

Chapter Four

The Shortest Distance between Two Points is a Zigzag Line

*It is the Hebraic intuition that God is capable of all speech
acts except that of monologue, which has generated our
acts of reply, of questioning and counter-creation*

George Steiner 1989

*When we know something, we come into relationship with it.
All our knowing is an attempt to transfigure the unknown
- to complete the journey from anonymity to intimacy*

John O'Donahue 1999

The previous chapter explored my growing awareness of the importance of not just knowing “what is going on when what is going on is going on” but of giving attention to my emotions and feelings to understand my relationship to what is going on. The aim of this chapter is to explore an emerging appreciation for relational knowing and the ways in which this has influenced my management practice. I enter this next cycle of learning recognising the hesitant and often inadequate ways in which I participate in the social world. I will describe my attempts at relational inquiry, creating space for the “other”, and explain how, through several incidents, I faced the challenge of becoming part of a system that is larger than myself, formed in-the-moment by connecting and interacting with others to experience what Martin Buber (1970) called the “space between.” I will conjecture that despite the fragile nature of this space it is formed and sustained by reverence, an awe for what lies outside my control. In the language I learned from my sojourn in Africa, “I am a person through people.” Or, to use the image offered

by Mary Catherine Bateson (2004) in describing Gregory Bateson's perspective on love, mind and wisdom, this is "a new animation of the landscape of awareness" (Bateson 2004, 38) that can transform our knowing and acting. In the taxonomy of relational research methodologies proposed by Bradbury and Lichtenstein (2000) this chapter is located in the intrapersonal sectors of their matrix.

One day in the autumn of 2005 I was walking with a colleague through the streets of Islington, deep in conversation about a particular issue in our work. Quite suddenly he stopped and, turning to me, asked "have you ever sailed a dinghy?" Taken instantly back to my youth I replied, "yes, many years ago, but I always preferred to row." "Ah," he responded, "as I thought, you are at heart a rationalist!" I laughed a little at the connection but he had a point. Through most of my professional life I have assumed the best way to make things happen was in straight lines, even if it meant travelling with my back to the destination using my own strength to get there. I was comfortable in my rowing boat.

We had been talking about one of my responsibilities at the Centre. Over the summer of 2005 I had become more involved in the life of the Centre and aware of difficulties in the management of another of the programmes, the MA in Development Practice that attracted practitioners involved in economic and social development from around the world. The programme administrator had resigned in July and it had become clear that a number of issues had been badly neglected. Someone had been appointed to take over the administration but was struggling to pull it back together before the next cohort started in September. The problems in the programme came up in an informal conversation over lunch with the Academic Dean in early September and, in a rather casual way, I offered to help. A week later he formally invited me to become co-director of the programme alongside the programme founder, a well known and respected academic in the field. I wasn't sure that I wanted the additional responsibility, but the work would fill out my portfolio through the winter months and I needed the income.

I agreed to the assignment, knowing that the programme was very traditional and employed didactic teaching methods (the Freirian banking concept of education (Freire 1970)). A colleague had withdrawn from teaching on the programme the year before because of differences in approach and practice. I anticipated some friction but decided that it would be a valuable experience in the light of our future plans for re-structuring the MA programmes at the Centre.

My first task was to bring some discipline into the marking of student work. The September Exam Board meeting had been postponed to November, against the wishes of the University, because the internal marking had not been completed. I discovered that very little student work had been marked since the previous December. Student papers were gathering dust on several faculty desks. With the agreement of the other co-director I convened a meeting of faculty and presented them with a report of the outstanding marking required. We re-distributed the marking load and set clear deadlines for completion. Although several missed the first deadline, we re-adjusted the load a second time and completed the marking just five days before the new date for the Exam Board, satisfying both the students and the University.

A week after I took responsibility in the programme we were presented with a formal letter of complaint by a new student who joined the programme in September, listing 7 areas of concern and copied to the Academic Dean, the Executive Director and all his sponsors. The complaints were not new to me. I had met with the students the Friday before and had been told about these concerns. I had asked the students to give me a week to investigate the problems and promised to meet them again the following Friday to report back. The letter was received on the Wednesday, two days before I was due to report back to the students.

I contacted the student and asked him to come and see me. I confirmed that there was nothing in his letter that he (and others) had not mentioned to me the Friday before and that he understood that I had agreed to report back on the situation the

following Friday. Under these circumstances I informed him that I considered his letter to be out of order and advised him to withdraw it until I had reported on my investigations. He refused to do so.

As a result the Programme Committee felt that it had no alternative than to reply to the letter in detail, pointing out the procedural error and giving a formal response to the issues he had raised. I drafted and sent the letter. A week later he asked to meet me again, this time with what he called his "counsellor". When the time of the meeting came I discovered that the student had no intention of attending and had sent this person to represent him. Apparently, although the student appreciated that his concerns were being addressed, he wanted to put on record the disappointment and frustration he had experienced in the first few weeks of the programme. He was experiencing symptoms the doctor had said were the result of stress.

I have deliberately offered this account of the situation in the language of a report to illustrate the directive style I adopted in managing it. I took over at a critical time in the programme and, I would argue, it needed leadership from the front. I have been comfortable, historically, in this kind of role. I am quick to size up a situation and decide on a course of action. In this situation there was little time for offline reflection. But as I now read the report I notice several things. Firstly, it contains little personal content. Although the pronouns "I", "my" and "me" occur frequently there is no attempt to convey who the "I" is, or what the "I" was sensing or feeling. Although I was engaged, addressing the issues and navigating around the sensitivities I faced, my behaviour was intuitive. I would have been unable to explain my actions in-the-moment.

There are other clues to my management approach to the situation. I needed to "bring some discipline" to the marking process and so "convened a meeting" to "redistribute the load and set clear deadlines." In responding to the student who had lodged his complaints I "informed him that his letter was out of order and advised him to withdraw it" and hid behind the Programme Committee who "had

no alternative than to respond in detail" to his letter. I am aware that my language is the language of certainty, precision, closure. My management style was to take control, to impose on the situation a way of thinking about it (strategic and tactical) that would lead to particular outcomes. The fact that these outcomes were positive (leading to a successful Exam Board and, later, the satisfactory resolution of the student's grievances) does not justify the means. It exhibits the action-logics of the Expert (Cook-Greuter 2002, Torbert 2004), particularly in the way in which I treated the other participants as objects - people and assessment papers alike were moved around to achieve the desired outcome. This kind of management practice did little to change the habits of faculty who get no pleasure out of marking papers and look for every excuse to postpone the task. Job done, programme culture unchanged.

There were times on Brendan's journey when neither the sails nor the oars were much help. When they were becalmed in a fog Brendan wisely advised his colleagues to pull in the oars since they had no idea in what direction they were going. And in the many storms they experienced it was too dangerous to hoist the sail or work the oars. Knowing when and how to act is a vital skill in organisational management.

To Mentor or Not to Mentor?

Connelly and Clandinin (1999) offer a useful metaphor to describe the culture I encountered in the Development programme. Although in some ways I describe it as dysfunctional, its participants had crafted a story to live by that was quite different from my own. There were unquestioned sacred stories that conveyed status on its faculty and gave the curriculum the status of sacred text. The institution, at the time, had permitted a strong sense of territorial identity to emerge for this and other programmes. Each existed in its own silo with its own culture, something the Academic Dean had tried to address with only limited success. I had experienced and, at times, defended this practice in the

Communications programme. Over the first few years the team responsible for the programme had helped me develop a student-centred culture in the programme which was cherished. Unconsciously, we had carefully protected this space, particularly monitoring its borders. While the programme was institutionally established, the "classroom space" was crafted by its participants and, in different ways, each of us helped protect and nurture it.

I was shortly to enter another organisational territory with responsibility for the pre-registration stage of the PhD programme validated by the University of Wales. This stage exists to provide support for research students in drafting their research proposal and recruiting a supervision team. I had no previous experience with the programme although I was aware that the territory involved a careful balance of established research positions in which contested views lay hidden behind a practice that assigned incoming students to mentors before they arrived, allowing each faculty member to handle the induction of new students in their own way. Inevitably there had been numerous cases of inappropriate appointments and consequent frustrations and delays in helping the students define their research interests and methodology.

A year earlier, in an attempt to moderate this culture, the Dean had introduced a formal Research Induction School (RIS) to provide incoming students with a shared introduction to research methods. In the first year the programme, organised by another member of faculty, simply distributed the timetable between different members of staff with no attention to shared learning goals or coordination of topics. In previous years I had contributed briefly to these events with a couple of sessions on Action Research. When I took over responsibility for the pre-registration stage, the RIS became part of my brief. My first decision was to postpone the assignment of mentors to the end of the induction process. I set up a simple procedure to enable every student to meet informally with at least three faculty members of their choice to discuss their research interest so that, by the end of the RIS, students and staff were able to make an informed decision about

the mentoring relationships. Otherwise I let the Autumn programme run to its established pattern and focused my attention on the Spring School.

