

A Pedagogy of the Privileged learning with the uppers

Upper[s]: people who are in a context dominant or superior to lowers.

A person can be an upper in one context and a lower in another.

Robert Chambers, 1997



The City Dump Slum story was so far out of my own frames of reference I couldn't really take it in. If I just sit in the face of complexity, what does such witnessing do to change anything – I am changed – is that enough? What difference does building the strength or capacity to do this make? Has anything changed in the lives of the people we are visiting at the slum? Not as far as I am aware. Did anything changed in my life? Yes... a little.

Following the visit to the slum, I was due to give my presentation to the conference on the work of the New Academy of Business. As well as the experience at the slum, I had heard the other conference participants speaking with huge competence and experience about their own social mobilization projects, and I began to feel ashamed that I could claim to have anything to say on the subject. I'd done a couple of projects for the ILO, and whilst I might pass for an "expert" in rural India, I didn't have social mobilization running in my veins as the other delegates seemed to here. After all, I'd

come here to the home of Paulo Freire and I had one day left before I was to give my presentation on social change and the mass marketing programmes I'd worked on in Ghana and India. I was to be part of one of the last panels at the conference.

I realized just how different the experiential base of many of the Brazilian, Peruvian and Colombian speakers was about intervening for social change in financially poor places. There was a man there from Ghana, too. And here I was, a rich white woman from England coming to tell people how it's done. Increasingly... this is not what I was thinking at all. By the lunchtime before the day of my session, I decided to take the afternoon away from the conference, go back to my hot hotel room and decide what I really had to say to these people, in the light of the stories they'd been telling so far. What did I actually have the right to talk about in this context?



The day came for me to offer my presentation. I now felt more confident that I could speak about something useful from the wider scheme of things that wasn't just a pale imitation or beginner's version of the kinds of skills that many of the other delegates seemed to have developed.

I started with an aerial photograph of my village. I wanted to show people that I lived somewhere small, modest, to try and make contact through similarity. I mentioned that it was unusual for me to be by the sea and to be in a city, let alone in South America for the first time. By doing this, I wanted to step back from my unearned privilege and show my humanity.

Next, I presented the material I felt I had a unique right to in the context of this conference. By doing this, I wanted to step up to my earned privilege. I called my revised presentation “A Pedagogy of the Privileged¹⁸⁷” and spoke about my educational work with other world “uppers” in the move to transform “oppressor consciousness” towards a commitment to growing a “critical consciousness” with regard to issues of both social and ecological justice (Freire 1996, Shor and Freire 1987). My understanding is that, as for people in oppressed situations, the oppressors, too, are responsible for the “midwifery of their own liberating pedagogy” (Freire, 1996: 30).

Freire says: “discovering himself to be an oppressor may cause considerable anguish, but does not necessarily lead to solidarity with the oppressed. Rationalizing his guilt through paternalistic treatment of the oppressed, all the while holding them fast in a position of dependence, will not do. Solidarity requires that one enter into the situation of those with whom one is solidary; it is a radical posture... The oppressor is solidary with the oppressed only when he stops regarding the oppressed as an abstract category and sees them as persons who have been unjustly dealt with, deprived of their voice, cheated in the sale of their labor – when he stops making pious, sentimental and individualistic gestures and risks an act of love” (Freire, 1996: 31-32). Bearing this in mind, the key issues I raised during my presentation were:

- Working with the “élite” (those with unearned and earned privilege...) to reflect on practice, to cultivate mindful action and to rebalance power relations... *a kind of conscientisation of the élite*;
- The practices of offering skills, experience, contacts and ideas to... and learning from... people with less power and privilege;
- The need for the global élite to develop skills in stepping up to and stepping back from power, and that “upper” and “lower” status is all relative from situation to situation;
- Questioning that if I am working at a systemic level, how can I possibly work in one part of the global system without having experience of the other?

Finally, I dared to raise the issue of love and compassion, projecting this slide last. By doing this, I wanted to open up a chink of space to be able to step aside from the issues of earned and unearned privilege altogether.

¹⁸⁷ This title came to me in that Brazilian hotel room. It is an expression that has also come to other people recently. I have had several conversations where people asked where I'd got it from as they'd also coined the phrase. Perhaps it is an idea that is somehow “breaking through” into consciousness. I don't wish to claim it as my own.

I felt confident and pleased during the presentation and the questions afterwards that I had been able to come from a position that was grounded in the heartland of my experience (working with “upper” learners), rather than an experimental edge (devising social marketing plans). Through simultaneous translation, the three hundred or so delegates appeared attentive. Afterwards, without translators available, it wasn’t easy for me to get a sense of direct feedback from the mainly Portuguese and Spanish speaking delegates. I did receive encouraging comments back from the small English-speaking contingent, but as can often be the case, I found it difficult to discern between confidence-building supportive comments and “real” feedback from people I hardly knew. Now, two and a half years later, I still carry an internal sense of “having done the right thing” and having somehow been true to the experience of the groups of learners I work with in the United Kingdom.



Compassion is not altruism but self-love and other-love at once.

In loving others I am loving myself and indeed involved in my own best interests and biggest and fullest self interest.

Compassion is a matter of common survival.

Learning with the uppers

These experiences in Brazil offer a conceptual bridge between my learning with the lowers and my learning with the uppers. This chapter complements and is juxtaposed to the previous chapter (*Do you want to change the world? – Learning with the lowers*) as it is concerned with exploring the behaviours and challenges particular to me as an upper making contact with other uppers and me as an educator-learner working with other uppers in the development of the kind of critical consciousness that Paulo Freire indicated was necessary for both uppers and lowers to develop in order to become “restorers of the humanity of both... no longer oppressor nor longer oppressed, but human in the process of achieving freedom” (Freire, 1996: 26, 31).

I include in this my own learning through my work as an educator to slowly, gradually restore my own humanity in ways which neither leave me as oppressed nor oppressor. As I have already demonstrated in previous chapters, this learning has also included opening my awareness to my being and acting as oppressed and oppressor at the same time.

I am reminded in that last phrase of a short clowning improvisation where the clown on stage ended up holding on tightly to the end of the very rope which bound his arms down to his body. Watching the improvised imagery of this act of self-oppression unfold, I noted that perhaps the whole point of the clowning was to help the person take the rope off of himself. My clowning teacher Vivian said: “You don’t learn anything unless you do the thing you don’t want to do... the process of liberation is so wonderful – it’s only a convention that you’re a prisoner... the clown occupies the liberated space between the oppressor and the oppressed” (notes taken on 22 August 2004, at Ringsfield Village Hall during *The Clown and Shakespeare* workshop).

What have my lines of inquiry been which lie beneath this chapter? What gives me a right to have a voice in this exploration?

I will not explore the full range of “upper to upper” educational and second person inquiry facilitation work I have been involved in over the last five years, which has included working with eight or nine substantial, long term second person inquiry interventions, with more than 150 learners. Instead I will pick out two threads of inquiry from the full range, based on the richness and longevity of one thread - **my educational work over the last six years as an Intake Tutor on the MSc in Responsibility and Business Practice at the University of Bath** - and the contrast of the seemingly intractable difficulties and detail of the second thread - **my repeated failure to make contact with a course leader as I first started and then stopped working with a different educational establishment**. I work with both these threads in ways that pay attention to kinds of presentational knowing I encourage in the learners I work with.

Here is an indication of the range of experiences from which these two threads have been drawn¹⁸⁸:

- Co-leading four two-year cohorts of the University of Bath's MSc in Responsibility and Business Practice (2000-2006 and ongoing).
- Facilitating a series of group learning sessions about action research as a way of approaching social development projects for voluntary and civil service workers in the East Midlands (2002).
- Facilitating two three-year cooperative inquiry groups for the UK Cabinet Office's Public Service Leaders' Scheme programme (2002-2006).
- Facilitating evaluation and development projects for rural Time Banks using a second person inquiry group approach (2002-2005).
- Supervising the development and evolution of the action research component of a new Masters' degree in Leading Change through Action Research for a University (2003-2006).
- Presenting at an EGOS Colloquium on "training action researchers" (June 2004, Slovenia).
- Writing, submitting and subsequently having rejected an article on action research education within the context of sustainability for the Action Research Journal (November 2004).
- Supervising action researchers teaching other action researchers for a county-based Child Protection Committee (2004).
- Co-facilitating action research learners in a think tank for new economics (2004-2005).
- Co-facilitating a second person inquiry for team managers and workers at a major London-based drugs project during a period of rapid growth for the organization (2004-2006).
- Co-designing and co-leading Wales-wide project with ten parallel second-person inquiry groups each researching a different thematic aspect of public service leadership in Wales, including facilitating of one of the inquiry groups (2004-2006 and ongoing).
- Co-convening and facilitating a second person inquiry group addressing issues of carbon reduction through product-to-service shifts in industry (2004-2006 and ongoing).
- Supervising a project consultant who has convened an action learning set for whole systems change work in children's services (2006 and ongoing).

¹⁸⁸ What isn't included in this list? Large scale, third person, one off and short term work – which, in its own right, is full of learning of a different kind. I am choosing not to include this stream of my work here as, by its very one-to-many and/or shorter term focus means that the contact that is being made with others is fleeting (there is less to get my teeth stuck into in terms of this writing) and, particularly, it often requires quite a strong, authoritarian holding of space (for example, when facilitating 230 people playing six parallel games, with six teams per game, looking at complexity and sustainability issues). This kind of space-holding is important and useful in its own right, and, in my experience can denote an appropriate holding of power-over space. I just need to draw the line somewhere with what is included in this writing.

What have been my inquiry questions as this work has unfolded?

In the early days (around 2000), as an apprentice facilitator (on the MSc in Responsibility and Business Practice at the University of Bath) who'd only heard the term "action inquiry" for the first time a year previously, my own inquiries were understandably focused on issues of getting by and survival:

Early days questions

- Who am I here?
- How do I find my own power (from within, and with), when it seems all the positional power is stacked up elsewhere (working alongside Peter Reason)?
- What right have I got to be with people while they are learning about action research when I am so inexperienced at it myself?

In May 2004, I wrote about these early days: *to start with, I was not easily able to untangle the mess of my parallel roles as student-participant and facilitator-apprentice-participant on two different intakes of the course. The overlapping year difficult and confusing characterised by role ambiguity. As a student-participant I was enthusiastic, interested and engaged. As a facilitator-apprentice-participant though, I didn't really know when to speak, when to keep quiet, when to ask questions and when I thought I ought to know the answers. I didn't even know where to sit in the room – next to Peter, in amongst the students, on my own at the back? My intuition failed me.*

Peter was steadfastly generous as I began to learn from him the craft of the action inquiry facilitator, but the group I was supposed to be co-facilitating often turned into a painful place for me to be, with some students becoming hostile and unsupportive of my role and me wondering what on earth I'd let myself in for. My role as apprentice had not been clearly framed during the first workshop and one student even asked if I was having to retake year one because I'd failed. Another asked me to do her photocopying for her. Another refused to have me as her shadow learning group tutor. The anxiety I felt transmitted to the group and their responses in turn perpetuated the difficulties we encountered together for almost a year in a rather destructive feedback loop. My confidence strengthened after I had successfully graduated from my own MSc and my sense of the ambiguity of having multiple roles and identities in the system loosened. The group I was working with as Peter's co-facilitator and apprentice softened and I began to do some more solid work more directly with the students as they prepared for writing their own final projects. After all, I'd completed my own project, I knew the process from the inside out and I could directly relate to the students as they struggled to express themselves. The role ambiguity of the first year had now evolved into an empathy of having "been there too", with my action inquiry learning having a close proximity to that of the students I was working with. Both my self-esteem and my credibility in the group grew.

