack of balance of my professional life. For the past few months I had been too busy and I knew I wasn't serving my clients well. I was surprised by the emotion that came to the surface as I talked and felt tears just behind my eyes. I couldn't continue to speak. The room fell silent again but I felt it was no longer a "we don't know what to say" kind of silence but a supportive, inquiring kind of listening."

It is worth comparing this description with the transcription of what I said. While drawing from memory, rather than the transcript, in trying to describe why I couldn't continue to speak, I perceive a detachment - I am talking *about* the experience, not presenting it. I notice how easily, perhaps because of the emotion involved, I imposed a way of reading the experience on the raw data - the phenomenology - of the moment. This deprived me, and my reader, of a quality of awareness of the experience and the opportunity to give attention to the limits of the representation I was working with. I notice, for example, the way I interpret the silence and wonder what evidence I have for the claim that it provided "a supportive, inquiring kind of listening." While I had no problem acknowledging the emotion of the experience was I avoiding something else? As I listened again to the recording I decided to remove the paragraph and continue with a transcription.

Now my own words, and elements of my emotional state are available as data. As I listened to the recording I realised how long the silence had lasted (1 minute 43 seconds). All I can hear on the recording was my deeper breathing for the first half minute. But the silence went on and I began to wonder what was happening. I wondered what I was doing with my eyes. Where was I looking - at the table, individuals in the group, or the ceiling? Were others looking at me, to make sense of what I had just said or, possibly, for a facilitating intervention? I certainly didn't know where to go from here. At this moment, we were in autonomous mode (Heron 1999). I needed to be carried to the next place in the inquiry by the group. I can't remember where my eyes went and the audio recording doesn't tell me. I have reached the limits of data available through this level of representation.

The group met again a week later.

HP: "I really feel that I have been more conscious of others in the past week. By chance I ran into HF at KFC the other day and we walked back together."

HF: "This incident really made a difference. It helped me understand you (talking to HP). I also felt supported by MG. Although I didn't reply, I appreciated your emails."

MG: "I'm from a background that is outward focused. I realised that in this programme I have become focused on myself and that I had gone cold turkey on helping!"

SA: We have a saying in my culture, "Anytime you catch a fish, it's fresh." I decided last week to start again...."

HP: "I feel a kind of excitement, something is happening. There is a new energy amongst us..."

HF: "I have the same feeling - there is something new...."

SA: "...we have the will. I made sacrifices to come on this course which is why I was unhappy about the way we were treated."

AT (who had, until this point been fairly quiet): "When I started this course I lost my job. I struggled with 'why did it happen?' Within 2 months I had found a new job and now I am paid to sit in the library! I am now 100% motivated!"

Some of these comments were already attempts at explaining the experience - making claims about the lack of motivation in the group. This process was made explicit by HF.

HF: "When we started this inquiry I made the assumption that our frustration was because of the way the course was organised. But I now realise that what we assumed to be the real problem wasn't the real problem."

SA: "I agree - when we were complaining about the course it wasn't just about the course - I now realise that in British culture people don't really care who you are. I was under lots of other pressures. This course is not just about my studies, it's about my life. There is no-where I can scream."

MG: "I felt at the beginning that others .... were demotivated and this dragged me down."

AT: "I feel very supported right now. It's like concentrated juice."

HF: "For me there is more for me to do .... I need to take more initiative."

AS: "We've already taken the biggest step - we feel secure enough to tell each other our situation."

SA: "with students from overseas, I suggest a day out - it would help if we spent more time together..."

MG: "perhaps we can hire a boat and have a picnic up the river?"

In the middle of May, a few weeks after the inquiry, I received an email from one of the group saying, "Dave, Just a quick note to say thanks for a great week of lectures. It's been long days but worth the effort." Everyone involved had a different take away from the process as their comments illustrate. And yet the confrontation and inquiry had allowed everyone to bring more of themselves into the process and had moved the group forward. No one quit the programme.