The faculty team involved in the RIS included an Indian, Hong Kong Chinese, Korean and 3 British ranging in age from their mid 40's to early 60's. There were two women. They represented a wide variety of specialisms - religious studies, anthropology, philosophy, communications, historical studies and theology. I was the only one with some experience of action research. By the middle of February I had met with each of them individually to solicit their views on the induction process and I felt it would be helpful to bring them together to discuss the shape of the programme.

I had been feeling anxious about the meeting for several days. I lost the last hour before the meeting (which I had intended for preparation) to a series of unrelated interruptions from staff and students and in the last five minutes banged out an agenda. There was no time for a last minute consideration of how to introduce the items or the order in which they were to be addressed. As it happened we were late starting and after about 10 minutes of waiting we decided to go ahead, although one member had still not arrived. This is not un-typical. It is virtually impossible to start a meeting with him present. He will wait until the meeting has started then go to the kitchen to boil a kettle and make a cup of tea. He eventually arrives at the meeting, papers, tea pot and cup precariously held in one hand while he opens the door with the other.

On this occasion, just as I was concluding a brief introduction to the purpose of the meeting, he turned up, not with his usual cup of tea but with the legs of a table in his hands. He hesitated as he opened the door, as if he had not realised that we were meeting in that particular room, and then explained that he wanted to take the table out to his car parked outside (the room opens onto the street and is a convenient short cut, avoiding the inconvenience of carrying things through the normal entrance on the other side of the building). We all got up to help him take the bits of the table across the room and to his waiting car. I recall my feelings,

half-hoping he was going to drive off to take the table home and let us get on with the business without him but no, five minutes later, tea pot and cup in his hands he walked into the room and sat down.

I was not my normal confident self in introducing the meeting and after a few preliminary comments I suggested, in a rather vague way, that we began by discussing the feedback we had received from the previous cohort. Others were hesitant to comment and when one did, I rather abruptly cut him off. I had not started well. I apologised and invited him to continue. I felt uncomfortable. The person I had interrupted is usually very supportive. While the next few comments were being made I was struggling with my feelings. I knew I couldn't 'think' my anxiety away. I wanted to trust the process and the people involved and I began to realise that I had no alternative.

"Rather than assigning a personal mentor at the end of the six week period," one of the staff was saying, "my suggestion would be to find someone as early as possible. This will give each student the opportunity to begin thinking about their research with their mentor." I hesitated before responding. This was a direct challenge to my decision in September to postpone the appointment to overcome problems in mismatching student and mentor. The feedback from the students in the previous RIS had been very positive about the opportunity they had to consult with different members of the staff before being assigned a mentor. "But we could fast forward this," he suggested. "You don't normally get that much exposure to staff in a normal university department", added another, "they were spoiled. I spent time with them but it was done at the expense of my half yearly reports. I don't have the time for this." My decision to postpone the appointment of mentors was the first topic of discussion. This was not what I had intended should happen in the meeting.

I realised that I had a choice. I could hold my ground, insisting on postponing the assignment of mentors on the grounds that it clearly gave the students a better experience. I thought of the value of witnessing - offering back to the group what I

was hearing in an affirming way - and decided to encourage the group to explore the suggestion of fast forwarding the appointment. Another voice was added in support of an early decision, suggesting that students need to be pushed to focus their interests and a personal mentor can hold them accountable. I picked up on this comment and suggested that the members of the group could support one another in this way. We had experienced strong bonding in the Autumn cohort and I had been encouraged by the way in which the students had become quite deeply involved in each others research interest.

By this time different perspectives had been brought into the conversation and I decided to let them lie there for the moment rather than seek closure. I wanted to explore the pedagogy of the RIS experience and invited the group to discuss it. Most of the sessions in the previous induction schools had been delivered as lectures and I wanted us to explore other learning approaches. "What experiences can we offer the students that will lead to learning? Not just provide a hand out on our topic." The conversation focussed quite quickly on writing. "They are asked to write something every week but what do they do in the seminars? They come with an outline or a powerpoint - one even gave us a mind-map."

"This throws up serious questions to admissions," someone suggested, "when we have people that are set in that way ... some catch up but there are some who never do. I don't think you can operate when students aspire to a PhD without basic skills in reading and writing." The Admissions tutor felt the criticism and protested, "the standard of admission into this programme is higher than the university itself," he said defensively.

"But Dave," the first person continued, "how much effect does a defective entry have in terms of the group dynamics, if it sets the pace that the group can move?" I noticed the inclusion of my name in the comment - perhaps a relational move - and offered a supportive "mmm" in response. "I get the impression that we are very much sailing according to the slowest ship," he added.

One of the purposes of the RIS, as set by the Dean, was diagnostic. The institution receives applications from people of many different backgrounds and it is sometimes difficult to assess their potential for post-graduate research on the basis of their prior academic record. "Immediately we are confusing things again," the same person interjected, "what are the standards here? The problem with having too many people who we are looking at (while we take their money) is that the wrong dynamics get into play."

The Admissions tutor hadn't finished. "At the end of the pre-registration stage," he said, "if we find students not capable of continuing then there needs to be a clear decision to allow them to withdraw. Instead, at the moment, we allow them to continue." I had become aware of several students who had been in pre-registration for more than two years. "One advantage of bringing mentors into the process sooner," I said, "is that you become conscious of these issues sooner. But then I want to encourage you to come to the seminars when your students are presenting." "I can't participate in them all," the member who had held up the meeting while we moved his table, responded, "but if there is a student that I am going to help ..." "But that's the problem," I reacted, "even after mentors were appointed they did not come to seminars to support their own students."

I sensed that the atmosphere in the room was changing. No-one responded and my criticism was allowed to join the other perspectives that had been offered earlier in the meeting. At this stage the discussion had been going for half an hour and I suggested that we turned to address some questions of content. Over the next 50 minutes we discussed critical issues in epistemology, research methods and the development of the online learning environment. As the session came to a close I invited a closing round of comments. The staff member who had been arguing strongly for the early appointment of mentors made no reference to the topic, but instead told the group of an event he had just attended at the Open University (OU). "Let me offer some encouragement," he said. "I was planted into a working group talking about how to build community - everyone is talking about community. It did make it obvious to me that we are streets ahead (emphasis in his

voice) of all the other sponsoring establishments, and indeed the OU Research School itself.” Another member who had also attended the event added, “And, in regard to the workshop I was assigned to, we are streets ahead in being student centred.” “Perhaps we may be overdoing it,” the first one concluded.

I offer this anecdote to explore a critical aspect of my action in the world. How can I improve the way in which I get things done in the world? Is it possible to intervene, from a position of influence, in ways that can change the culture? Can collective deliberation make a positive difference? In the incident reported above I find it interesting that I chose to witness what others were saying about the appointment of mentors and encouraged a discussion of the proposal to fast forward the decision. I did not agree with the idea, either on principal or politics, but it was also evident that opinions were divided. The issues involved in the decision are ambiguous. Mentoring of individual students is a call on staff time (something that academics protect vigorously) and there are wider question of quality to consider.

There are different ways of getting things done. I had executive authority in organising the Induction School and could have exercised positional power as I did in the earlier incident. I could have resorted to argument, seeking to change my colleagues minds and persuade them of my opinion. Although it didn’t occur to me at the time, I might have been able to set up a small collaborative inquiry around mentoring practice to facilitate an iterative cycle of inquiry during the school. However I suspect that the level of interest by staff members would have been below the threshold of participation. Instead, by witnessing the proposal for a change in practice and withholding my opinion, I sensed that the group was able to work in an open space that allowed different voices to surface and the topic to evolve in-the-moment. I did not know the outcome at the pivotal moment I took this direction and I certainly could not have manipulated the conclusion. However, I had observed that even when mentors were assigned early, they did not support their students adequately and this was something I was able to say later in the discussion when I felt it was appropriate. The meeting did not make a formal

decision but I was able to invest the social capital it had given me to develop the practice of peer and group support and postpone the appointment of individual mentors.

As I reflect on this process now I realise that, in the situation, it was not enough to consciously interpreting the experience in terms of Torbert's (2004) territories or parts of speech. I did not subject my mental models to scrutiny using the ladder of inference (Senge et al 1994) or other inquiry tools to examine my assumptions or beliefs. I was hesitantly, yet intentionally, managing my power and presence in the group and making choices around whether to act authoritatively, offer persuasive argument, or provide an open space for the group to participate in an emergent process. It was a judgment in-the-moment that was not based on rational argument but relational commitments.