As an action inquiry educator, I came to realise around this point that I was a co-learner. The emphasis in my inquiries (in these contexts) being on facilitating the group learning process whilst the student participants I work with have their own different learning agendas. This notion was tested as I started to work with another new MSc group in 2002. One participant in this new group (who was employed at a business school at the time) questioned the differences between our respective roles and expressed her difficulty in stepping out of “facilitator mode” into “student mode”. I told her the story of my coming to understand myself as a co-learner and suggested that she did the same. After two years of doing this work, I began to believe that my experience was starting to count for something.

Thankfully, this moved on to a “getting better” phase, starting in about 2002, where my experience had grown and now I was officially a co-facilitator and not an apprentice (I’d found it hard and upsetting, or perhaps more accurately, my ego had found it hard, to return to an apprentice role after a decade of running my own consultancy). By this stage, I had started to work more extensively in a solo capacity with action research learners – both with whole inquiry groups and with smaller learning groups.

Getting better questions

- How do I place myself relative to my co-facilitators?
- How do I assert my ways of doing this work?
- How do I stand up in what I know without imposing it on others?

In February 2004, I received feedback from a course participant which spoke to these questions: *“Peter giving Chris a bit more space as the workshops went along which allowed you [Chris] to really show your identity in what you were bringing into the course. In workshop five the space was really given to Chris and she was able to bring a lot more into it.”*

And again, in May 2004, I wrote about this time of things getting better: *sometimes I am tearful when I read student-participant’s work – some things leap off the page, where the all-human, eco-centric story has been touched, a glimpse of a daring brave and momentary escape from the dominant Western mindset, stories of loss, vulnerability, glimpses of love, glimpses of something bigger. A photograph, a poem. Bypassing the intellect. I think in this work there’s a need for encouragement and challenge, joy and trauma, light heartedness and solemnity.*

More recently, I feel that I have been coming into my own with this work. I have a new co-facilitator for the MSc at Bath, who (loosely speaking) was apprenticed-in between 2004-2006, bringing that learning full cycle as I am now the more directly experienced one of us two at this MSc work. The questions I carry with me now are:

Coming into my own questions

- What is it to love these learners? And what happens to my facilitation practice in those moments of those generous feelings of love?
- What is it that I bring to this work?

*I find it quite tense to write - and then publicly display – my understanding of what I am now bringing to this work. Making such claims to competence has an evil twin, hubris, lurking round the corner. “Do yourself justice!” says my supervisor, and I’m caught on the polarized horns of hubris versus not doing myself justice. And then, there’s the issue of substantiating any claims – yes, but, where’s your **evidence**, Chris? How are you going to **prove** it to me? – some rationalist voice pipes up in my imagination. Well, here goes with the public display, and what will follow is an exploration of this work in ways which speak to my understanding about what it is that I bring to this, potentially the most meaningful (to me) strand of my work.*

What is it that I think I bring to this work of learning with the uppers?

- Practices of building enough trust with learners to laugh and cry at the same time, about living and loving in the shit, about recognizing the light and the dark arising as single gesture;
- A capacity to stay in a state of “unconditional positive regard” (which has got better during the time I have been doing this work) (Rogers, 1989);
- An ability to communicate and connect, not so much across a divide, but at a creaturely level.
- Eye contact. This is important and I’ve learned more about that from the clowning than anything else¹⁸⁹.
- An understanding that this is not a therapeutic relationship – this is an educational relationship. We’re learning about each other from each other, gazing at another human trying to get on with life in their various ways with an explicit agenda of turning to face – and “building the muscle” to remain in the face of – the great issues of our time – climate change, species extinction, the growing polarization of the haves and the have-nots, our disconnection from natural systems and cycles and so on...
- A strong emphasis on the value and necessity of presentational knowing as part of the inquiry mix, particularly, to repeat from the point above, to face the great issues of our time.

¹⁸⁹ *Warning: moment of the potentially grossest hubris coming up...* “corporate” poet David Whyte tells a story of working with a group of nuns. The Mother Superior asked him if he knew the story of when St Peter is in a boat with several other apostles in the middle of a bad storm. At one point, they see a figure walking toward them on the water (Christ). Then they are asked by Jesus to step out of the boat in faith and come towards him, while he holds unwavering eye contact with them. In my own small way (how do I even approach saying this without hubris – for god’s sake, asking people to step out and walk on water. I ask you...), I recognise *something* in offering the steady gaze that directly says - eyeball to eyeball – you *can* do this *and* you’re taking a risk *and* it might be hard but the only way you’ll do it is by having the courage of your conviction. You’ll see an example of an incident that felt something like this in Pauline’s story later in this chapter.

What is it to love these learners?

When I am able to forget myself and my anxieties of knowing the territory, the authors, the stories, then I can love these learners.

When I am able to just be in the room and watch people learning, watch their expressions change, watch them as a speaker says something that's really relevant to their inquiries and we look at each other to exchange a knowing glance.

When I can hear, see, feel their engagement, then I'm engaged, too. Then, when I am able to forget myself and my own anxieties, then I can, for a moment or two or three love these learners.

When I am able to offer feedback that says you're right on it here, and they know it and I know it – or, you're not right on it here, what happened, what's really going on for you (and they know it and I know it), then I can, for a moment or two or three, love these learners.

When I am quiet and still and absolutely there in support of these learners, discussing and probing and challenging and congratulating each other, and the questioner might glance over to me with a face that says – is this OK, have I gone too far here? Am I pushing too much? And without words I say go for it.

When we have these silent conversations, then I can, for a moment or two or three, love these learners.

When I watch an oil executive cutting a big gold heart out of paper, then I can love these learners.

When, for the first time in a group, it feels as if I needn't be there, then I can love these learners.

But when they can't be bothered. Or when they sit sending text messages. Or when they sit with their eyes shut time after time and avoid contact. Then, for a moment or two or three, I'm maybe not so sure.

In a feedback session from MSc learners in February 2004, one participant said: “I feel a real care about the course and our learning. It makes me think that this [MSc] is really important”; “What you've really put into the course is a lot of care for the way you hold the space every time we get together and also your genuine interest in our development”; “thank you very much for the passion and the care that you've brought. I don't think that the group would have developed the personality that it has if it wasn't for this”.

Similarly, in a telephone conversation with Tim Malnick (fellow MSc student graduate and at the time of the conversation in May 2004, newest MSc staff apprentice), he noted that “teaching inquiry is about learning to love the participants” . One of the students had also noted this three months previously when she said (to both Peter Reason and me): “your mission is based on the love of your students and not that you think you have the right answers and you’re right. Your humanity shows. Your humanity and your love of your students are what make the difference. It’s almost a parenting role and I appreciate that.”

Educationalist, Parker Palmer says: “the kind of community I am calling for is a community that exists at the heart of knowing, of epistemology, of reaching and learning, of pedagogy; that kind of community depends centrally on two ancient and honorable kinds of love. The first is love of learning itself. The simple ability to take sheer joy in having a new idea, reaffirming or discarding an old one, connecting two or more notions that had hitherto seemed alien to each other, sheer joy in building images of reality with mere words that now suddenly seem more like mirrors of truth—this is love of learning. And the second kind of love on which this community depends is love of learners, of those we see every day, who stumble and crumble, who wax hot and cold, who sometimes want truth and sometimes evade it at all costs, but who are in our care and who—for their sake, ours, and the world’s—deserve all the love that the community of teaching and learning has to offer” (Parker, 1987).



An Educational Partnership

The course is offered by the Centre for Action Research in Professional Practice in the School of Management at the University of Bath, UK in partnership with the New Academy of Business. The New Academy is an independent educational body founded in 1995 by Anita Roddick, Founder of The Body Shop International. Its objective is to encourage businesses to match high standards of social and environmental responsibility with successful business performance.

Staffing

The staff team includes Professors Jill Marshall and Peter Reason at the University of Bath, Dr David Murphy and Dr Rupesh Shah at the New Academy of Business, Dr Gill Coleman, Chris Seeley and David Ballard.

Fees

£5,000 per annum (2004 & 2005 intakes)
In addition, participants will need to pay for accommodation and meals during the residential workshops.

Electronic mail access

Participants and staff will maintain contact and exchange written materials between workshops; some of this will be using email.

Assessment

Participants will complete several short written assignments throughout the two years, based on applying course learning in their own organisational setting and other contexts. They will also conduct a more sustained action project during the second year of the degree.

MSc in Responsibility & Business Practice

For further information and a brochure contact:

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Website: <http://www.bath.ac.uk/carpp/msc.htm>

or:
2005 UPDATE:

The MSc in Responsibility and Business Practice was run in an educational partnership between the University of Bath and the New Academy of Business (NAB) until late 2004. In 2005, NAB was formally dissolved and re-organized as the Association of Sustainability Practitioners – many of whom are graduates and course participants of the MSc.

Fees for 2006 intake - £5750 per annum

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New Academy of Business



MSc in

Responsibility & Business Practice

An innovative management degree addressing social, environmental and ethical issues

A two year part-time course



Aims

This course addresses the challenges currently facing those managers who seek to integrate successful business practice with a concern for social, environmental and ethical issues. It looks at the complex relationship between business decisions and their impact on local and world communities and economies, on the environment and on the workplace itself. Participants will develop management practices which are responsive to pressures for greater awareness in these areas. The course offers a wide range of alternative perspectives on business, all of which challenge ideas about where "responsibility" begins and ends. Participants will learn about management techniques and approaches being developed in leading-edge organizations, and will

test the relevance of these ideas and practices in their own work environments.

Many management programmes treat "management" as if it were a value-free activity, unconnected to the social and environmental consequences of business. Many managers are concerned about the impact business has on communities and environments, both local and global, but do not know how to bridge the gaps between their beliefs and hopes, and the reality of their working lives. This course addresses these issues. It aims to equip participants with the skills, knowledge and awareness both to review their own practice and to play an active part in moving organizations towards a more values-aware orientation.

Course participants will:

- gain knowledge of current thinking on globalization, sustainable business, new economic approaches, human needs in the workplace, diversity, and corporate citizenship
- hear from managers in leading edge organizations, who are developing values-aware business practices
- carry out action-experiments in their own workplaces, and develop skills in disciplined action-learning
- develop their capacities as informed and self-aware individuals and as contributors to organisational change
- participate in the growing world-wide debate on the purposes and responsibilities of businesses

The Course

Topics to be covered are:

- Workshop 1: Globalization and the new context of business
- Workshop 2: New economics
- Workshop 3: Ecology and sustainable development
- Workshop 4: Sustainable corporate management
- Workshop 5: Humanity and enterprise
- Workshop 6: Corporate Citizenship
- Workshop 7: Diversity and difference: globalization revisited
- Workshop 8: Self and world futures

The course is part-time for two years, based on a series of eight intensive residential workshops, each of 5 days duration. It is designed as a process of action inquiry, drawing on the expertise in this form of adult learning established at the Centre for Action Research in Professional Practice at Bath. Each workshop will be an exploration of a perspective on "responsible" management. Participants will be introduced to critical issues and practices, stimulated by focused inputs from

leading international authorities, and by presentations from practitioners in organizations currently developing innovative business practices. There will be vigorous debate and critique of these issues in the course community. The development of relevant action inquiry skills – to enable participants to conduct action experiments in their organizations and other contexts – will be a core feature of the programme. Participants will work in learning sets to review their activities.