The Reflective Process

In several of these incidents I had experienced what Graves (1997) calls "grace", an unexpected and subtle shift in the quality of the moment that has the potential to transform and heal. This is not something that can be planned but "comes in by the back door ... While the attention is elsewhere, grace is at work in the unconscious" (Graves 1997, 16). Knowing comes as an "epiphany", an "aha moment" when "the penny drops." A pre-requisite seems to be an ability to suspend ego involvement and attend to emotional and embodied sources of knowledge. This shifts the ground of knowing from a cognitive and rational base to a more visceral awareness of the influence of personal history and the presence of power. This is not commonplace in the literature on reflective practice. "Any number of texts" writes Brookfield (1991), " emphasize the importance of reflecting critically on the assumptions underlying practice and there is plenty of advice on

methods that can be used to this end. But the stream of writing on reflective practice tends to appeal at the cerebral, rather than the visceral level" (Brookfield 1991, 23).

The metaphor contained in the notion of "reflection" may not be helpful. A mirror reflection is an image of what is directly in front of it. It suggests an external object perceived and projected back in the direction from which it came. This has, as Bolton (2005) points out, dualist overtones, "*this* in dialogue with *that, in* and *out, here* and *there*" (Bolton 2005, 4). Torbert's (2004) loops can be handled cognitively as ways of thinking about what is happening "out there." Critical incidents (Ghaye and Lillyman (1997), Fish and Coles (1998)) can be analysed in a detached way. In an online discussion open to researchers associated with the Centre I made this comment in March 2009:

> "Reflective Practice and Action Inquiry can often be done in a detached way - that is, seeing the observable world as "out there", and missing the important question of what is happening in the knowing self. While the pragmatic value of reflective practice is unquestioned we may miss the opportunity to know in a deeper embodied way."

Making sense of a situation involves reflection on its antecedents and the influences of my interpretive frame (assumptions and beliefs) on the quality and focus of attention I bring to it. I can take this process apart through further levels of cognitive attention in a spiral that involves thinking all the way down. As a mental activity my mind skillfully makes short circuits across the available data, labelling the experience in "meaningful" ways and jumping to conclusions that lead to action. But without attention to the quality of presence in-the-moment accessible through emotional awareness and embodied knowledge I may be unaware of the complex motives and desires that give it direction.

The following discussion involves several cycles of reflection on an incident that occurred early in my inquiry through which I have witnessed an awakening, not just

to the way in which I initially jumped to conclusions and then began to probe my assumptions, but also began to explore the call for presence in my practice. The account begins with excerpts from my journal, written in the first hours after the incident in which I offer a description of what happened, overlayed with my early sense making. This is followed by a cycle of reflection as I worked with the incident in a paper written for supervision, and then a further reflective cycle as I re-visited the experience in preparation for the Diploma transfer. A fourth level of reflection brings this into my current writing.

Throughout the Master's programme we encouraged the use of personal learning journals and organised a weekly journal review seminar, providing students an opportunity to share something from their journals with the rest of the group. While we respected the privacy of their journal writing there was an understanding that they would bring something to the seminar they could share. These sessions were often rich and rewarding occasions, stimulating helpful conversations on a wide range of topics.

On one occasion I interacted with a Korean student who had made a number of unquestioned claims about American influence on his culture. I wrote in my journal:

> "My conscious intention had not been to confront this student but to make the more general point that our conclusions often say more about our assumptions than they do about the facts. Phrases like "the reason is..." or even the word "because" may hint at claims that need to be tested. These phrases in the Korean students' journal entry had provoked my intervention."

In my journal reflections I wondered whether I had said too much and whether I had intervened at the right moment. I wrote:

> "It had been a good humoured exchange but I was a little uncomfortable that I had dominated the discussion in what is normally a student led session."

But I went on to say, "I had been tempted to engage in the debate earlier. By holding back and letting the group probe their own attitudes I was able to use the incident to illustrate an aspect of reflective practice."