Towards Haptic Vision

Many of the metaphors for knowledge are associated with the visual sense - insight, observation, perspective, for example. Sight objectifies the world, locating everything as external to me. I am at the centre of the world. It is perceived from my point of view, creating what Einstein called "the optical delusion of our consciousness" (Senge et al 2005, 203). Martin Jay (2005) identifies it as a characteristic of modernity, describing it as an ocularcentric bias in the culture - the dominance of sight over other senses.

This may work well in daylight with good visibility. But life in organisations is not always so clear. There were times when Brendan and his companions were covered by a dense blanket of fog making progress on their journey impossible. It is when sight is removed that our other senses are able to access and bring to consciousness a different kind of knowledge of the world around us, as the story of Jacques Lusseyran (Kornfield & Feldman 1996) so powerfully illustrates. Shortly after becoming blind as a child Lusseyran realised that he could still see but that

initially he “was looking too far off, and too much on the surface of things” (Kornfield & Feldman 1996, 97). He discovered a light which, without his eyes, “was much more stable than it had been with them” (ibid 98). It only faded when he was afraid or impatient. It was his emotion that made him blind.

“I could no longer afford to be jealous or unfriendly, because, as soon as I was, a bandage came down over my eyes, and I was bound hand and foot ... All at once a black hole opened, and I was helpless inside it.” (ibid 101).

It was not, he suggests, that his blindness made his hearing improve, but he was able to make better use of his hearing. Gradually his body which had been disoriented by his blindness came back to him, learning in new ways to be wise. He learned that the eyes run over the surface of things, half seeing, satisfied with appearances. Smell and touch helped him really connect with things, no longer living in front of things, but living with them.

“All of us, whether blind or not, are terribly greedy. We want things only for ourselves. ... But a blind child learns very quickly that this cannot be. He has to learn it, for every time he forgets that he is not alone in the world he strikes against an object, hurts himself and is called to order. But each time he remembers he is rewarded, for everything comes his way” (ibid 112).

The physical example of blindness is a metaphor for the social discernment I was seeking. Stephen Pattison (2008) suggests that all of us can transcend what he calls our “ordinary blindness” by giving closer attention to the phenomenology of what is around us, ordinary and extraordinary, “mantelpieces and masterpieces,” to quote from the title of his Gifford Lectures. He proposes a more inter-sensorial, comprehensive notion of sight, that he names “haptic vision,” a phrase that deliberately links touching and seeing, an invitation to a quality of knowing through relationship with the artifact. Lusseyran describes in intimate detail his delight at discovering things through pressure.

"If I put my hand on the table without pressing it, I knew the table was there, but knew nothing about it. To find out, my fingers had to bear down, and the amazing thing is that the pressure was answered by the table at once. Being blind I thought I should have to go out and meet things, but I found that they came to meet me instead. I have never had to go more than halfway, and the universe became the accomplice of all my wishes" (Kornfield & Feldman 1996, 106).

There is a further analogy, appropriate to this perspective, in the images of the Eastern Orthodox tradition. Orthodox theology led to the emergence of a new artform - the icon (a word adopted as a metaphor in computing but in the process robbed of its deeper meaning). Icons are a representation of the transcendent in a form that invites participation. Icons are a rejection of the objectivity of the Renaissance in western art where the focal point disappears into the distance. Icons reach into the space in front of them, inviting relationship. Their focal point is in front of the icon, giving the viewer a sense of intimacy and an invitation to deeper participation with the image. Or again, in the discipline of writing, Natalie Goldberg advises the writer to make friends with what they write about, to "go so deep into something that you understand its interpenetration with all things" (Goldberg [1986] 2005, 82). She exposes the illusion that lies in the syntax of the English language. The subject/verb/object structure of the language puts the subject in control, subject acting on the object. No wonder, since we think through language, that we act as if we are masters of the universe.

Putting Heart and Soul into Research

In the second half of 2005 the Board of Directors of the Centre led the senior staff in a major review of its purpose, structure and future programmes. The Centre was set up more than 20 years ago by Christians from the non-western world to provide an opportunity for advanced, critical research and reflection on their involvement in culture and society particularly in contexts of marginalisation and poverty. The

Centre was established in the UK with the explicit purpose of validating this knowledge in the citadel of western scholarship and learning.

The founders were aware of some of the difficulties this would create. They wanted to avoid the practical reality of competent students being assimilated into western culture at great cost, or returning home with knowledge of little relevance to their context. At the beginning these concerns were overcome through the establishment of a non-residential PhD programme validated, initially, by the CNA²³ and then the Open University. But the subtle influence of western ways of knowing have nevertheless crept in through, for example, lack of attention to the wider epistemological questions, and the influence of a diverse group of well meaning academic supervisors with limited first-hand experience of the non-western world.

In November the founder-director convened a faculty/student seminar to discuss this issue. His concern was the possible alienation of PhD students from their own context. It was a frank admission that the Western academy had subtly and yet effectively undermined the very purpose for which the Centre existed. "The luxury of getting a PhD and then later producing useful products is no longer possible. Our research needs to have demonstrable value in our own contexts now," he said. To conclude his remarks he asked the students present two quite personal questions. "Have you developed skills that your context does not need or cannot use?" And, "are you so changed by your studies that you are little use back in your context (has your usefulness been reduced)?"

The discussion that followed was shaped by this question: "How can we prevent this alienation from our context as a result of our research?" My mind turned towards my own research interests and its possible convergence with these

²³ The Council for National Academic Awards (CNA^A) was formed in 1965 to award degrees to graduates of programmes offered by polytechnics and private institutions in the UK. It was dissolved in 1992 to be replaced by external validation through the Open University and subsequently other universities in the UK.

concerns. I was reminded of the balance suggested by Jay Wood (1998) in his book *Epistemology: Becoming Intellectually Virtuous*:

"So the focus of our thinking about epistemological excellence, I argue, should be the unfolding careers of knowers and the care they display in orienting themselves toward ends they deem valuable. Viewing epistemological questions in career terms, as the concerns of a lifetime, requires that we attend to the processes of belief formation, maintenance and revision, not just the specific outputs of these processes... Epistemology, then, is not (or ought not be) concerned merely with the piecemeal appraisal of individual beliefs but with what kinds of persons we are and are becoming..." (Wood 1998, 26)

In January 2006 I used an opportunity to contribute to the series of open lectures at the Centre to explore my own emerging perspectives on holistic research. I observed the discrepancy between the non-western contexts from which most of our students come and the western academy. The Enlightenment established a clear demarcation between the empirical world (that we can see and touch) and the world of the spirit, a division that is unrecognised in many of our cultures. I entitled the lecture "Putting Heart and Soul into Research: An Inquiry into becoming Scholar, Practitioner, Saint" (Adams 2008), and presented the issue as a personal question:

"In what ways are the epistemological assumptions of the academy influencing what I am becoming through my inquiry? Some of you will find the taken-for-granted worldview intimidating and easily succumb to what Donald Schon calls its "technical rationality." None of us is immune to its subtle inoculation into particular ways of framing reality."

At the end of the lecture I invited anyone who was interested to explore this further to join me for a meal and a discussion on the following Tuesday. Although I had no experience of the approach, I was hoping to facilitate a collaborative inquiry

involving cycles of action and reflection on our research experience. It is worth acknowledging that while I saw this as a great opportunity I was pretty anxious. I wrote in my journal on January 27th, just three days before the lecture:

“My feeling at this stage of preparation - overwhelmed. I am confused and uncertain about how (or even whether) to continue. One part of me is feeling ‘wow - this is great!’. Another side feels weak, lacks any confidence that I will be able to pull all this together by Tuesday (if ever). Is this mental exhaustion, or anxiety about letting the heart in on my work? And there are wider circumstances. I have been disappointed in the lack of progress on my contract and I even received a speeding ticket in the post this morning. The terra is no longer firma.”

Collaborative Inquiry

The practice of cooperative or collaborative inquiry has its roots in *Human Inquiry*, a seminal text, edited by Reason and Rowan (1981). The subsequent literature in the field (Heron 1988, 1996, 1999; Bray et al 2000; Baldwin 2002; Reason 2002, 2003) describes an open, shared process of inquiry cycles over time. Even if some can be Dionysian in process (Heron 1996), they are governed by a clear sense of purpose and general structure. From this literature I had drafted a set of ideas about how to organise the inquiry and a number of questions I planned to bring to the group, although as I reflect on this preparation now, I realise that it was no more than a prop. I needed to trust the process, and even more importantly, the people who became involved.

Despite several attempts to get confirmation of the numbers attending this proved difficult and I was feeling quite anxious as the time of the meeting drew closer, particularly since I had committed to cater for 15 people. In the end 9 people turned up (6 students and 3 faculty, including myself). I was particularly pleased

that 2 members of the faculty took the time to come, and with the diverse background of the group - Europe, Africa, China, Pacific Islands and the USA.