Who is the course for?

This is a challenging programme, aimed at managers and others who are ready to ask searching questions about how modern business is carried out, the consequences and the alternatives. It will be especially suitable for people working within companies addressing issues of corporate responsibility, those seeking to take the role of change agents within their organizations, or those undertaking postgraduate education as a form of personal and professional development. The course is international in scope, and is designed to be accessible to people living outside the United Kingdom.

MSc in Responsibility & Business Practice

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Workshop 1

Globalization and the new context of business

This workshop will establish the purpose, culture and scope of the programme. It will consider the context of international business and "globalization" as viewed from different perspectives and paradigms. This will include exploring the nature of markets, the role of international institutions such as GATT, IMF and the World Bank; human rights, colonisation and fair trade; the impact of new technologies; the ecology of business; and the impact of human activities on the environment. Issues and dilemmas concerning responsibility and business practice will be identified for further exploration. Also, participants will be introduced to the principles and practices of inquiry and action research, and begin to develop their own individual learning priorities for the programme.

Sample reading:
Brown, L. R. (2001) *Eco-Economy* (WV Norton & Co.); Capra F (1996) *The Web of Life* (Harper Collins); Koren, D. C. (1995) *When Corporations Rule the World* (Earthscan); Brown, L. World Watch Institute *Annual State of the World Report*; von Weizsäcker, E. U. (1994) *Earth Politics* (Zed Books); Tilly, N. M., McGill, A. R. & St Clair (1997) *Corporate Global Citizenship* (New Lexington Press); Slightiz, J. E. (2002) *Globalization and Its Discontents*.

Workshop 5

Humanity and enterprise

This workshop will consider the relation of human experience and needs to work and enterprise. Individual, organizational, social and spiritual perspectives will be explored, offering an inquiry into the roles of work as part of life, as a provider of meaning, as aesthetic and creative activity, as well as being an economic activity. The workshop will explore the emergence of new meanings of work, lifestyles and enterprise which reach beyond the materialist assumptions of contemporary society to complement their attention to managerial and organizational implications; participants will be invited to review the meanings of work in the context of their own lives.

Sample reading:
Fox, M. (1992) *The Reorientation of Work: A new vision of freedom for our time* (Harper); Spretnak, C. (1992) *States of Grace: The recovery of meaning in the postmodern age* (Harper); Whicker, M. (1992) *Leadership and the New Science*; Law, A. (1997) *Open Minds* (Oxon); Levin, K. & Regnier, B. (1999) *The Soul at Work* (Oxon); Shaw, J. (2002) *Changing Conversations in Organisations* (Routledge).

Workshop 2

New economics

This workshop will begin a scrutiny of the neo-liberal economic framework which underlies business thinking and macro-economic policy from a number of different perspectives. It will consider the impacts of our current system of economic valuing on human activities, both inside and outside business, and will look at alternatives which are emerging with the explicit intention of placing social justice, quality of life and environmental sustainability at the heart of economics. Attention will be paid to practical as well as theoretical developments, including the macro level devolving new economic indicators which incorporate activities and resources which are currently unaccounted for in economic terms, and at the micro level developing new measures of corporate accountability through an active process of social and ethical auditing.

Sample reading:
Daly, H. E. (1996) *Beyond Growth: the economics of sustainable development* (Beacon Press); Ekins, P. & Max Neel, M. (1992) *Real Life Economics: understanding wealth creation* (Routledge); Robertson, J. (1998), *Transforming Economic Life* (Totnes, Devon: Schumaner Society); Waring, M. (1988) *Counting for Nothing* (Bridget William Books); Ayres, R. (1998) *Turning Point* (Earthscan); Meyer, A. (2000) *Contraction & Convergence: Global solutions to climate change* (Green Books Ltd); Pettifor, A. (2003) *Real World Economic Outlook* (Palgrave/Macmillan).

Workshop 6

Corporate citizenship

This workshop will consider the arguments that the role of organizations in society is changing, from the perspective of contemporary developments in corporate practice and presentation. This will include reviewing historical shifts in the political and legal status of corporations, and issues of leadership, governance and accountability associated with the growing prominence of ideas such as "stakeholder capitalism", "corporate citizenship" and "corporate social responsibility". The ethical, social and wider global responsibilities of corporations, and of the managers who run them, will be explored.

Sample reading:
Logan, D., Roy, D. & Regelbrugge, L. (1997) *Global Corporate Citizenship* (Ethical Foundation); Wheeler, D. & Sitaropoulos, M. (1997) *The Stakeholder Corporation* (Pitman); McIntosh, M., Leipzig, D., Jones, K. & Coleman, G. (1999) *Corporate Citizenship* (Financial Times/Human); Nelson, J. & Zadek, S. (2000) *Partnership Ideology* (Copenhagen Centre); Regelbrugge, L. ed. (1999) *Corporate Citizenship* (Washington, DC: CIVICUS); Tomishi, M., Thomas, K., Leipzig, D. & Coleman, G. (2003) *100 Years of Corporate Citizenship* (Ethical Foundation); Sloan, R., Murphy, & McIntosh, M. (2003) *Something to Believe In* (Greenleaf).

Workshop 3

Ecology and sustainable development

This workshop will explore ecological perspectives from several viewpoints including the Gaia hypothesis and natural ecology; systemic thinking; complexity theory; environmental management; and deep ecology. It is intended to provide an experience of nature as wilderness and will be held in a residential setting with access to the natural environment. Participants will be introduced to ecological thinking through direct experience of local ecosystems, using a process of co-operative inquiry.

Sample reading:
Berry, T. (1988) *The Dream of the Earth* (Sierra Club Books); Lovelock, J. E. (1979) *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (Oxford University Press); Miles, M. & Shiva, V. (1993) *Ecofeminism* (Zed Books); Abram, D. (1996) *The Spell of the Sensuous* (Vintage Books); Bateson, C. (1972) *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (Ballantine).

Workshop 4

Sustainable corporate management

"If business is prepared to re-examine it's underlying assumptions and taken... it will not only fulfill its own agenda of contributing to society by providing products, jobs, and prosperity but also mature a new era of ecological commerce" (Hawken, 1995, p.10). This module examines concepts of 'sustainable business', and considers whether practices being developed in environmental and wider sustainability auditing, reporting and management systems, and through approaches such as product stewardship and The Natural Step may suggest moves in this direction. Managers involved in organizations noted for their good practice in this field will be invited to talk about their strategies and experiences.

Sample reading:
Hawken, P. (1993) *The Ecology of Commerce* (Weldenfield and Nicholson); Elkington, J. (1998) *Cannibals with Forks: The triple bottom line in the 21st Century* (Capstone); Welford, R. (1997) *Hijacking Environmentalism* (Earthscan); Hawken, P., Lovins, A. B. & Lovins H. J. (1999) *Natural Capitalism* (Earthscan); Benedell, J. (ed) (2000) *Terms of Endearment* (Greenleaf); Stankey, R. & Welford, R. eds. (2001) *The Ecritisan Reader in Business and Sustainable Development* (Earthscan); Rowell, A. (1996) *Green Bookends* (Routledge); Waage, S. (2003) *Arts, Culture & Growth* (Greenleaf); Dunphy, D., Griffiths, A. & Beam, S. (2003) *Organizational Change for Corporate Sustainability* (Routledge); MacDonough, V. & Brundage, M. (2002) *Cradle to Cradle* (Rockdale Books).

Workshop 7

Diversity and difference: globalization revisited

This workshop will look again at issues of globalization, highlighting the viewpoints of the less privileged inhabitants of the planet. It will consider business from the perspective of social justice, raising questions of race and ethnicity, the place of women in world economics, international trade and human rights, and the relationship between countries of the South and North. It will reflect on the business world as a potentially neo-colonialist force, and will explore the ethical dilemmas that arise when diversity is acknowledged and respected.

Sample reading:
books, b. (1990) *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (Tamanara Books); Freire, P. (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Therender & Herder); Channors, R. (1997) *Whose Reality Counts? Putting the First Last* (Intermediate Technology Publications); Hines, C. (2000) *Localization: a global manifesto* (Earthscan).

Workshop 8

Self and world futures

As well as closing the programme and reviewing learning, this workshop will focus on the diverse images of business and world futures generated so far on the course, and review these alongside the personal futures of course participants. Much of the content of this final workshop is agreed in collaboration with course participants. However, the notion of the interconnections between global, economic and social agendas and the local, community and individual actions of people - a recurrent theme of the programme - will be revisited.

Sample reading:
Korten, D. (1999) *The Post-Corporate World* (Earthscan); Schwartz, P. (1991) *The Art of the Long View* (Currency and Doubleday); Eisler, R. (2002) *The Power of Partnership* (New World Library); Wans, D. J. (1999) *Small Worlds* (Princeton University Press); Fisher, W. F. & Romaniuk, T. (2003) *Another World is Possible* (Zed Books).

My educational work over the last six years as an Intake Tutor on the MSc in Responsibility and Business Practice

I know that I need to include a “dry” description of the MSc in Responsibility and Business Practice at the University of Bath to frame this section¹⁹⁰. After all, it was the dry description that seduced me in the first place to become part of the MSc. And yet now I know too much about what lies behind that description for it to feel an adequate representation of the MSc, and it is no real representation of the continued evolution and gradual re-forming of the programme over time. How could a course description alone recall and echo my laughter, tears and feelings of encouragement as I sit by myself reading participants’ final projects? How could it trace the path of engagement that participants tread? How could it engage you as well?

In April 2005, I sent an email to all of the MSc participants who’d been part of the learning groups I’d worked with. I wanted to explore how I might do the MSc better “representational justice” here, in the framing of what the programme means to those involved in it. I wanted to co-create a multi-voiced framing which evokes the felt experience of the course as well as the dryer more academic content. Here’s the message I sent:

From: Chris Seeley
Sent: 13 April 2005 17:18
Subject: Message for people in the learning groups I have tutored

Dear All

As part of my PhD work, I am exploring the "educational" effect of the MSc, and of my part and influence in that as one of the Intake Tutors. So this email has been addressed to all the participants on MSc4, 6 and 8 for whom I have been the main Intake Tutor.

I have been working on creating a presentational form that both expresses (to "outsiders") the kinds of learnings that the MSc invites and allows your multiple voices to be heard (rather than just my interpretation of your experience).

I would like to invite you to join me in an experiment with a participatory poetic form for this, inspired by three ideas:

- first, "hyakuin", which is a Japanese-derived 100 stanza poem which can be generated by multiple people;
- second, "Dart" by Alice Oswald (2003), a poem using many people's voices about the River Dart and;
- third, the work of John Killick (2005), a dementia specialist "carves out" transcripts of discussions with clients to form poetry which he reads back to them.