This intervention was part of a discussion resulting from another student's journal reflection on "tele-evangelists". Many of the students who join the programme find their first few weeks in the UK quite disorienting. One expressed it as "not finding anything in the media in England that they could identify with." This student was surprised to see some of the same evangelical shows on British satellite that she had seen in Kenya - and was horrified. She had found The God Channel on the television in their student common room. She criticised the format ("preaching without editing") and the content ("so loaded with Christian jargon"), concluding, "It really pains me when I see it."

As I worked with this experience in writing a paper for supervision a month later I observed:

"Many of the students on our programme are Christians, and some work for the church, so this form of evangelical globalisation usually comes up at some time during the year. But on this occasion I found myself uncertain about whether to contribute to the discussion. I have my own opinions and, I reasoned to myself, this could be a useful learning experience for the group. But I remained silent. Others added their voices from Nigeria, Uganda and India. As they gave examples from their different situations I felt my own outrage at this travesty of Christianity, but also found myself involved in a collegial rather than personal protest. By my choosing a strategy of silence, the group had developed a solidarity in their criticisms, so that by the time the Korean made his complaint about American influence on his culture, it was possible to make the more general comment about the reflective practice of testing our assumptions. Palmer (1998) talks about creating a paradoxical space that invites the voice of the individual and the voice of the

group. We had experienced this paradox and perhaps, as a result, the students had moved closer to becoming "the authors of their own practice"."

Several months later, as I prepared my Diploma paper, I returned to this experience. This is what I then wrote:

"I imply that my "strategy of silence" was intentional when, as I now reflect from a distance I suspect this was not the case. Elsewhere in the paper I admit, "I feel vulnerable and uncertain in the strategies I use..." I am embarrassed to read, "I just caught myself...by holding back and letting the group probe their own attitudes I was able *to use* the incident to illustrate an aspect of reflective practice" (italics for emphasis). Was I really as intentional in my action as this implies? I was focussed on making a point and it is likely that this undermined the possibility of a generative outcome.

"I refer in the supervision paper to Parker Palmer's idea that in teaching we sometimes experience a "paradoxical space that invites the voice of the individual and the voice of the group" (Palmer 1998) - something I now see as immensely valuable and fragile - and then, almost arrogantly, go on to claim, "we had experienced this paradox and, as a result, the students had moved closer to becoming "the authors of their own practice." How did I know this? How could I have known this? In summarising my conclusions from the incident later in the paper I implied access to similar knowledge, when I claimed, "...by initially choosing to listen I had unexpectedly created the space for collaborative learning and gained the permission to ask the more challenging questions." Really? Again, how could I have probed these assumptions?

"I read these comments now, with embarrassment. In the same paper I acknowledge that in the "performance period" of the classroom (Eraut in Atkinson 2000) I must trust myself. Reading back through my record of this incident I don't know whether I can. I am aware, as I also state in the paper,

that the values that shape my practice are "largely tacit". But what has hit me between the eyes as a result of revisiting this incident in my memory and through my presentation of it last March is the way my agenda - what I wanted to accomplish - distorted my interpretation of the incident. I can now see the incongruity and contradiction, in this tacit zone, between my espoused values and the attitudes I conveyed through my interventions in the discussion."

I continued in the paper:

"But perhaps the most disturbing conclusion is the recognition that under the surface I do not hold a simple set of transparently wholesome beliefs. The self that acted in this way is a "living contradiction" (Whitehead 1989) exhibiting conflicting ideas and incompatible values, some more selfish than others. Making changes in the quality of my practice isn't simply a matter of aligning an existing set of values with action. This reflection suggests there is work to do at deeper levels of my being to resolve these conflicting values. So, at least on occasions, when my actions do not reflect my espoused values I find myself echoing St Paul, "I do not understand my actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate....For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out" (Romans 7:15, 18). This is a kind of knowing which touches the inner core of my being and suggests a deeper journey that I need to take, inspired, perhaps by Kierkegaard's understanding that "purity of heart is to will one thing" (Kierkegaard [1938] 1956)."