Many of our students live in simple accommodation and the meal provided an opportunity not only to satisfy our hunger at the end of the day but also to develop informal relationships before we began our conversation. When the meal was over we cleared an open space in the middle of the room. It is not common for us to "show our knees" in meetings in the Centre but it seemed important to me to push the tables to the side of the room and sit in a circle. One faculty member manoeuvred the corner of a table into the circle so that he "had somewhere to place his coffee cup." This was later pushed back when a late-comer joined the group. I was reminded of Kate McArdle's experience of re-arranging the furniture for the first meeting in her co-operative inquiry with young women in management (McArdle 2002).

I gave a brief introduction in which I quickly reviewed the purpose of our time together and repeated the questions I had posed in the lecture - to ask, how is my research shaping my personal development and in what ways can we, as a community, be more intentional, individually and institutionally, in encouraging more holistic development? After a brief description of the collaborative inquiry process we decided to break into pairs to start the conversation. My partner graduated from Gordon Conwell Seminary in the USA. I learned that these questions are frequently discussed in the American seminary context but although the spiritual aspect of student life is supported and encouraged, exceptional students can graduate with honours without evidence of spiritual formation. "So is the problem in the assessment regime?" I asked. This led to an interesting discussion of how this could be assessed and what would need to change in the curriculum/learning environment to nurture this development. There are economic pressures when funds are tied to academic performance.

The feedback from the other groups was more personal. A student from Tonga said, "my research is my current vocation - this is where I belong." I didn't realise it

at the time but I would glimpse what this meant for myself a few weeks later (see below). One of the faculty told us that his PhD research had sustained him spiritually - he felt that his studies had fed his soul. A student from Kenya said, "I started my research wanting to make a difference in my context. I now realise, one year later, that my research is changing me."

I invited the group to stand while I placed a label carrying the words "scholar", "practitioner" and "saint" on the back of three chairs positioned in three corners of the room.²⁴ I invited everyone to go and stand behind the role they felt most comfortable in. Five went to the practitioner chair, three to the saint and one (a faculty member) to the scholar. After inviting them to reflect for a few moments on how they saw the other chairs from that vantage point I then suggested that they moved to the one they felt least comfortable with. Four went to the saint chair, three to the scholar and two to the practitioner. After a few moments I suggested that we write down our thoughts and feelings about the experience. Then, in groups of three we shared what we had written and spent some time talking about what we had noticed and what sense we had made of the experience.

I found myself with a Croatian and a Chinese student. The first told us that he was very uncertain about where he felt most comfortable and expressed a desire to stand between two of the chairs, although this was not permitted by the rules of the game. The Chinese said, "Within the regulations of the game I had no hesitation - I went immediately to the 'saint' chair. Knowing God is of first importance. But I also know that I can know God best through good practice and good scholarship. The intellect is very important but it is only a part of my life. I cannot survive just as a scholar or just as a practitioner but I can survive as just a saint."

My own experience had been different again. I noticed the walls I have built between my spirituality and my practice and scholarship which means that I have

²⁴ This exercise was based on a suggestion by Paul Feldwick in a CARPP supervision session. Thank you Paul!

no way of letting them inform each other - I can only work on them one at a time. I also noticed my reluctance to go to 'scholar' and wondered why?

In the final few minutes of debriefing someone observed that, like the rules of the game, the western academy sets the parameters for what constitutes valid knowledge. In the end what is examined is a thesis (knowledge that can be represented in a particular form) not the person who discovers and holds the knowledge (although they are expected to defend it). Do we simply accept these rules or build an argument for changing them? I found myself reflecting on our smaller group discussion about Chinese ways of knowing. In Chinese culture, I had learned, you cannot separate scholar and saint - knowledge and knower - it is impossible to talk of one without the other. One validates the other.

We had ended the evening recognising our dilemma. We are not comfortable suppressing or denying part of ourselves and our multiple ways of knowing for the benefit of gaining a credential. We parted company with an agreement to carry the question into our work over the next few weeks and to continue to interact online. The following day I set up an online forum to provide an interactive space to carry the conversation forward. In the next few days several of the group contributed their reflections on the meeting and added some additional resource material. A brief report and the date and time of our next meeting was circulated to the wider community. Word of our discussion quickly spread. The Executive Director (who had been overseas at the time of my lecture) expressed his support for the process and several others indicated an interest in participating. I subsequently heard from a second member of the Board of Governors supporting the initiative. The process became known as "The Tuesday Inquiry".

I had to think on my feet on several occasions. Just minutes before the dinner I was approached by my co-director on the MA in Development Practice, asking whether the meeting was official and was he required to attend, adding: "How controversial do you want the evening to be? You are a late comer to the research community - I've been at it for 40 years." He had a distinguished academic record as Professor of

Development Studies at a large UK university before joining our team on retirement. I had come to know him as a convinced positivist and it would have been easy for me to say, "No, you are not required or expected at the meeting," but I realised that we needed to hear his voice in the conversation, and so I told him, "No, it is not official, but I would personally welcome your contribution." He came, and to my surprise, contributed constructively and helpfully to our discussions. At the end of the discussion he proposed that we all re-read my paper in the light of the evening. "You have, for example, made use of ideas from the beginnings of the enlightenment and from Medieval sources," he said, "this discussion needs to feed in other perspectives - team work. While I appreciate your perspective, I am psychologically not fitted for the mysticism of the Middle Ages."

A month passed before our next meeting and I was anxious that the momentum might have been lost. Several of those who had participated in the first meeting told me that they would not be able to attend but I put up a small poster on the notice board in the hope of recruiting a few more participants. Seven of us met on a cold and damp Tuesday evening at the beginning of March. I was eager to hear what others had learned since our first meeting.

I had not heard the last from my Development colleague! He opened the conversation with a criticism of the title I had given my lecture and the typology I had used. For him the notion of "heart and soul" was old fashioned and he objected to the place I had given the heart ("the heart is just a pump"). His preferred typology would be "body, mind and spirit" and he quoted several sources of authority for his choice. We were not off to a good start. In my exchange with him before our first meeting I had told him that I didn't want the conversation to become too philosophical - I felt the need to explore our research journeys at a more experiential level.

What caught me by surprise however was my own response. Rather than adopt a tactic to exclude the criticism (something I have done many times before in classrooms and board meetings) I found myself embracing it. In-the-moment I

recalled the Biblical injunction to "love God with all your heart, and soul, and mind and strength." I quickly recognised the rebuke, by both my colleague and Jesus, and agreed to the essential need for embodied knowledge in the typology, but at the same time I insisted, this time with support from Jesus, on retaining the heart. It seemed a reasonable accommodation!

It occurred to me later that there might be a way forward in determining the appropriate aspects of human wholeness and learning in the notion of multiple intelligences. I had been reading Stephen Covey (2004) *The 8th Habit* and found his discussion on this topic helpful. In a few sentences Covey pays tribute to Howard Gardner's work on multiple intelligence and summarises other typologies:

"Some books separate out visual intelligence from verbal, analytical, artistic, logical, creative, economic and other intelligences....but (I) believe you can put them all under the four areas of body, mind, heart and spirit - the four dimensions of life" (Covey 2004, 54).

Rather than remove emotional intelligence from the list, as my colleague was suggesting, I saw the disembodied nature of my earlier typology - what Jesus calls "strength", and Covey calls "physical intelligence" - and happily added it to the model. With this change the typology feels more complete and its simplicity appeals to me. Here, perhaps, are the four dimensions of learning I need to hold together in my practice as a learning facilitator.

In planning the inquiry process I had struggled with the ground rules. Should participation be restricted to those who were willing to commit to the inquiry in the long term or should it be more open? I could see benefits and difficulties with either. The next intervention convinced me of the value of welcoming newcomers. CP is from Zimbabwe and was mid-way through his PhD research. "It's the topic that needs to drive our inquiry," he said,

"My faith is intrinsically a part of me as a researcher but I need the freedom to pursue my topic without the expectation that in the process I might be able to give voice to the faith dimension. It is almost as if the bird is flying and someone is trying to put a cage on it. I need to allow my work to mature without this cage being thrown on it."

We had almost finished our conversation when the student from China (who had remained fairly quiet) intervened:

"I don't think the basic issue is spirituality or faith - it is in the nature of our questions. Whatever we do, we have to start with a question. I am thinking of the simplicity of children's questions - how, what, when, etc. Relatively speaking they are not so knowledgeable. But I think, for me, this is more interesting. We are on a certain stage and we are playing a certain game with other characters. We need to come to the very root - what are we doing as researchers? We might take a lifetime to define our human nature. We need, first of all to be simple. Simplicity is not a place - it's a direction."

The brief evaluation at the end of the evening produced some affirmative feedback:

"Just two words - highly content. It's a starter in restaurant terms..."