¹⁹⁰ This is a part-time post-graduate course running over two years with eight one-week residential workshops. The group size is around 24 people, with two tutors. The average age of participants is 37, ranging between early 20s and late 60s. Participants produce three self-directed (ie: there are no “essay titles”) learning papers, two learning reviews and a main project. The whole group is divided into six learning groups for the purposes of mutual support, feedback and challenge when it comes to their inquiry cycles, learning papers and projects. Participants are expected to stay in the same learning groups for the duration of the two years. During the workshops, sessions include a mixture of visiting speakers, visiting alumni, participant presentations, group process work, learning group and personal inquiry work, action research theory sessions and “cross woven threads” sessions looking at issues such as power, gender and systems. There is a vibrant official and unofficial alumni for the course.

Both the hyakuin and the Dart poem contain the idea of progression, over time (the seasons for the hyakuin) and space (the river's path in "Dart"). I'd like to express this, too with the MSc, in terms of progression from the start of the course through to the end in three sections - beginnings, transitions, new foundations.

Writing this it all feels a bit ambitious, but exciting to see what come out. Eventually I would like to share what gets created with you.

I would like to invite each of you to go back to your learning papers, learning reviews and final project and draw from them quotations and sections from your own writing - anything from a phrase to a sentence to a paragraph or even entire pages and sections. I'll do this, too with my own work from when I was on MSc3.

I would like to ask you to select some material from your early days on the programme ("beginnings") - maybe learning paper one or two, then something from about half way through ("transitions"), perhaps your learning review and then something from your final project work (in-progress if necessary) and/or your year two learning review ("new foundations").

I may also spend a little time in the MSc office looking through your projects and papers to supplement what you send, if that's OK.

Can you choose sections which:

a: still speak to you now in some way (excite you, upset you, comfort you, embarrass you, please you, make the hairs on the back of your neck stand up etc).

b: epitomise how you felt / what you were inquiring into at the time

c: you just like.. the words, the feel (I'd be delighted if you picked something from your writing which wasn't in English, if you want... and please would you offer a translation, too, so I know where or how I might place your words?)

I'll then draw together the material and carve and shape it into some writing which tells the story of the MSc "journey"... and see what you all think of it...

How does this sound? Are any of you interested in contributing?

I would love to hear from you either way,

Thank you
Chris

By the end of May 2005, I'd received seven out of 27 possible respondents, and used these as raw material to create a new representational whole. I did not go back to read their projects and select more material for myself. Nor did I include material from my own MSc writing. My aim was to retain the participants' original voices, whilst taking these collective voices forward and shaping them into a form of expression which matches and reflects my experiences and memories of the MSc over the years since I have been involved. But I had concerns:

- I was concerned about lack of poetry experience (and attended a poetry weekend, "The Poet in Nature"¹⁹¹), to help build my confidence;
- I was concerned that I gave it a "go" and did not smother my own agency and initiative with a mushy "all inclusive" communion of doing this by consensus;
- I was concerned that I offer what got created back to the MSc participants as a gift, whilst recognising that the primary purpose of this experiment in representational

¹⁹¹ "The Poet in Nature: Saying Big Things in Small Ways", 30 April - 1 May 2005, Emerson College, Forest Row, with Paul Matthews.

knowing is to express *my* sense of the whole of the MSc through the words of the student-participants I have worked with and influenced educationally;

- I was concerned about the power inherent in my self-appointed role as initiator and “director” of this work.

Respondents said that the process of picking sections of their own writing was “fun”, “tricky”, “interesting”, “no hardship”. Others were concerned about their writing “I am not sure how poetical my sentences will sound”, “If I have missed the point, let me know”.

One respondent picked up on the power issue:

“I’d love to understand from you afterwards how it feels being editor in chief of a ‘cooperative’ work. Indeed I am intrigued by the power that you are taking when it comes to the ultimate composal [sic]... I wonder how it would work if you composed it using the order in which you get replies instead, or some other less centralised manner.” (email correspondence with MSc participant, 25 April 2005).

I responded the same day:

“Yes...this issue does have power at play (what doesn't?), which I have been pondering from the start. I wonder whether it renders the whole act in some way invalid, (is it ‘bad’, coercive or inappropriate power-over?) or whether this act of conscious agency might be seen as “inquiring” in any way. Am I ‘editor-in-chief’, darkly manipulating unmitigated agency behind a thin veil of ‘cooperation’ or am I simply gathering and facilitating a process, or just the person with an impetus to experiment with another form of expression, interested if the result resonates in some way re: the whole MSc journey? Does the introduction of a random element, as you suggest, remove some of the ‘sting’?” (email response to MSc participant, 25 April 2005).

I made notes during the shaping process, which came in two parts. First, in May 2005, I gathered together all the responses into the three headings I’d devised – “beginnings”, “transitions” and “new foundations”. At the time, I wrote: “it feels like I have been given material to work, like having a scrap box for a collage and I am choosing the bits and pieces that catch my eye. So, it feels quite random at present, I am already aware that there’s far too much stuff, and that I hope that a pattern is being built unseen, informed by my experience both as student and tutor of this MSc, and through the juxtaposing textures and colours of the material I am picking out to play with further. My other thought is that my choices (and those of the participants) may be so informed by the experience of the course itself that no one else, no “outsiders” will be able to understand it. This was especially combined with my uncertainty of having any poetic skill or insight whatsoever. This cuts across my desire and

hope/belief that this work will have an emergent property which traces, expresses and (re)presents the MSc experience as a whole. It feels like a process of distillation to get to an essence.

Judi has asked in “what way is this inquiry?” I’d reframe the question, “in what way does this contribute towards my inquiries?” – it helps frame, in a participatory way, what the MSc means to its participants. Even though I have experienced the MSc both as a participant and a tutor, I didn’t feel it was right just to represent my viewpoint on this, I wanted a collective voice to speak the framing of this piece” (16 May 2005, notes made during the first part of the process).

Second, in July 2005, after a break to let the material rest (like bread dough), I went through an iterative process of carving away parts of the “raw material” to leave the phrases and words which together – from my perspective as intake tutor – evoked the whole. In this process, I added no words of my own, I juxtaposed voices from different MSc groups, sometimes I changed round the order of lines of text and once or twice I changed the tense or added a word for continuity’s sake.

I am shaping and crafting the material made by others. I feel respect for their substrate, their matter. I like bringing together similarities and responses from over the different years in conversation. Seeing and expressing a bigger pattern of expectation, despair and possibility (28 July 2005, notes made during the second iterative process).

What I am feeling here is an inordinate requirement for me to somehow justify the inclusion of poetic and expressive representations of experience using drier, transactional, framing language. I fear that, by looking square on to something that feels subtle and delicate, it will squash, rather than illuminate what is to come.

In his exploration of “multigenre” papers, educator Tom Romano cites James Britton’s 1970 categorisation of writing into “poetic” (stories, fables, plays, descriptions), “transactional” (reports, essays, shopping lists and peace treaties) and “expressive” (exploratory, new and focused on meaning) forms (Romano, 2000: 137). He says that expressive writing is “the least often used category”, where the writer is seeking to “think on the page”. Here, I am arranging MSc participants’ self-selected poetic and expressive writing through a further poetic process (a kind of “performance text” (Walsh, 2006: 977)), whilst justifying the use of these less often seen categories through this transactional writing...

beginnings
one

I didn't realise how angry I was... *or how sad.*
I've tried to make up for something... *to compensate.*
I often felt a fraud... *I was not prepared.*
An absolutist crusade... *and vanity in myself.*

Part-time environmentalism.
Unilever. The natural choice in my mind.

I
don't
even
want
to
belong
here

beginnings
two

From the start, at the start
I was at sea
It all felt very natural

Where would I start?
How would I discern?
I had to *know* the answer

Full to the gunwales with questions
I dwelt on the questions for a long time
I have often missed my burning questions
More questions than answers

beginnings
three

I cannot yet see
which part of a larger thing.

I uncover a small thing
and a texture; a shape
gradually revealing
at the earth
scratching away carefully
on my knees
my nails are packed with soil
I feel like an archaeologist

a
huge
stone
is
blocking
the
way

transitions

one

Eat anything.

Travel around the country.

Sleep too little.

Work 6 or 7 days a week.

Attend and organise meetings on Sunday.

Wake up in the middle of the night.

Transfixed by the headlights of the approaching moment,

my fears hold me back,

muscles imploding with fright.

My body knows exactly what is needed.

Stop.

Wannabe change agents need to find some balance in their life,

I try to align my actions on my values and my desired impact in the world,

I try to manage my assets,

I carefully manage my time.

The environment is far from optimal.

It will take longer than I first thought.

My body gradually told me to stop.

My body knows exactly what is needed.

What changed?

Caused caution to be thrown?

To throw yourself headlong?

To have your own splashing, my little thing?

What changed?

My body knows exactly what is needed

I dreamed that I was dying
Wanting to withdraw
A state of turmoil
Solitary isolation
Sometimes I chose to say nothing
The spirits of the mystics were silenced

I'm in a very strange place at the moment
Walking the well-worn path
Consistently following a path of least resistance
Water trickling down in little rivulets

"Why ever are you doing that?"
my own fear of passion
my reluctance to commitment
my aversion to conflict

This inquiry feels incomplete.
This paper does not say what I wanted it to say.
It happens sometimes.

What
I really
wanted to say
is contained
in the spaces

transitions
three

You can touch me now
I receive what my soul craved
A peace and connection to creation
I am a part of this, not a spectator.
I am in the world and the world is in me.

I am not only a victim but also an actor,
free, lacking in self consciousness.
I felt like a child again,
eyes wide
I was part of the forest.

Why does business hedge art about with so many guards and straitjackets?

The box has just been trimmed,
but the yews haven't had their annual cutting yet,
so each geometrical shape,
while it's still quite distinct,
is halo'd with a wild aura of new shoots

Creativity thwarted expresses itself as violence, as ego, as armour.
The pain of this is the surest sign that this is where the disease lies.
What has made business so often sick and mad?

A dangerous lunatic.
A gentle, sensitive person.

His creativity is currently squashed right out of him.
I sense that.

His creativity
(for which he's supposedly employed)
is currently
squashed
right
out
of
him

new foundations
two

All of a sudden the rim would collapse in on itself
and I'd be left with a reject.

How did *that* happen?
How could I do this differently?

Unable to act to get myself back on course,
watching myself doing precisely what I'd been trying not to do,
I gather my observations.
I broke down my inquiry.

Just let go.
It is good enough.
Surrender.

new foundations

three

I have seen this place before

I slept too long:
it was so different to wake up this morning.

In my dream
I have seen this place before

Little nook in the world
rushing fountain
hanging vines
exotic trees
birds tweeting
scarlet flowers
beautiful
enchanted
and and and and
most secret

Sat down on the picnic bench
I cried my eyes out

I have seen this place before

I will offer reflections, accounts and feedback on my practices as an action research educator working (as one of a team of six) in the context of sustainability on the MSc in Responsibility and Business Practice at the University of Bath. Here, I build on my involvement as a speaker at the 20th EGOS Colloquium stream on “Training Action Researchers”, and writing originally prepared for an edition of the Action Research Journal (during 2004).

I used the formality of the submission deadlines as one way of helping “pull” my PhD writing through and inject some discipline into my process (at a time when I was floundering somewhat after the great writing push that had been needed in 2003 to get through my MPhil to PhD transfer process) and the great exhalation of relief when I passed through what turned out to be an enjoyable and generative examination process on 3 July 2003.