Beyond Reflective Practice

As I write now, looking back on this incident and my reflections I can see further evidence of my absence. When referring to my concern about whether I had dominated the discussion I said that I was "a little uncomfortable?" The adjective "little" isn't very helpful in exploring the discomfort. Emotional and embodied data

was weak or missing from my deliberation. It is interesting that at this stage of my inquiry I recognised a spiritual dimension to my inquiring practice and used the language of my religious tradition to express it. I would now say that on these occasions I am witnessing the symptoms of the soul (Moore 1992), which if honoured can move me towards authenticity and presence. "Observing what the soul is doing and hearing what it is saying is a way of "going with the symptom" (1992, 7), often expressed in "the latest addiction, a striking dream, or a troubling mood" (ibid, 5). If we retain the language of reflection in action inquiry, then we must give attention to the reflective surface. While the metaphor of a mirror is powerful it is not a simple mirror. On closer inspection the reflective surface turns out to be the "living contradiction" that is my-self. Whatever is the focus of my attention will be blurred by the conflicting motives and passions of the moment. As WH Auden says, "How warped the mirrors where our worlds are made" (Auden [1940] 2007).

So while the disciplines of action inquiry can inform my deliberation in significant ways they are deficient if only employed at the cognitive level. Thomas Merton (1973) describes the "arrogant gaze of our investigating mind," which seeks to capture God and "secure permanent possession of him in an act of knowing that has power over him" (1973, 103), an insight that can be applied to anything that occupies our gaze. The visual references are not incidental. Sight situates me in my world - I am at its centre - it is perceived from my point of view (notice the visual connotation). Attending to the "me" that does the perceiving is an essential dimension of knowing in-the-moment that is accessed through my feelings - the visceral awareness that accompanies my participation in the world.

In discussing the affective mode of the psyche, John Heron makes a distinction between emotions and feeling (Heron 1992). I may experience joy, sadness or anger, what Damasio (1999) calls the primary emotions, or their cultural elaborated extensions (such as guilt or jealousy) in ways that may affect my motivational state. But these powerful influences on my action in the world are distinct from the quality of consciousness Heron describes with the word *feeling*, which he defines as

"resonance with being" (Heron 1992, 92). This "participative feeling…is the absolute hallmark of personhood, not reason" (ibid, 94). Referring to Hochschild (1990) Heen says, "I see feelings as a sense, which, like other senses, conveys information to the self. Our feelings tell us about our relationship to what is going on in the world and how we stand in relation to that" (Heen 2005, 266). So, as I give attention to my feelings and emotions, I become aware of how I relate to what I see, hear and touch. This awareness of self doesn't come through the five senses. It is an embodied knowing that has become a critical element in my inquiry offering signals not just to "what is going on?" but to "what is my relationship to what is going on?"

The first movement of my inquiry is almost complete. In both Hebrew and Latin the word for wisdom is derived from taste. It is something to be experienced not theorised about. As I nurtured my inquiring skills in this period of my research it became clear that I needed to attend to visceral as well as cognitive data in order to access the symptoms of a fulfilled or frustrated desire to be in harmony with my world. Such resonance is a characteristic of soulful living, of a deep and satisfying presence.

This chapter has not been a neat and tidy description and analysis of my emerging practice of inquiry. What you have are glimpses of the fits and starts, the disappointments and joys of the process. Action Inquiry skills are not acquired as one does the ability to ride a bicycle, or even to drive a car. It is not appropriate to licence a driver as an "inquiring practitioner" after a few short lessons. Action Inquiry is more like learning a foreign language. My first attempts at French were faltering and I failed my French language O-Level exam. But this didn't deter me from taking a job, on graduation, in France, or from later struggling to read Camus in the original. I am still on the lower slopes of proficiency in Action Inquiry but as I gained experience the process began to influence my practice.