"For me I appreciate this engagement on a second level - we often talk about the content of research and methodology but the thinking behind research is very important - it frames the work. It is the kind of conversation that will help me bring the pieces together."

"I enjoy any conversation about research..."

"I have thought and talked about these things before but it seems that you really want to do something about it and I am excited about this."

We met five times between February and July with numbers varying between seven and twelve. We used a variety of tools to facilitate the discussion, including

non-cognitive forms of presentation. We exchanged stories with each other and, on one occasion, produced drawings of our research selves to explore a more embodied understanding of our inquiry. We had been meeting for several months when the conversation turned to ourselves as the research instrument. There was laughter when someone first mentioned the idea and asked how to present this methodology in a thesis. Several quickly confirmed that their inquiries had changed them but that they had not referred to this in their writing. As we played with the idea of “discernment” we began to talk of a “spirit” that enables our inquiry.

Since our last meeting one of the group had attended an International Conference on Women in Development in Korea at which she had been asked to coordinate the reports from several groups on the implementation of the UN Millennium Development Goals. Faced with different kinds of people (professional and cultural) she tried to encourage an open exploration of the issues. After participating in the group discussions and watching some of the presentations in the morning she felt an urge to confront the approach being taken by some of the session leaders and requested a special lunch with the people who chaired the session to encourage a more open exploration. Despite some objection the groups followed her advice and the report that came out of the process was warmly received by the conference. The term she used of her approach was “humility” but she also spoke of praying about the situation and opening herself to the “spirit” that enables inquiry.

As I reflect on the experience of the journey and my account of it here I notice several issues relevant to my inquiry. This was the first time that I had facilitated a collaborative inquiry and I was quite anxious about the process. First person inquiry skills were still important - paying attention to what was going on; monitoring outcomes, actions, and purpose; listening to my feelings and managing my presence in-the-moment. But I also felt the burden of holding an inclusive space for other voices; listening to other experiences; and folding these into my own sense making. There was something invigorating and scary about balancing my

role as facilitator, judging when I was being overly directive or failing to provide enough structure, and as a co-inquirer, seeking with others in the group to make sense of the experience. At times I was captured by the energy in the space and then refreshed by the moments of quieter collective reflection. I came away from the process aware of the amazing diversity of experience and insight I was privileged to work with and a growing appreciation for those who shared the journey.

We had worked on the boundary between system and lifeworld, providing a communicative space exhibiting many of the paradoxes noted by Wicks and Reason (2009). Although participation in the group changed as the inquiry continued, a core group helped maintain an open and inclusive attitude that quickly integrated newcomers into the process. Inevitably with an open membership, however, there were participants who had not contracted into earlier cycles of the inquiry and this diluted a sense of collective progress. The group nevertheless maintained a clear sense of purpose and there was a shared ownership of the topics of discussion arising from the experience and reflection of the participants. For a short time our inquiry was aligned with the institution's (system's) interests. Stories of individual lifeworlds emerged in the process that could have resourced the institutional inquiry but the institutional questions that had triggered my lecture and the collaborative inquiry that followed were quickly forgotten. While we had institutional support and encouragement, the institutional leadership had not participated in the inquiry.

The inquiry process lost momentum over the summer and, with my assignment as pre-registration Stage Leader in September, I was even more embedded in an institutional role. There was no opportunity to continue the inquiry or extend it to new students joining the programme. But we had, for six months, participated in a community of collaborative inquiry that had deepened our appreciation for more holistic research practices. There were limits to what we did. I carry a lingering question about whether we had reached any agreement on how we might hold "heart, mind, soul and strength" together in our research, or simply facilitated a

process by which individuals were helped in their personal choices through interaction with others in a supportive and creative environment. There was possibly a little of both.

Taking a Relational Attitude to Inquiry

My inquiry now involved a wide range of stakeholders (including students, the institution, several professional contexts and employees) and I realised that I would need to employ second person inquiry methods to continue my work. I had reached a stage in my inquiry in which I wanted to experiment with more relational ways of knowing. Jean McNiff talks about the need “to generate knowledge about how ... knowledge is produced within and through relationships and what kind of relationships are necessary for this process” (McNiff 2002, xi). Paulo Freire (1970) observes that, “the thinking Subject cannot think alone. In the act of thinking about the object s/he cannot think without the co-participation of another Subject. There is no longer an “I think” but “we think.””

There are occasions when it is possible to obtain explicit agreement from a group of people to engage in mutual inquiry such as the one described above. However my experience with the collaborative inquiry had left me conscious of the way in which a formal process like this includes and excludes members of the community. For many (students and faculty) and, crucially in this case, institutional leadership, the level of “collective curiosity” (Herr & Anderson 2005, 73) was too low for them to invest the time in a formal process. But I realised I was involved in dozens of conversations, meeting and seminars every week that I could view in a different way. Was it possible to see these quotidian social interactions in a relational way? Could I change the way in which I participated in these situations that might enhance the quality of knowing and acting that they produced? Thomas Merton suggests that we can only find ourselves in and through others. The self I seek is not isolated and individual (Merton in Del Prete 1990, 46). What might be involved

in discovering that “I am a person through people” (Bantu African) in the informal and even casual interactions of every day?

The distinction between first and second person inquiry becomes blurred at this point. While I remain an agent in the inquiry, I am not alone. I can discern the shift from first to second person inquiry as I move from the outer arcs of attention (Marshall 2001) in which I am aware of the other, to soliciting the active participation of the other, moving from my own subjectivity to become aware of and engaged with the other. What constitutes such a solicitation? I began to work with the notion of posture and described it as a relational attitude of inquiry. I began to give attention to the posture I adopted in conversations and group discussions and brought into my reflective practice questions such as:

- what space am I providing for the other?
- in what ways am I inviting a relationship?
- what is the quality of my listening?
- am I showing respect?
- how can I enable the other to find their voice?
- are my questions inquisitive, curious, appreciative?
- have I explored what outcomes we might share in common?
- what quality of being are we creating?

Barber (2006) offers a number of other practical questions in a similar vein (2006, 133). Crucial to the success of this approach to inquiry is a willingness to listen deeply, or as Wheatley suggests, to “bear witness” (Wheatley 2002, 82-83), to move the centre of attention from myself and what I am sensing to the other, to look at people inclusively, bringing them within in the circle of my own being, rather than using my eyes to alienate and exclude.

I did not find this easy, particularly when navigating organisational territory that was disturbed by my action as the following incident in my practice illustrates. Let me first give a brief description of the background before giving an account of the

incident itself. As a part of the institutional review the Board had decided to close the existing Master's programmes and mandated the development of a generic post-graduate programme for mid-career practitioners. I was recruited to work with the Academic Dean on the project. As we worked with the university and explored the potential market for the programme it became clear that there was a substantial interest in offering a PhD in Professional Practice (this project forms a central feature of my inquiries in the next chapter). I quickly found myself handling enquiries from around the world and realised that they would need to be processed in a different way to the existing research programme. But was the difference sufficient to require changes in admissions procedure? Opinion was divided, particularly in how to handle enquiries from research candidates who were undecided about which programme to join. We could now offer a choice, the traditional PhD by research, suited particularly to those pursuing a career in the academy, and a practitioners PhD, designed for individuals in professional life.

As the number of enquiries built up I knew that it was not appropriate for me to handle them directly and I recognised that they needed to be logged and managed by the admissions office. We designed a different application form but it was not always clear which form to send to the enquirer. The Admissions Tutor (AT), who would normally handle academic enquiries was not familiar with practitioner research. The issue came to a head when I realised that several dozen enquiries had not been processed and, as a result, their applications were not presented on the agenda of the Admissions Committee.

Following some discussion in the Admissions Committee, I was asked to meet with the AT to resolve the matter. Just before the meeting he emailed the Dean, with a copy to me, to say that he would not attend the meeting because "I do not think I need to be there as (the administrator) needs to compare her list with Dave's to make sure we have everyone covered. Thanks for excusing me." I went immediately to his desk to explain that I felt we needed a more in depth discussion about the admissions process and asked him to reconsider his attendance. He came to the meeting where, as I entered the meeting space, I found him, with the

administrator, reviewing a list of six names they had on their database who had enquired/applied for the new programme.

They handed it to me and I glanced at the names. Only one was unknown to me. I had dozen's of names that had not been entered on their system but, rather than review them, I used their existence to explain what I saw as the task we needed to address in managing enquiries of this nature. I had drawn a concept map of the process, as I saw it, and presented it briefly. There were two issues - our ability to coordinate enquirer information and contacts, and the handling of applicants who were undecided about the programme they wanted to enter.