On 22 November 2004, my submission was squarely rejected, and a major revision was called for if it were to be resubmitted to that journal. The reviews were painful for me to read and I wanted to defend the course, my role in it and, especially, the learners on the programme. Perhaps I would consider this “normal” behaviour if I was a career academic. Perhaps this is part of the academic game. On occasions when I have needed to critique others’ submissions (for the same journal), I have sought a generative and encouraging approach, as I do with the MSc participants I work with.

On a more positive note, one of the reviewers did acknowledge that “I think you have set yourself a difficult task here... it is a worthwhile task and one that can contribute a great deal to practice”. Phew, so it wasn’t all bad, then.

I titled the submission “**When Form and Context meet: Practices of an Action Research Educator Working in the Context of Sustainability.**” In the introduction, I said: *I have chosen to exemplify my practice by making writing this article an inquiry in itself (Richardson 1994) and overall, I have written in the form of an experiential account from within, rather than attempting to offer a “one size fits all” definitive explanation or how-to manual. I am offering this writing in the spirit of ongoing inquiry, dialogue and discussion and my intention is that this work will be an honest, open and vulnerable ‘insider’s account’ of the practice of action research education. I neither wish to make the work look facile, nor do I wish to cloud it in esoteric mystery.*

First, I will start with exploring the inquiry process which committing to produce a submission for the journal triggered, and then offer extracts (*in italics*) from the submissions, interwoven with a commentary on what I wrote then.

This article builds on my experiences as an educator working on this MSc through a number of research processes:

- *Writing-as-inquiry;*
- *Self-reflection on my own inner experience of action research education;*
- *Tape recorded assessment and feedback from a group of MSc students;*
- *In-depth solicited and unsolicited feedback from two individual MSc students;*
- *Ongoing discussion of this piece of research into my own practice with my CARPP PhD group colleagues and as a part of the 20th EGOS Colloquium stream on “Training Action Researchers”;*
- *The development of ideas on the possible linkages between the form of working in action research education and the content of sustainability, based on others’ ideas about and my own glimpses and experiences of ‘deep ecology’ (Naess 1989; Naess 1995; Harding 1997, 2006) as a fundamental core of sustainability.*

I am particularly interested in prioritising showing the cycle of this inquiry which is concerned with the in-depth feedback from two MSc students, Pauline and Rachel. I place more value on their viewpoints than my own reflections, firstly: because what they said was partly unsolicited; secondly, because I have already offered my own reflections and sense-making earlier in this chapter, and thirdly, I value these voices as external witnesses – students encountering me, rather than me churning round encountering myself over and over again.

Pauline’s story came from this student’s final MSc project and Rachel’s reflections came in response to an email request I sent asking if “you have any additional thoughts or comments on the ways in which I have “taught” action research (or, you have learned action research whilst I’ve been hanging around...), I would really appreciate any observations.”

*I spent one week with Pauline when I worked as a stand-in facilitator for her MSc intake and she wrote about my educational influence on her as part of her final year project. I am interested in Pauline’s accounts as I believe they provide evidence of my qualities of **empathy** and **attention** (both **focused concentration** and **diffuse awareness**¹⁹²).*

¹⁹² When I am working with action research learners in group settings, I would claim that I maintain both diffuse awareness and focused concentration (Frenier 1997). The sensation of scanning the group’s overall state whilst simultaneously zeroing in on individual learners’ responses to what is happening has given me an insight into what I am actually doing when I am acting as an action research educator. I have noticed my capacity to pay attention and stay present in this way grow over and my belief is that this scanning activity somehow contributes to “holding” or creating a container for group and individual learning.

Pauline's story: empathy and attention

*In terms of **empathy**, Pauline noted that “what you did here was to simply be yourself. To communicate in a way that let me in on your own experience, in a way that legitimated mine. You'd been there before. We didn't need to go through the larded detail of what that had been for you. The fewest words did what was required. It was a major turning point... I simply let go of what was holding me back.”*

In her final project, she detailed one specific event in support of this: “I felt... a frustration so profound and so strong it was almost a rage, though it wasn't rage... I didn't want to talk about this any more. About me. About being stuck. Or about why. Enough of this navel gazing. I... just... wanted... to... s-c-r-e-a-m... In the brief instant from that morning that's burnt on the circuit board of my brain, I'm looking angrily at Chris, and almost spit at her: ‘But I thought I was doing a Masters in Responsibility and Business Practice, for Christ sake...!’ ... With eyes that say ‘Boy, do I recognise that feeling...’ she sighs quietly, and with a searing empathy, replies: ‘...I know’ ... We sit and look at each other for a long moment. Because she knows - and I know - that I know too.”

*In terms of the qualities of my **attention**, Pauline also writes of two incidents. The first illustrates the qualities of attention I can offer students and the second exemplifies the qualities of focused concentration and diffuse awareness mentioned earlier.*

First, the qualities of attention: “when we met for coffee one morning... the simple fact that you got up early to meet. I know that sounds weird. Trust me... I'm not walking around the world feeling like a piece of shit on someone's shoe, but I find it's unusual in life to find someone who is willing to spend time on ‘me’ with me... Attention to my needs. That in itself is hugely valuable. I can't remember what we spoke about - it was the ‘fact’ of it that mattered”.

Second, the qualities of focused concentration (responding to Pauline's situation) and diffuse awareness (of her actions in a large group learning situation): “I was sitting at the back of the room... we were asked to go down to the chair in order to ask our question...I waved my hand in the air for a long time, hoping I might get to ask the question from the back of the room, but I wasn't seen... Immediately after the session that afternoon, Chris Seeley approached me. She said she'd noticed me waving my hand in the air, avoiding going down to ask my question and suggested I write it up as a fractal of my second year project. At the time, I didn't really know what she meant. Now, of course, I do... the interchange itself - did indeed turn out to be a fractal of my inquiry, which at that time I hadn't fully conceptualised...”. Pauline went on to comment on her own writing in a later email to me: “What was important here Chris, was simply that you named it. You saw it and named it. You bothered to notice and come to me”.

Rachel's reflections: enthusiasm and energy

*Here, I am including excerpts from an email from Rachel, a student I worked with on the MSc for two years both as co-facilitator and personal learning group tutor. With reference back to earlier sections of this paper, I believe Rachel's email supports my assertions that, in my practice, **I model action research behaviours and attitudes, I meta-communicate about my process, I value the desire to learn in people I work with and I adopt both appreciative and challenging stances:***

"... I've ruminated on your teaching of action inquiry and have the following to contribute (based on your feedback on my learning papers, interaction with the learning group and me personally; and contribution to our plenary sessions):

"Show not tell: while you did talk about what action inquiry was, you mainly demonstrated it, by showing awareness, inner and outer arcs when making contributions. You did this without explicitly drawing attention to it, as in 'look at me demonstrating action inquiry' and as a result I didn't know I was being taught it, it slowly soaked into my consciousness.

"One thing I felt personally very helpful was that you always suggested a place to move to next, so there was no endpoint to my work, but suggestions of potential next ports of call for exploration. I found this mindset very useful in terms of being 'ever provisional'. This approach contrasts with more conventional supervision or teaching where there would be a specific aim (as in a research objective) and end point. This perpetual emergence and interconnection seemed almost fractal-like at times.

"There was also a sense of you always holding the space open for possibility to emerge, a key aspect of being inquiring, as opposed to closing down ideas and choices (and again in contrast to traditional educational methods), yet at the same time there seemed sufficient direction and coherence not to get 'lost in space'. Not sure I could pinpoint how you did this, but probably something to do with the way you pose questions, and respond to what others are saying and doing.

"Enthusiasm and energy, especially in recommending reading to me, where you really seemed a bottomless mine of information.

"The net effect of all of these things was to widen and deepen my learning world into a web of interconnected ideas and themes, which also seems, looking back, central to my embracing of inquiry".

These individual pieces of feedback offer evidence which I believe still corroborates my own reflections on the nature of my practice as an educator working with other uppers. At the end of the article, I wrote my conclusions, which I also want to include here to show how the themes of this work have been stirring over time. In the list you'll see the same issues of working with presentational knowing, struggles with hubris and self-deprecation, notions of multi-layered emotion, playfulness and conviction you'll encounter in more depth in *Serious Play: glimpses of that other field* (look as well for the energy that is brewing here for what became Gaia's Playground, the clown and deep ecology workshop I co-facilitated in May 2006, which you'll also find out more about in the *Serious Play* chapter). In 2004, I wrote:

I assert what I know for now about the practice:

- *I know that it takes time to develop the craft of the action research educator.*
- *I have a positive regard for others' creativity.*
- *I use "lightening-up" as a way of helping others' loosen their own inhibitions sufficiently to allow something creative to emerge¹⁹³.*
- *I pay detailed attention to student-participants' learning journeys in the sense of their lives as a whole, and not just in terms of "getting an MSc".*
- *I believe that learning is an essential part of becoming an educator and I explicitly make this part of my practice though my own ongoing inquiries plus a supportive framework of creative learning in clowning, storytelling, writing, movement, voice and body work.*
- *On a day to day basis, I am less able to support myself as generously as the ways in which I support the students I work with.*
- *The students I work with learn well and are appreciative of my work.*
- *Sometimes, or at some levels, I have more faith in my students' abilities than in my own.*
- *I recognise, and am able to respond to, the need for encouragement and challenge, joy and trauma, light heartedness and solemnity in this work.*

¹⁹³ This was written in 2004. I now notice, in 2006, the much greater ease with which I invite MSc participants to experiment with and respond to experiences with a whole range of presentational forms. Rather than planning the contexts for these responses in advance, I am now more likely to pick and choose presentational forms to suit my interpretation of the learning moment and the mood of the group.

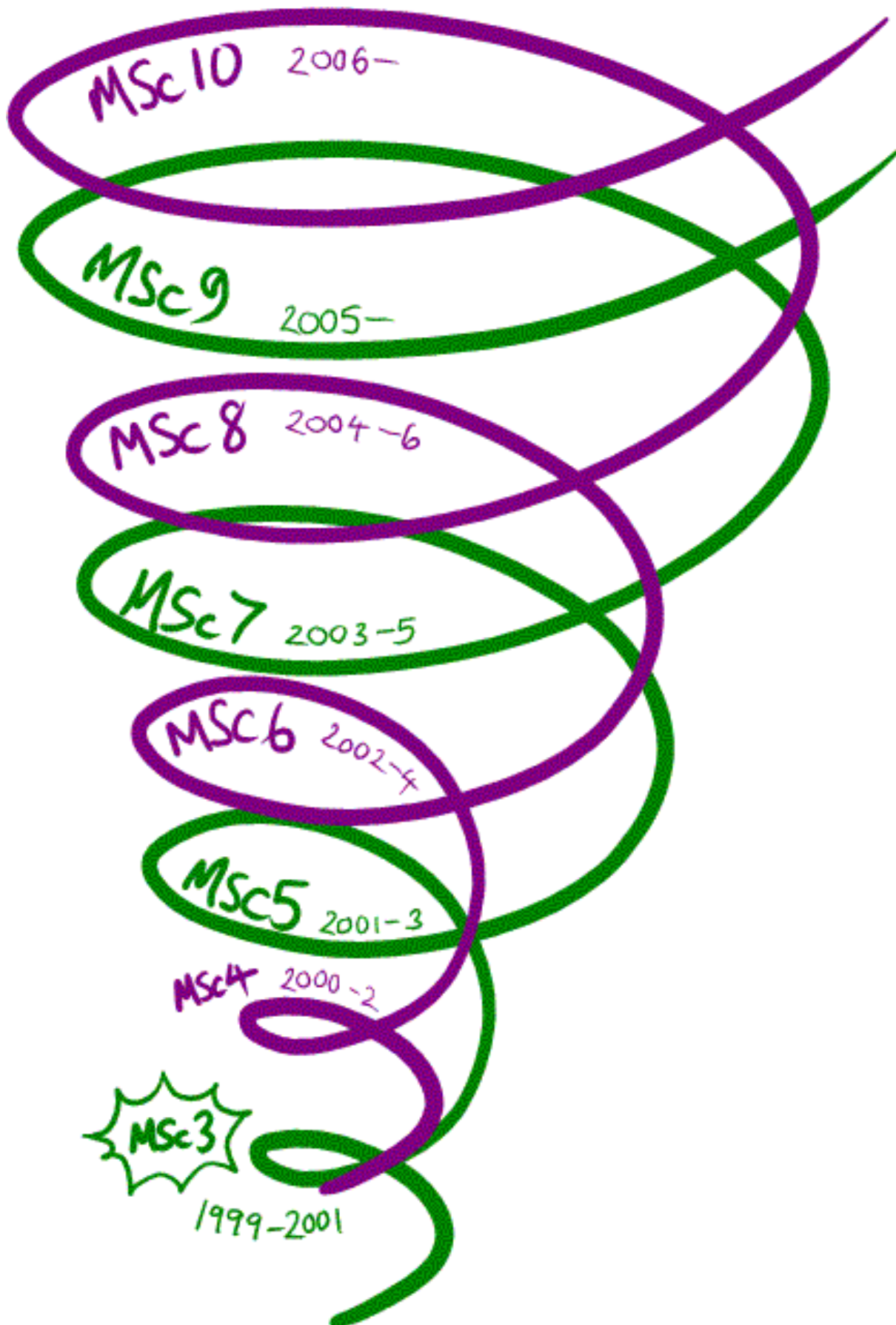
In addition, I recognise two other insights from this inquiry.

First, being an action research educator is not a solo, heroic activity whereby I tip the contents of my intellect into the brains of keen students waiting to be filled with new knowledge. Rather, action research education is a dialogue between co-learners where all parties to that dialogue are both educators and learners. The process, then, is one of mutual encouragement and challenge in which the action research educator carries a particular responsibility for ensuring that the student-participants get the most out of their learning experience.

The students and colleagues I work with learn from me and from each other, whilst I learn from them and we each learn from our individual self-reflection. As such, I am inclined to agree with educator Christopher Bache when he makes a claim for the emergence of the “learning field” saying that: “pedagogical techniques which stimulate strong student interest and participation and which invite high levels of critical reflection and the free expression of individual thinking will encourage the development of stronger course fields than techniques which emphasize regurgitative learning and passive engagement of the material... Whatever other factors are involved in drawing these fields into conscious expression, I believe that the instructor is the essential catalyst for their emergence” (Bache 2000: 198, 201).

Since writing this, I have started two new MSc groups and Bache’s words seem more relevant than ever. It seems to me that each group starts off somehow standing on the shoulders of the previous group. I can easily muse that, in sustainability terms, the whole field has moved on substantially in the last decade, so participants on the course come with a much greater degree of awareness and knowledge about issues like climate change and sweat shops.

On the other hand, this alone does not account for the rapidity with which I believe learners on the MSc are picking up on, or “catching” the practices and attitudes of being inquiring. I would guess that my own interventions might be more accurate towards learner in this respect, given that I have witnessed at least the parts of the pattern of over one hundred participants by now (2006). Even so, I find Bache’s claim for a “learning field” compelling. Here is how I imagine it looking (I have been primarily involved with the evenly numbered cohorts, having worked on MSc4, MSc6, MSc8 and now MSc10. I was a participant on MSc3, and the whole thing started two years before my time, with MSc1. Others in the team work on the odd numbers):



Second, during conversations around the process of writing this paper I have become aware that in learning how to become an action research educator, I have needed to unlearn much of the knowing I held from ten years of working as a more conventional trainer and consultant. I believe that this choice to become an apprentice again, to return to beginner's mind, is a profoundly useful (and challenging) perspective from which to practice action research education. Too much certainty might bring with it an unhelpful hubris and return to a prevailing power-over style of teaching, and yet too little carries with it the equally unhelpful prospect of downwardly spiralling self-confidence and, at worse, an unsupportive learning environment. I need to pay attention and look out for my own pulls towards such defiance or collapse otherwise I'll surely take the group down with me. For my practice to work, I need to believe in myself, the process of action research and the potential of student-participants sufficiently to be open, loose and stable in my own demeanour, whilst "holding" the group of learners just firmly enough for them to be able to flourish as they learn. Finally, I wish to return to the issue of the relationship between action research educational practice and sustainability and my earlier question about "What can I learn from my practice as an action research educator when it comes to living a less unsustainable live?" Drawing on both the cycles of inquiry described in this article and my own glimpses and experiences of sustainability issues (especially deep ecology), I would like to tentatively offer the following as shared practices of action research educating and living sustainably. Both:

- *Work with multiple perspectives, encouraging the development of wide identification with other people, the more than human world (Naess 1995) and deepening self-knowledge;*
- *Seek to be fully "immersed in and engaged" in the present moment (see Maughan and Reason 2001: 20-21);*
- *Advocate for notions of co-subjectivity – being part of a larger whole;*
- *Encourage an attitude of respect for others both socially and ecologically;*
- *Invite practitioners to slow down (at least some of the time) and live at a more reflective pace;*
- *Invite action in the world as well as reflection;*
- *Seek to change perspectives, highlighting or bringing conventionally peripheral issues, viewpoints and voices to the foreground;*
- *Encourage mutual encouragement and reciprocal support;*
- *Invite "opening to a larger self and to a larger purpose" (Senge, Scharmer et al. 2004: 241);*
- *Benefit from a lightness of touch (deep ecologist, Arne Naess says: "the environmentalist sometimes succumbs to a joyless life that belies his concern for a better environment. This cult of dissatisfaction is apt to add to the already fairly advanced joylessness we find among socially responsible, successful people, and to undermine one of the chief presuppositions of the ecological movement: that joy is related to the environment, and to nature" (Naess 1995: 250).*

No list or analysis like this can ever be exhaustive, right, or “prove the point”, but what I can offer are insights and tentative ideas based on a ground of experience in the hope that some of what I have researched and articulated will stimulate thought, discussion and more learning from experience for other practitioners in this field.

Presentational knowing and the MSc

In a moment, I will conclude this section with a selection of haiku written by MSc participants towards the end of a deep ecology workshop and offered by them for inclusion here. These haiku represent the tip of an iceberg of presentational knowing experiments I have explored and encouraged with learners on this programme, which, through poetry, creative writing, photography, music, calligraphy, drawing, collage, mask making, body sculpture, image theatre, storytelling, improvisation, film making (and even a little clowning), have opened glimpses and pathways to the greater contact, more confident self-expression and creative being which are the backbone of this thesis.

Drawing on the work of therapeutic and ecological storymaker, Alida Gersie (1992, 1997), I have gradually moved from “prescribing” specific presentational knowing exercises (which feel quite school teacher-like: “and now we’re going to do a collage...”) towards processes of receiving and *responding* to experiences, drawing on a range of different forms. Gersie calls these presentational gestures “response tasks” (Gersie, 1997: 134). Responding to an experience (through, say, a combination of drawing and haiku, as with the example below following an ecological ritual during which I “became” a medlar fruit), helps learners dwell in the experience more fully, give back to the phenomenon in a reciprocal gesture, digest the experience more fully, pluralise their interpretations of an experience by witnessing others’ responses and, as Gersie says, benefit from “assisted reflection” (Gersie, 1997: 142-3).



Gersie suggests four phases of working with response tasks (Gersie, 1997: 135-6), which I have adapted slightly for a more general learning than Gersie's focus of storymaking and telling:

Phase 1

The facilitator suggests the same response task for each group member. For example, each group member does some freefall writing in response to an experience of sitting in nature.

Phase 2

The facilitator offers each participant several suggested response tasks out of which he/she chooses one or two. For example, group members choose from a "toolbox" of freefall writing and/or haiku, and/or writing an imaginary letter and/or making an image and so on.

Phase 3

The facilitator invited the participant to formulate their own response task and offers coaching to ensure that the suggested task will fit. For example, working with an MSc participant with regards to making broad life changes, I might suggest building up a visual, collaged mind map in order to make their options visible as a whole.

Phases 4 and 5

The participant designs their own response tasks with minimal or no coaching support from the facilitator. At these stages, participants are acquiring a fully fledged response ability, which takes them beyond the "default" response of conducting a group discussion after having had an experience.

I believe working to build such a rhythmic movement between receiving and responding helps rich experience to be digested more thoroughly in the moment – before the next experience comes along in those moments of *serial amnesia* (mentioned earlier in *Expressions of Energy*).

The resulting reciprocity reminds me of the movement of water in a flowform structure (see image to the right, drawn by flowform originator and designer John Wilkes).



English woodland
Ten thousand beings here
In love and beauty

Dying planet
How can we face so much grief
Community of peers

A precious first kiss
The meeting of skin and air
Forms a bond for life

A seed grows
Water gives it strength
The earth moves

All the beings came
To give us of their wisdom
Poetry came out

Water drop on leaf
a tear rolls down for times lost
and new beginnings

Alive with purple
the hills luminously shine
forgive and embrace

With a bang on stone
a life forgotten, recalled
later more sweetly

What is respect?
Why is humanity so unclear?
Spring has started

And what have you got to offer, little girl?

In this section I show in detail the extent to which I can spectacularly fail in opening upper to upper conversational space and the ways in which I try (too hard) to improve my practice. Here, although Basil and I are both uppers on the world stage, the difference which is making the difference on this occasion I attribute to gender, and gendered behaviours on both our parts.

“I think you’d be a great contributor to the Management and Organisation Programme” (MOP) Claire said and my ego perked up. Me? Claire interested in me becoming involved with MOP? I wondered what she’d seen in me that might have led to this statement. After all, this was the Claire who’d described me as a terrier snapping at her heels. This was Claire who had a proper job and lived in London and wore lovely matching clothes. This was Claire who’d read “The Reflective Practitioner” and consulted with big companies for, I assumed, lots of money. This was also the Claire who loved photography and wept at the sight of some of the images she’d created.

I didn’t want to react in “enthusiastic puppy” mode (and as I write this I have a sense of loss for my innocence surrounding that way of being in the world). “That sounds interesting; shall we meet up to chat about it? I’ll come over to Whitfield if you like”.

And so a series of meetings began, first with me feeling pretty special in amongst the ambiance of the management school at Whitfield. Perhaps here I’d have some sense of caring for myself? Thankfully, this seduction by the lushness of the physical space didn’t last too long (I was waiting for that feeling to fade), and as I was invited to shadow a workshop on social construction and appreciative inquiry, I walked into what to me was now an ordinary working environment in an opulent setting.