The conversation turned to the case of an individual who had already enrolled in the traditional programme and now wanted to transfer to the practitioner programme. Since she was already enrolled this was not, in the opinion of the AT, an admissions issue. It needed to be referred to the Research Degrees Committee. But this was an institutional matter, not a programme matter. The Research Degrees Committee was responsible for the traditional PhD.

"If there is a situation like this we can just talk about it," the AT was saying, "we don't need everything so well organized. The Dean and I were just talking at lunch time about Indian markets - they may appear chaotic but they work. You may not understand that." For some reason I felt patronised by his comment and said so. "Don't patronise me ... the number of enquiries is growing and we are now offering students a choice - this will need more involvement from faculty to advise potential participants and we will need different ways of handling the process."

This is an example of an informal social process in which I had agency, the kind of conversation that happens every day in organisations as they adjust to change. Perhaps I was too efficient. I was certainly task focused. I noticed our eyes never met across the table. Our expectations of the conversation were quite different. I hoped that the meeting would help develop admission procedures that would accommodate the new programme. Perhaps he thought the new applicants could

be processed through the existing procedures. Presenting a concept map of the process he was responsible for may not have been the best way to negotiate change. I had taken time to produce it on computer and had printed it in colour giving the impression of a finished design!

Patricia Shaw (2002) makes an important connection between everyday conversations and the "patterns of interdependencies" (2002, 72) that Norbert Elias called "figurations." Power is not an attribute of individuals but a feature of their relationships. All relating involves a dynamic distribution of power by which identities are formed and modified. "Others have value for us as they offer, withhold and change their responses to our responses, generating for each of us feelings of being more or less powerful, influential or powerless" (Shaw 2002, 73). This leads me to interpret this incident in terms of what Bateson (1956) called "the double bind." Had I, unknowingly at the time, put the AT in a double bind? In my journal notes following the meeting I considered the possibility that he was being defensive. Did my action imply criticism of the way Admissions currently worked? Had my insistence that he attend the meeting given him no escape? Was he forced to choose, in front of the administrator, between the procedures that had served their purpose well, and the unknown consequences of accommodating the new programme? Did the concept map of the process, and the polished form I used to present it, convey a meta-communication that I had not intended? I wonder whether the metaphor of an Indian market might have been an attempt to shift the discussion onto safer ground, a communication tactic Bateson suggests is characteristic of the victim in a double bind (1956, 210).

The incident exhibits a professional behaviour that was task driven and ignored the relational aspects of organisational life. I have told the story here to avoid an impression that I was progressing smoothly towards more relational ways of knowing and more empowering management styles. There were times when the urgency of the work, or anxiety, left me confused. There is no straight line path to the cultivation of these skills of inquiry and social practice. Yet, when I did stumble I had become more conscious of the failure and my curiosity about relational

practices was heightened. How might these everyday conversations be more inquiring and productive? How might I reflect more consciously on the quality of relationship involved? What might be involved in taking a more relational attitude to inquiry and practice?

A Relational Ontology

It might be helpful, first, to describe more carefully what I mean by relational and explain its roots in my faith tradition as a way of exploring its influence on my practice. As I do so I notice, once again, an intention to weave experience, personal reflection and ideas into the narrative. The word “relation” can be used in different ways. We use it of family members; to make comparisons (relating one object to another to make comparisons in size, weight or other, less tangible, properties); to describe associations (connecting, for example, a smell or sound with distant memories, or linking phenomena to one another - clouds with rain, a hostile voice with fear, etc); as a synonym for telling stories or giving an account of an experience; and, as a way of referencing similar concepts. What these different uses of the word have in common is the notion of connection, whether of people, objects or ideas. I am using the term, in particular, to point towards an ontology, a way of thinking about reality that sees all things as fundamentally interconnected. It may not satisfy the philosophical purists but it serves my purpose to name this way of understanding reality a “relational ontology”. Heron and Reason (1997) talk about it as a “participatory paradigm.” Heron says,

“The participative perspective sees a world not of separate things, as a positivist view would have, nor as a socially reinforced construction of the human mind as held by various relativist perspectives, but rather of relationships we co-author. The world we experience as “reality” is subjective-objective, a co-creation that involves the primal givenness of the cosmos and human experience, imagination and intuition, thinking and construing, and intentional action in the world” (Heron 1992).

As an ontology, relationality inspires a set of values and describes an attitude of inquiry that gives attention to the connections as the locus of meaning. This should not be seen as a transactional model in the sense of Dewey's billiard balls, interactions that may change the trajectory of the balls but has little or no effect on the balls themselves. A relational ontology offers a more fundamental connectedness perhaps best described by reference to my religious tradition.

The Christian imagination, occupied over several centuries with an understanding of God as encountered in Jesus Christ and experienced through the Holy Spirit, evolved an image of God as Trinity. Although Kant is reported to have said that "absolutely nothing worthwhile for the practical life can be made out of the doctrine of the Trinity" (Moltmann 1981, 6), a recent resurgence of interest in the topic has produced a substantial literature (Rahner 1970; Boff 1988; Gunton 1993; Volf 1998; Fiddes 2000; Zizioulas 1985, 2006) that provides a helpful frame for my inquiries into relational practice. The Western tradition, heavily influenced by Augustine's "psychological model" of the Trinity, and the Eastern tradition, shaped by Gregory of Nyssa and the Cappadocian Fathers and their "social" perspective are, today, involved in a creative development. Current scholarship is finding in the Trinity a vision for feminism (Johnson 1992), democracy (de Gruchy 1995), pluralism (Karkkainen 2007), and psychotherapy (Cooper-White 2007).

Popular analogies of the Trinity are not helpful. Ice is water; liquid water is water; water vapour is water, the same thing existing in three forms, suggesting the image of the Father melting into the Son and then evaporating into the Spirit. Although both $1+1+1=3$ and $1 \times 1 \times 1=1$ are true statements, this eliminates the difference between the individuals and limits their relationship to addition or multiplication. The early Christians were struggling to find images and words to give expression to what they had experienced of God. After Jesus, they could no longer simply talk about "God". They found it necessary to speak about "the love of the Father, the grace of the Lord Jesus and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit" (1

Cor 13:14) although it would take several centuries before the ideas would find maturity.

Lucian Turcescu, a Romanian scholar, argues that the emergence of a trinitarian understanding of God lead to important changes in the understanding of the human person. Individuality came to be seen not as a form of atomism, that might be described today as a "centre of consciousness", but a view of personhood constituted in relations of active communion (Bates 2010, 9-10)²⁵. John Zizioulas (1985) contrasts the Greek notion of personalness as something additional to one's core being or essential nature, with the understanding of person resulting from Trinitarian thought, in which relational being is a matter of ontology: "to be and to be in relation becomes identical" (Zizioulas 1985, 88). No person exists by him or herself.

This understanding of personhood in the Trinity is captured by Paul Fiddes in the following way: "If we use the term *hypostasis* as the early theologians did for a "distinct reality" which has being, then the relations *are* hypostases. There are no persons "at each end of the relation", but the "persons" are simply the relations" (Fiddes 2000, 34). The three persons of the Trinity are de-concretised, each person being entirely with reference to the other. At the same time, as Gunton (1993) points out, the image retains an understanding of particularity in the persons in relationship, rather than sameness. In theological language there is coinherence without confusion. The names for God, "and especially "Father, Son and Spirit" can properly be used as a kind of shorthand for the movements of relationship" (Fiddes 2000, 40).

Perhaps the best know icon of the Trinity was painted by Andre Rublev in the 15th century. The figures of the Trinity form a circle. The eyes of each figure encircling the gaze of the other two. The gestures of the hands embracing the others. The mutual relationships of each person in the other was suggested by the Greek word

²⁵ I am indebted to Dana Bates for this point, drawn from an unpublished paper prepared for a research seminar April 14th 2010.

"*choreo*", each one containing or filled by the other. In noun form, *perichoresis*, it describes the encircling participation in each other. In the Middle Ages the metaphor was extended to the image of a divine dance perhaps helped by the play on words between *choreo* and *choreia* (dance) (Fiddes 2000), each person fulfilling themselves and expressing themselves in relation to the other, encircling and embracing each other. The Trinitarian God is not an isolated, static ruler of the universe. There is constant change, each person embracing the other in spontaneous, mutual love.

The radical outcome of the Christian tradition is that this dynamic interaction is not limited to God but extended to his creation. The Trinity embraces humanity in its love-dance. In the words of Christ in the Fourth Gospel, "as you, Father are in me, and I am in you, may they also be in us" (John 17:21), humanity is drawn into the dance with the divine.

Despite the centuries that separate us from the theological controversies that led to these ideas, we have not yet fully explored or embraced the significance of this ontological grounding for a relational understanding of the cosmos. The universe exists as an extension of this dance - all creatures participating in the movement of love, harmony and joy. One way of describing the dysfunctional, exploitative world in which we now live is to suggest that humans broke with the dance and decided to create their own, stepping on the toes of other dancers, falling out of rhythm with the rest of creation. A recovery of the *perichoresis* in which we recognise each other as co-dancers in the mutual love of God could go a long way to recovering the respect so necessary to healing our planet.