During this workshop, I knew that I’d be meeting with Basil, the leader of the MOP course. He was going to come up and consult with the participants about future workshop design. I already knew him by sight – a man in his 50s who, I understood, rode into work on a horse, wore tweedy jackets, carried himself with authority and, from what I could gather through seeing him in the audience of an open seminar the day before, liked the sound of his own voice. Claire had described him as a difficult man, but one she had learned to get along with. I have a history of getting on with difficult, older man through a combination of cheek, quick-witted humour and sharp intelligence. I worked for some years with a Major-General from the army. I found him interesting and he had a glint in his eye. His reputation was one of weeping secretaries and impossibility to work with. I found that the ruder I was to him, the more he liked it. We had an on-going battle where I would insist on opening doors for him when all of his upbringing had trained him into the opposite etiquette. We would stand for minutes either side of a door I’d be holding on to. “Go on, you know you

want to” I’d say. “I can’t, I just can’t”. “Yes you can, use it as a developmental opportunity”... and so it would go on.

In my 20s and early 30s, this behavioural pattern served me well in terms of relationship building, opening access to some of the more interesting and smart men in positions of power, and helping to secure a steady flow of work, as these men often also held the purse strings for project work. Now, in 2004, sucking up to and humouring men in this way was wearing a bit thin as a prime strategy. For starters, a new generation of younger women has now come into the workplace and I am no longer the favoured “bright young thing”, nor can I qualify as the interesting and respected older woman.

Meeting Basil offered up a great opportunity to practice with a different response from my natural or habitual reaction of “Oh, hi, Basil... you still riding that horse, then?” I had an idea about what I might be up against. Claire had warned me that Basil didn’t operate to quite the same philosophy as CARPP and I imagined a kind of heavyweight title fight with Basil in the red corner and Peter limbering up in the blue corner, with me rubbing Peter’s shoulders. She said that he’d just abandoned his PhD (at least there was that). With this information in hand, I was expecting Basil to grill me, interview-style on my theoretical knowledge and anticipated that he’d choose some Stacey-esque “organisations as conversations-there-is-no-such-thing-as-a-theory” territory to perform this grilling.

So when he sat down opposite me at the dinner table, I felt I knew what was coming. “So, you’re Chris, then.” “Yes. You must be Basil”. “You work at CARPP don’t you? What kind of theoretical base do you use there on the Masters in-whatever-it-is-you-do-there. Some environmental thing?”. Here we go, then. Was my anticipation of this projection or intuition? Either way, I wasn’t surprised and mentally asked myself whether my anticipation of this approach had somehow sucked it into being. Was it written all over my face that such a question should be asked? I stumbled around my responses, exuding inadequacy. I remembered feeling like this four years before when Peter and I had started working together facilitating the MSc and he’d stare at me asking dumbfounding questions. Surely I would, could, should have moved on in the intervening time? Had I learned nothing? I kept the conversation as short as possible. Damage limitation.

The workshop apparently went well and I received both direct and indirect feedback from faculty and students that my presence had been appreciated, peppered with references to CARPP’s ecological ideology and first person solipsism. “Maybe MOP already has enough CARPP influence”, “we don’t want to turn this into a CARPP degree”, “MOP isn’t a course for tree-huggers, we’re not pushing those values on people”. This felt like a mixed message of me being OK, in spite of my CARPP background, rather than my own thought that if I was OK, then this was because of

my CARPP learning. Basil sent me an email strongly indicating his leadership of the programme and decision making power over who might become new faculty. Looking at this email again, it does not look as hostile as when I first received it in November 2004. I did not pursue the relationship with any real gusto, and the eager puppy stayed in its pen.

In January 2005, I received an unexpected email from the MOP course administrator which asked if it was OK if my course dates for this year's involvement changed. I looked in my diary and thought, hang on, I haven't been invited to do any course dates at Whitfield. Perhaps I'd lost or missed an email. I looked back in my files. Nothing. I emailed the administrator – "Had I missed something?", "No". When I found I'd been put down for two workshops with no consultation, and was then asked to submit my details to be part of the course handbook, I knew I had to speak with Basil, and I knew I'd only go over there (a 2.5 hour drive) if I had other business in the area. Basil agreed to a meeting and Claire, who we'd both wanted to be there, perhaps as an intermediary, could not make it. A date was set and my inquiry question formed – how might I interact with this man without resorting to eager puppy, angry, victimised feminist or cheeky rude girl reactions. Time for some basic assertion and inquiry skills. I discussed the meeting in advance with G., who knew my prejudices and potential reactions to Basil (sadly, first hand). I drafted a list of issues I wanted to discuss with Basil, and showed them to G., specifically asking for his comments and support – both of which I received.

My specific intention was to shift our conversational base from the theoretical grilling base to the processes which were (or were not) in place for the selection and recruitment of new faculty (especially since I'd had quite a painful time of it coming in as an apprentice to the Bath MSc and was not keen to repeat the process).

I tidied the notes up and emailed them to Basil two days before our meeting. On the day he came out in the lobby to meet me and we went to get some tea. I avoided the opening chat of the "still riding that horse" variety in case it released the eager puppy and followed / led Basil to a meeting room.

Good, we met in a room I'd been in before, and I had a good memory of the place. I positioned myself so I could see the snow falling outside the window, so that if he decided to press me on CARPP's eco-ideology, there's still me and the snow together thinking otherwise. I removed my coat and scarf and immediately regretted not having brought a jacket to wear as well. At least there weren't dog hairs all over my black top – Doogie Dog was away. Basil sat down. He didn't have any papers in his hands – had he received my email? Had he chosen to disregard it?

"Did you get my email, Basil?" I said. He took it from his jacket pocket and slowly unfolded it on the table in front of us.

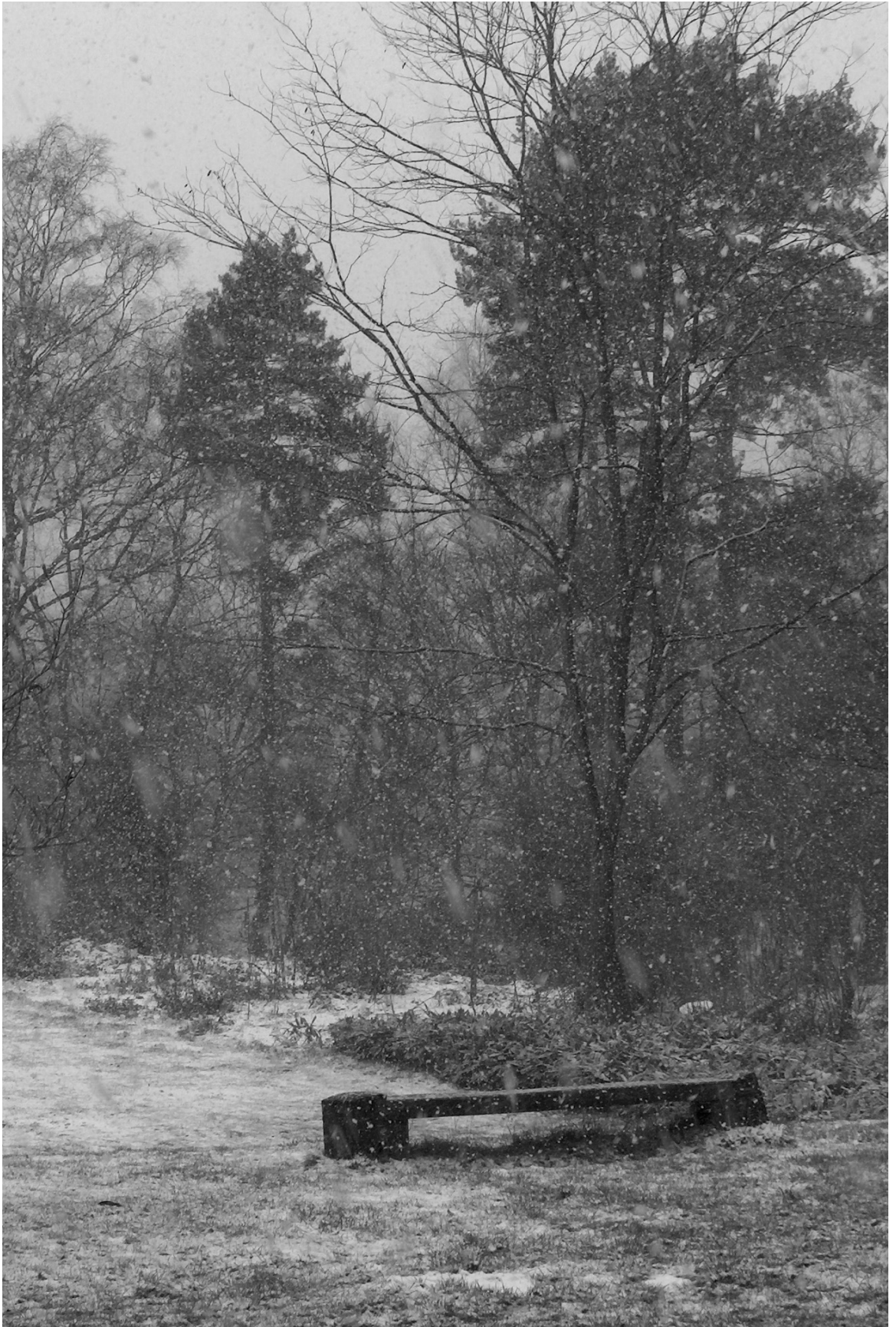
“Yes, I did,” he said. He looked at me. Silence stretched out.
“How did you feel about it?” I asked, maintaining a steady gaze.
“I was quite affronted by it, no, not *quite* affronted, *somewhat* affronted.”
“I thought you might be. It was either that or spring it all on you here at the meeting, which I didn’t want to do. I wanted to shift our conversations to these process issues because I think they’re important,” I said.
“I felt like you were a QA inspector, but then I read the questions again and saw they were relevant”.
“Yes they are. They’re important, and not just for me, but for others who may come after me, if I understand correctly that I would be the first external newcomer to the MOP team.”

And so the conversation went on, gradually defrosting but never becoming puppy-ish (I refused to play *at* Basil) or in the slightest bit playful in its own right (we did not play *with* each other)¹⁹⁴. I observed my own behaviour from afar, maintaining a detachment from myself in an attempt to break habitual patterns of behaviour. I looked at myself in the snowflakes falling outside the window. I kept my feet flat on the floor. I scratched my back too often. I realised that Basil hadn’t prepared for the meeting particularly well and that he didn’t know how the decisions had been made for me to attend / lead / shadow / guest lecture at two MOP workshops. He variously referred to me as a guest lecturer, not a member of faculty, a new member of faculty, a shadow, someone who wouldn’t want or need to shadow for two more workshops.

I listened to his various descriptions and chose not to pursue greater clarity at this point. I checked with Basil about the time “How are we doing for time, Basil? I don’t have my watch on and I know you need to go off to London”. I wondered if he really was going to London. I wondered why I thought he might be lying to me. Basil looked at his watch. “We’re doing OK, we have plenty of time.” I felt better.

Finally, I thanked Basil for what had been a useful insight into his educational philosophy – and meant it – and asked him if I could borrow one or two MOP dissertations which, in his opinion, had demonstrated his kind of excellence so that I could further understand what his intentions with MOP are. We parted company and after gathering some fruit from the tea area for my journey home, I sat in my car and realised more fully how uncertain he’d been about my role. Had I been fobbed off? Was he just ill prepared? Or caught on the hop? I caught these thoughts and settled back into acknowledging that I had achieved my aim of shifting the conversation with Basil towards a process meta-narrative. No point in grabbing defeat from the jaws of victory here.

¹⁹⁴ I notice in writing this how often I have played *at* people in the hope that *playing with* might emerge, or to somehow cover for the possibility that it won’t.



During my CARPP PhD supervision workshop the following day, I told the Basil story. I'd also just written a piece about my encounter with Chartres. One of my CARPP colleagues commented on the difference he'd felt between the open way I'd encountered the cathedral at Chartres and the more defended, cautious, detached ways in which I approached Basil. "What would it be like to approach Basil as Chartres?" he said¹⁹⁵.

It'd be a more generous, loving position than I was capable of reaching in the context of the meeting with Basil. I saw more clearly that my "switch to process" behaviours with Basil on this occasion were an intermediary stage in allowing a more "loving eye", helping me to undo habitual reactions (such as the enthusiastic puppy) which can inadvertently reinforce degenerative power-over gender stereotypes.

It is in these micro-processes and behaviours that unearned privilege gets perpetuated, reinvented and, sometimes, dissolved and transcended. Yes, we were also just two people sitting having a meeting, and we were enacting / re-enacting / embodying age old patterns of domination, submission and resistance. Here I was attempting to step aside from power issues (in some mixture of age, position, gender, experience and hierarchy). I can not trust my habitual (puppy-ish) responses not to reinforce existing stereotypical behaviours in the face of such power-over. I was working, albeit in a somewhat detached and ham-fisted way, to dismantle my unhelpful habits.

I followed up the meeting with Basil with an email and the intention of keeping the dialogue open between us. I wanted to "acknowledge what is" in the email and reinforce the shift to process. Things didn't improve and, early in 2006, I basically gave it up as a bad job. During the CARPP supervision workshop just after the meeting with Basil, Judi suggested (with a smile) that meeting Basil on his home, territory of process theory could have been received by him as a threatening action. In a childish way, I hoped it was.

Writing out this encounter with Basil triggers all kinds of associated thoughts and questions for me, in a way that is intellectually congested. On the one hand, I aspire to articulated the complexity of this jumble of interrelated ideas and questions with an elegant simplicity that is crystal clear (and if I can't achieve this, then give up and move on) and on the other (as Judi advised) I have the opportunity to try and capture that tangle in a way that's good enough for now. If I walk away now without doing this, then I will have lost the qualities of thought now arising. Again, I see this as an "acknowledgement of what is" rather than an attempt to realise "what should be". Here goes:

¹⁹⁵ Or, through the lens of Goethean science? G. says that sometimes he feels like a primate in a zoo when he catches me watching what he might be doing.

- Being with Basil reminds me of Luce Irigaray’s writing about otherness and communicating across irreducible difference¹⁹⁶;
- This, in turn, reminds me of Karen Warren’s writing on “the loving eye”¹⁹⁷;
- I then get uncomfortable, because such behaviours, in practice, seem uncomfortably close to the kinds of subordinating, gendered behaviours that I would wish to dismantle, not reinforce;
- I want to grow out of feeling responsible for the emotional work needed to try and make the working relationship grow;
- And yet I want to be looked after and cared for. I’m tired of feeling responsible;
- Perhaps I “should” become thicker skinned. Know the personal, but keep to the impersonal, the Tao Te Ching says. And then I freeze, detached, playing a role, unloving, isolated, looking at the snow;
- What are the contexts in which I can transcend this frosty mistrust of and desire to subvert the Basils of this world? Some of my best friends are men. Knowing people outside of the work environment helps. Knowing people in the life world not the system world helps (Kemmis, 2001). I seek to subvert the system world with the life world (dropping to the lower linguistic registers - everyday, casual, jargon). I think I use humour to subvert, overturn, bring down to earth and disarm;
- Sometimes this comes out as irony, sometimes this comes out as wit, sometimes this comes out as sarcasm. G. calls me cynical and tells me this is not attractive. I think he takes himself too seriously;
- One of my clients told me that he saw me moving through the different registers with a fluidity when I ran a story circle workshop with a group of mental health professionals of which he is a part. I hear his words from afar. Judi tells me that I skip over this feedback. I wonder how I can receive it, and know what, at some level, I already know (that, in the moment, in the flow of work I can and do do a good job), without becoming conceited. Without constructing a victory narrative;
- So I go back to Basil and acknowledge what is. And I am enraged at him;
- What kind of loving eye, then, do and can I have for masculine behaviours (my own and others?). Is there room for a little appreciative inquiry here?

¹⁹⁶ See chapter on *Serious Play – glimpses of that other field* for more on this.

¹⁹⁷ - ditto -

Then, while she was writing, the phone rang and she answered it. “Why did I leave the phone on in any case? Why didn’t I take my own writing time a bit more seriously?” she asked herself, not for the first time. Perhaps it will be him. That’d be nice. She liked it when he rang because it gave her the impression that she belonged somewhere, that she was intertwined in another’s life and not just a passing guest. She was right, it was him. She asked him how it had gone with getting the fridge mended at home. He had sold his house six months earlier and this was the first time that he’d appeared to take an initiative to get involved in caring for the fabric of her house, now, supposedly their shared home. She wanted to somehow acknowledge this initiative without making seem special or unusual. This was the stuff of everyday life not a gold medal winning achievement. She slipped into a double bind – don’t acknowledge this, and perhaps he’d miss that it was a good and appreciated thing to have done (for someone who had said that he didn’t feel like her house together was home). On the other hand, acknowledge this and it made it too much of a special event.

In any case, the fridge was fixed. In fact it had never broken. The temperature in the kitchen had dipped to below fridge temperature (the boiler had finally broken, so the house was cold) and the thermostat in the fridge had turned it off. Apparently the fridge mending guy had said to him that leaving the fridge door open would now help the food stay fresh. She laughed and tears pricked at her eyes. “How did I get into such a state?” she asked herself.

“My book chapter’s been going really well” he said. “Shall I read you some?” Shit, yes, I’ll bet it’s been going well, flowing well and if you read it out it will eat into my writing time and why don’t you respect that? And if this was your PhD writing time you wouldn’t have even answered the phone, I’ll bet. Why did I leave the phone on in any case? Why didn’t I take my own writing time a bit more seriously? She silently looped round these issues again for the umpteenth time.

“Go on, then” she said. And he read to her, in his fluent, narrator’s reading voice. It was a neat, complete argument, eloquently written. The illusion of having made progress she’d put herself under in writing out the Basil story evaporated as she listened to his stream of well reasoned writing. Bugger. Where was his “stumbling gait” of inquiry¹⁹⁸, then? His writing smoothly interpreted events in a project that she’d worked on, too. His story didn’t feel as lumpy as the experience he was writing about had actually appeared to her at the time and now here it was being interpreted in an “ironed-out” style that would be valued, applauded and influential. The writing was great. “What do you think?” he finally asked. “It’s really good writing. It sounds like a very plausible interpretation of what happened” she replied, and those small tears silently crept back into her eyes. She glanced at her messy computer screen and then out the window at the pale winter landscape beyond.

¹⁹⁸ See Torbert, 1991.

One last story of uppers behaving badly: I want my 20 days

Here, my question on the theme of responding to power-over gender stereotypes has a slightly different flavour. In this instance, along with my (female) colleagues, I have positional power (we are the project leaders) in the face of a steady resistant push from Terence, an independent consultant who is part of a consortium for the project we are working on. In spite of a series of very direct “no”s from each of us, Terence appears to be juggernaut-like determined to pursue his desire for an (unrealistic) allocation of 20 days work from this project to do work which has no direct deliverable.

What do his behaviours appear like to me? I was working from a space where I was experiencing Terence’s behaviour as pushy, grabbing and self-centred. He appeared to me to be operating from a stance of single-minded, unlistening persistence, as if he was running on rails. The story I told myself about his behaviour was not one of conspiracy and wickedness on his part, but a blundering fear of not getting enough work, couched in very reasonable, rational logical middle class educated talk, which sailed towards me in lengthy packets from across the other side of “irreducible difference”. When I imagine him right now, I see a small boy with his lower lip stuck out and I want to clip him round the earhole and tell him to run back to mummy. Only when I go to whack him, my hand turns into a handbag and I turn into a Margaret Thatcher-like figure with a dreadful, unreasonable, unbudging booming voice. Not only do I fear others interpreting my assertive behaviour as being aggressive, but I think I do the same interpretation internally with visions like this Thatcher one. Actually, I had a strong desire to tell him to piss or get off the pot, but kept my mouth shut.

“You don’t need everyone to like you in leading this project, Chris. There will be people that won’t like you. And never will as a result of this project” G. says. But that doesn’t give me licence to stomp around like Margaret Thatcher, does it?

What other options are open to me in difficult upper to upper conversations?

On the occasions like those I have described, where my perception is that gender might be the difference that is making the difference... that’s when I can get angry, both at the “other” for perpetuating inappropriate power-over structures and equally, at myself for the same reasons, for my own part in this (as the difference is held in me as much as in “them”). The question that I hold – or, with this issue, it feels like the question holds me – says: **“How do I make contact across the irreducible difference of gender when my part in perpetuating the degenerative edge of that**

difference (which manifests as inappropriate power-over and inequality) might be the very act of striving for contact across irreducible difference?”¹⁹⁹

Put another way, my anger and frustration around the perpetuation of inappropriate power-over (as exemplified, from my perspective, by both Basil and Terence) fills me with such negative judgement that I want to withdraw from offering generous contact so as not to “reward” that behaviour, and thereby confuse and conflate a generosity of response with inappropriate (feminine) behaviours of subordination.

In the Basil example, I can’t seem to find a satisfactory escape from ping-ponging between problematising him for his thoughtless pompousness and problematising myself for my eagerness to find a pathway to contact. Simply walking away, shutting off and ignoring him (which is ultimately what I have chosen) feels at once like a relief and a failure (but it doesn’t feel like reconciliation of the tension). Is there a maturity in withdrawing energy from an intractable problem as well as a feeling of having failed?²⁰⁰

Australian academic Roslyn Diprose writes about making contact with the “other” from a feminist stance. She indicates that the acceptance of such a quest for contact is “a rare and welcome move in philosophy, consistent with a feminist ethics of difference that would base subjectivity on an intersubjectivity that remains sensitive and open to otherness,” whilst also pointing out the more conventional (masculine-by-default) view of what: “philosophy has traditionally designated feminine; ... that exhibits a rapport with the other, not yet mature enough for judgment, will, autonomy or self-determination” (Diprose, 2000).

To paraphrase Diprose (and Levinas, who she is following):

“The grace of Terence is the alterity signified in the nakedness of the face of me, but is irreducible to what I make of him through my perceptions, judgments and knowledge; a surplus that breaks through his form;”

and...

“something generous ... was doing its best to flower” in Chris’ openness to the grace of Basil but that the acts, words, judgments, thoughts and deeds that flowed from this served only to kill off Basil’s difference and return Chris to herself unchanged.”

¹⁹⁹ Even writing this brings back the voice of the Relate counsellor saying to me (when she got me on my own) “just don’t try so hard, Chris.”

²⁰⁰ If I manage to take a bigger, multi-generational view on this, then I might be more inclined to follow ecofeminist principles, go where my energy is replenished and supported and not waste time in frustration (Forsey, 1997).