The Trinity then offers a fluid metaphor for multiplicity and unity, the one and the many (Gunton 1993) and, establishes a relational basis to ontology. In a more poetic appreciation of the Trinity, Pamela Cooper-White (2007) describes it as,

"a waterfall, *full* of light, colour, and dancing shapes, that provide continual refreshment, a long cool drink for parched feelings and hardened thinking,

cleansing for the perceived wounds and stains, cooling for fevered human hubris, and the occasional deluge for those who become too comfortable with the delights of any particular tributary of sacred ideology" (Cooper-White 2007, 82).

Wrestling with Control

These ideas have lingered long in the intellectual background of my life but have not always been evident in my practice. A relational ontology requires a participatory epistemology, re-locating the locus of what is known from the individual consciousness into the relationship between knower and known. This perspective offers a radical alternative to the all encompassing Enlightenment notion that observation is the basic paradigm of knowing and the human mind master of all it surveys. Yet I may acknowledge I live in an interconnected, interpenetrating world and yet continue to cling to my own space and resources. I must learn to let go, to give the "other" space and time to be, and listen to what arises as we co-create reality. This is not, in a phenomenological sense, just a matter of letting go of my ways of seeing and knowing but an invitation to release my grip on power.

In the weeks following my MPhil/PhD transfer (February 2007) I felt two conflicting emotions. One was a desire to linger, to savour the plateau. I had an image of having climbed a hill on my hands and knees with my face to the ground and reaching the top where, below me I could see a winding path, occasional villages and a copse of trees ahead. The other was to press on, realising that I had much work to do. Perhaps both were included in my attempt to draft a paper on methodology - my first description of the landscape that lay before me and, at the same time, a record of the place at which I had arrived. I shared the paper at the next supervision session.

The CARPP approach to research supervision proved, at times, to be very important to my inquiry practice. It was our practice to meet for a full day to discuss our emerging inquiries and support one another. We would often divide the day into one hour sessions in which we would take turns to present our work and invite the contributions of the others as "critical friends" (Costa & Kallick 1993). I was introduced to freefall writing (Goldberg 1986) in some of the early CARPP workshops and from the first occasion it felt awkward and uncomfortable. I was hesitant to share what I had written with others. I put it down to personal preference - just as some are reluctant to paint, I felt "this is not me". So when, at the supervision session, the suggestion was made to do some freefall writing at the end of our work with Nick, one of the members of the group, my heart sank. But I went ahead and put pen to paper, filling a page in the short time we agreed. It was full of incomplete sentences, half formed bullet points and unquestioned claims. I would have happily scrapped the paper at the end of the day and thought no more about it. But this was not to be.

Although I had drafted a paper on methodology I had decided, on this occasion, that I would like to use the occasion to talk about my work with the induction of our new research students. When, therefore, Geoff our supervisor, asked, "What do you want in feedback to your writing?" I had not thought about the question and stumbled into a comment about the shift I felt I had made coming out of the transfer process. "I feel as if I am in a different place - is this evident in the writing? Am I ready to write about methodology?"

"Is there a connection between this paper and your freefall writing?" Nick asked. I thought there was and quoted the first couple of sentences from my freefall writing: "Could my PhD be my way of doing things in the world - the way in which I make choices about what I do and how I do them? The past few months have been hectic and often I feel pressured into spaces that are not life giving." Geoff suggested that I continue to read what I had written but I hesitated "because," I said, "of the patchiness of the writing." Besides, I wanted to tell my story about a new student working in micro-finance and my joy as she had developed her ideas

about poverty alleviation and wealth creation and her desire to recover the lost voices of the poor. I was excited about her desire to engage in collaborative inquiry with them and wanted to share my experience of helping her find her voice.

"Can I start by telling the story?" "Yes," Geoff responded, "but notice your reluctance to go with what is raw and ragged

"The chances are that you said something really important in what you wrote in freefall. By not going to that other place what you are saying is "it's not complete, it doesn't make sense." There is something about wanting to stay in control of the story. Just notice this is you, frail, imperfect, and you won't share it..."

I was stung by the challenge. For a moment I wanted to quit - this was getting altogether too complicated and messy. I felt the urge to get up and walk away. I came into the hour thinking that, perhaps, I had glimpsed the horizon. Now everything was out of focus.

As I narrated my experience in working with the student I found myself contrasting the kind of conversations that I enjoyed and the situations, often associated with the demands of the system, that I found draining. As I spoke, I realised that most of my writing is about positive experiences - incidents when things were working well and I felt there was alignment between my espoused theory and practice. I had not written about the shadow side. How do I work with that darker side of my professional life and what meaning can I draw out of it? There were a couple of supportive comments from other members of the group and then Geoff said, "this is a powerful insight, a fractal moment. There is something, for me, I'm very interested in. It seems to me that this is exactly about not going to that other place. It isn't complete."

Nick offered another perspective:

"This makes sense to me what you have said (since I have been on this journey with you). I am really drawn to your account of losing yourself in intimate relationships and what that is for you, what it shows you about the joy that is in there. Everything you've said all connected. I also want to appreciate the risk you have taken. You may not have gone where Geoff wanted to take you but it feels really powerful to sit here and witness that."

As I listen again to the recording of the supervision session I am very conscious of the silences - long silences when nothing is being said. I can even hear the scratching of my pen on the paper next to the microphone - I was obviously writing something. Geoff interrupted the silence, "Can I ask you a question, Dave? I'd like to know what are you writing." "They are prompts of things I want to come back to," I reply. Geoff responded:

"Things we have said? I mention it because, for me, one of the things your writing does here is it stops me from being in relationship with you, not completely of course, but it makes it difficult, because you are not looking at me. So, if you are writing down what is on that tape then I suggest you don't. I know you are interested in relational space, but what you are doing now diminishes it, or to put it differently, when you put down your pen and look at me it vastly improves the quality of the relational space."

Touche - I suddenly felt as if the earth had opened in front of me and I could see strata of meaning beneath the ground on which I had been standing. As I attempt to represent the experience now in writing I am only vaguely aware of some of the questions. Is my inquiry more internal that I espouse? Do I aspire to the qualities of relational inquiry while, when in a tough situation, I retreat into myself rather than holding open the space in which meaning might emerge "between" us? I put down my pen and the conversation moved to the paper I had written before the session on my emerging methodology. I can now see that the paper was an attempt to present a tidy account of my inquiry process but in writing, it had become detached from my practice. A metaphor was forming in my mind as the session unfolded. I

had managed to build a greenhouse in which I was cultivating my inquiry. If I was to take these stories out of the greenhouse and plant them in the garden they would be vulnerable to wind and rain, pests and predators. But am I content to cultivate something that can only live in a greenhouse?

The hour was nearly over but I was now ready to read my freefall writing. This is what I had written:

Could my PhD be my way of doing things in the world - the way in which I make choices about what I do and how I do them? The past few months have been hectic and often I feel pressured into spaces that are not life giving... my motives may include financial benefit, political necessity, etc. How might I make these choices deliberately creative - opening spaces in which I find an alignment of self, purpose and others?

My current choices are around the 4P, the RIS, and the Budapest process²⁶ as potential sites of fruitful inquiry.

What are the blockages?

- Fear of missed opportunities
- Of failure to fulfill the contract
- Self-affirming "I'm needed around here"
- Of financial uncertainty
- Of threats to home life and personal relationships

If I try to move to a place in which these spaces are more creative what might life be like?

Where do I flourish?

Where have I flourished recently?

- In and with others in learning relationships
- In a training planning meeting (although there was a strong shadow with another participant that deserves attention)
- In conversations with students, but not with faculty

²⁶ These were three projects in which I was involved at the time.

What are the differences?

My motives, skills, interests in alignment

Receptivity - is such space based on reciprocal commitment or can reciprocity or acceptance be created by one party?

How can it be lost?

Perhaps my inquiry can be expressed differently...

"In search of integrity and presence - the key to my professional practice"

As I finished reading I was surprised by several voices speaking at once: "Wow - that's exciting (Nick) that is alive, (Geoff) it's juicy, so full of juice"

"But, it feels like bullet points," I said.

"Well, listen to what you are being told," Geoff responded, "This is living inquiringly".

"There are dashes and dotted lines .." I noted.

"Yes, yes", they chorused, "but this is fertile ground."

"The ground may be messy but the way I talk about it doesn't need to be," I argued.

"Yes it does, yes it does," was the response.

"How are we going to smell and taste this beautiful garden if all you are doing is saying "there is a beautiful garden." This is different from saying - sometimes I reflect-in-action and sometimes I write in my journal. That is telling your reader that you do inquiry. It isn't showing me your inquiry. Have the courage to put this into your work - appreciate its qualities which are unfinished, raw, all this brings as well as lacks. It's alive. In process. By sharing it you allow me to enter this world."

Thank you, CARPP colleagues. I had been focusing my inquiry on ways in which I might create a relational space with others only to be surprised by it as a gift from others. There are many blockages to relational inquiry, but perhaps the most significant is in myself - my attempt to pre-meditate my participation, to withhold what is incomplete, to not trust myself to a sentence whose end lies in the future out of my control. Geoff wrote a note on the bottom of my paper on methodology that he forwarded after the session: "I see you on the threshold of another breakthrough (and you may find it where you least expect it... in the mess and the

dirt and the ashes). What would it be like to step more fully into this place of not knowing?"

Glimpsing the *perichoresis*

I end this chapter with an anecdote that hints at an answer to this question.

Catherine LaCugna (1973) offers the following insight that flows from a relational ontology of the Trinity: "There are neither leaders or followers in the divine dance, only an eternal movement of reciprocal giving and receiving ..." (1973, 312). In September 2008 I participated in a clowning workshop facilitated by Chris Seeley and Carol Thompson. Early in the session we were invited to wander casually around the room and then asked to glance at others as we passed, fixing on the eyes briefly before passing on. As the activity built we were told to catch someone's gaze and hold it, moving around the room in such a way as to keep in eye contact. There were smiles and giggles as we swirled around one another or bounced up above someone's head to avoid someone getting in the way. We experimented with distance, moving closer or further away while fixed on each others eyes. Then we were asked to keep eye contact while trying to hide from each other as we moved. My partner picked up a cushion to cover her face, revealing just her eyes. Someone else grabbed the cushion and for a few moments four of us were tangled up in a spontaneous dance of hide and seek with the cushion.

This focus on the eyes was sustained throughout the remainder of the day as we began to learn of their crucial role in the way the clown communicates with his/her audience. Working from the self that is hidden by the mask, that contact is crucial.

I noticed the eyes the following day at the end of the Singapore Grand Prix. Following the bitter rivalry between Alonso and Hamilton in the 2007 season this was the first time they had both appeared on the rostrum together. Three times Hamilton gestured towards Alonso but there was no indication of its return. This

provoked a comment from me about the importance of eye contact. "Yes," Wanda, my wife, responded, "and I noticed, when you told me this week that the Centre was not going to renew your contract, how you kept your eyes from me."

This triggered further reflection on what had been happening in recent weeks. I had noticed that one member of the staff with whom I had worked closely had not been able to look me directly in the face since the university had taken its decision to terminate our agreement. I had been trying to thaw the relationship and now realised how important eye contact is to restoring confidence. There was a quality of relating in the clowning exercise that has not been evident in my organisational setting in recent weeks with implications for our shared understanding and corporate action. Relational tension was paralysing our action.

The clowning activity continued in pairs and we were invited to take turns in leading the other in mirror movements. As our hand, body and facial movements became more pronounced and dramatic I began to realise the difficulty of trying to think about my actions. It became easier to let myself fall into the activity (a bit like freefall writing in movement). After a few minutes the facilitator suggested we change from being leader or follower and continue the exercise without pre-determining who would lead or follow. For a few moments we both hesitated, waiting for a movement from the other. I moved first and my partner followed but then continued my movement further and I felt myself drawn to follow. It was a fairly clumsy dance but my body felt alert and attentive. I noticed that I was watching my partner's hand or face and found it difficult to anticipate what might happen next. I drew my focus back to take in the whole person, noticing the subtle clues of facial muscle or body tilt that indicated a change in gesture or lead helping us find a synchronicity in our movements.

We were ready for the final stage of the exercise. We were now standing in a loose circle of five with just enough distance between us to allow us to swing our arms. We began by making eye contact with one and then another, trying to hold open a relationship with everyone else in the group. Then we were invited to lead or

follow one other as we introduced movement and sound to our activity. As we began one member yawned involuntarily and we all mirrored her action, which made her laugh - an action we also followed, creating a sense of well being amongst us, the smile remaining on our faces as the exercise continued. As we settled into the exercise there were more subtle changes. At times I was consciously choosing to follow but then I would follow a movement in a slightly different way and someone would notice the variation, exaggerating it as she followed me. I noticed, to my surprise, that for a brief moment I had led the group, but then it had moved forward and I was, again, following. We needed to be reminded to keep eye contact with each other. The person to my left was to one side and I noticed her on several occasions leaning forward to catch my eye - a gesture we all tried to follow.

This was a complex exercise and I would have liked to work with it more. It provided a quality of experiential knowing that is difficult to present in linear text. The invitation to attend to the eyes, gestures and sound in four other individuals as well as choosing when to follow and when to lead was exhausting but fun. I became conscious of the importance of focal and peripheral attention, trying to hold eye contact for subtle clues to what might happen next, catching in the corner of my vision a change in movement from someone else. I noticed the amazing variety of ways each individual followed and then took forward the sounds or movements of others. For a few brief moments it was possible to glimpse a rhythm or flow that I imagined might emerge in more pronounced ways with practise.

I saw the exercise as a metaphor of healthy organisational life. In a crisis we revert to hierarchy and procedure. In a recent meeting in which we were de-briefing on a policy decision by our university partner I became frustrated and asked if we could move on. "I'm in the chair and will decide when we move to the next agenda item" I was told. There was little evidence of shared leadership in the meeting. But then there are moments when no one is paying attention to who is in charge and our corporate activities are mutually reinforcing and enriching.

Value or Virtue?

As I continue to probe the experiences explored in this chapter I am aware of how easily my actions descend into hubris, assuming my way of reading the world is the right one and imposing my will on others. What is the quality of being that might moderate the hubris and enable me to participate in life, as I did in the clowning exercise, giving focal and peripheral attention to what is happening around me, sometimes leading with a gesture, or joyfully responding to others?

Hubris, Woodruff (2001) suggests, is power without reverence. Reverence has a slightly quaint, old-fashioned feel to it. The ancient virtues have, in my lifetime, slipped from daily conversation, to be replaced by the much over-used word, values. But, as Skidelsky (2010) has pointed out, values are not inherent in the thing that is valued, they are rooted in the act of valuing. Since a value is attributed we can describe a value system without adopting it. "Anything can become a value simply by being valued; the noun is parasitic upon the verb" (ibid 14). In its original use a value simply referred to the price or worth of something. It was adopted, according to Skidelsky, by philosophers in the 19th century as a technical term of evaluation for objects of moral or aesthetic worth, emerging in mainstream culture in the 20th century as "the debased coin of the modern moral economy" (ibid).

When justice or integrity is reduced to a value, its worth can fluctuate by circumstance. So, for example, respect as a value must be earned, that is, it is given on the basis of the opinion I might form of the other person. But, as Woodruff says, "such a condition would shoot a crippling confusion into the heart of any organisation" (Woodruff 2001, 181). I need to live from a place that is less vulnerable to hubris. I may espouse the value of respect for others yet show little of the virtue of reverence.

Reverence arises from an inner harmony that is aware of my own place in the world and in awe of the other, particularly what is different and unknown. Several incidents explored in this chapter reminded me of the limits of my own knowledge.

I have also been brought to face the mystery of others. I cannot fully know the motivations and intentions of others. Reverence welcomes the company of other souls and minds. By nurturing a humble attitude, reverence undergirds good judgement, "the intellectual virtue by which we make reasonable decisions in the absence of knowledge" (Woodruff 2001, 184). Good judgement, as Coles (2002) reminds us, is a key quality of professional practice. So although I might act confidently I must hold lightly to my conclusions, considering them what in philosophy is called *defeasible* (Woodruff 2001, 184), always alert to the possibility that the conclusion was wrong.

The inner harmony that is manifested in reverence is an emotional, rather than a rational condition. "The reverent soul remembers how to feel what it ought to feel about itself and about other people" (Woodruff 2001, 88). This quality, it seems to me is not just expressed in the discipline of self-control. It is an inner instinct capable of monitoring the complex feelings arising in my social relationships that incline me to do the right thing. I need to expand my emotional vocabulary to bring this process to greater consciousness.

A reverential attitude of inquiry then requires attention not just to thinking and acting, but feeling, thinking and acting. There is a simplicity about this that embraces the contradictions and conflicts of a relationship, learning to forgive the reality for what it has become and accepting my own complicity in creating it. I concluded the last chapter by recognising the need to attend to feelings as a crucial measure of my relationship to what is going on in the world. This has deepened through this chapter into a vital quality of relational inquiry, embracing the other with humility, recognising I cannot fully know but must fully engage.

This is a virtue that was to be severely tested in the final cycle of my inquiry.