

## Chapter Six

### Living Inquiry (Reprise)

As I come towards the end of this thesis, I am conscious that although I have critically evaluated the narratives of my inquiries in terms of my own distinctive standards of judgement and criteria of validity, I have yet to answer the imagined questions Jack Whitehead, Peter Reason and Judi Marshall, my tutors at CARPP asked about *living inquiry* in the opening chapter.<sup>1</sup>

They are challenging questions, which stimulated my thinking and lead me to develop my own standards of judgement and criteria of validity for the thesis. I promised to return to their questions so let me now respond, speaking directly to each of them in a “virtual dialogue.”

#### Dialogues with my tutors

Peter first: your question was “How do you determine and define rigour and discipline?” And I respond: the rigour and discipline in my *living inquiry* come primarily from aspiring to attain the twelve attributes that underpin my own standards of judgement and practice. There are times too when I assess aspects of my work against other criteria – your own, for example, developed with Hilary Bradbury in the closing chapter of the *Handbook of Action Research* (Reason and Bradbury 2000).

Thus I might want to claim that the *Developing Ourselves as Leaders* project, as a form of co-operative inquiry, fits your five categories of questions for validity and quality in inquiry; questions of participative-relational practices, practical outcomes, extended epistemologies, worthwhileness and the developmental quality of the work, but that is secondary to striving to meet the standards I set for my inquiry as a work of art.

In judging this thesis as a communicative act, I find it helpful to refer to Habermas’s four criteria of communicative validity; comprehensibility, truth, truthfulness and

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<sup>1</sup> See – *Chapter One: Living Inquiry*

“rightness” (Habermas 1976) but, again, this is not my primary concern. I think of the reader and wonder about its evocative quality. Does it “call out of you” some of your own self-stories; does it in any way help you to unlatch the gate of your own “will to meaning”? Can you see the creation of my embodied knowledge in my narratives of inquiry and practice? Is the text interesting and easy to read? Do you think I write well? Your answers to these questions give me a much better sense of the quality of my communication than the application of some abstract principles because they come directly out of our relationship as you read and interact with the stories of my *living inquiry*.

Judi next: you queried “Can you articulate the qualities and practices of your inquiry process?” And I respond: I think my work is probably closest, in its intention and scope, to your own – particularly in the last few years as you have written about living your life as inquiry (Marshall 1999; Marshall 2000). I greatly admire the finely grained texture of your “attentional disciplines” and have often felt that my own efforts were somewhat clumsy in comparison.

I consciously put your work to one side as I strove to understand and develop my own forms of *living inquiry*, concerned that I might find it difficult to avoid defining my work in your terms. This is not to suggest that would be your intention. Indeed, I take heart from your explicit encouragement to the contrary (Marshall 2000):

Each person’s inquiry approach will be distinctive, disciplines cannot be cloned or copied. Rather, each person must identify and craft their own qualities and practices. The questioning then becomes how to do them well, how to conduct them with quality and rigour appropriate to their forms and how to articulate the inquiry processes and sense-making richly and non-defensively (p433)

Now that I am more confident in the qualities and practices of my inquiry processes I have returned to your writing with a new sense of standing alongside you, exploring this field as a fellow researcher, recognising and enjoying similarities and differences in our perspectives. We are both interested and concerned about gender, you from a woman’s standpoint, me as a man. We both pay attention to what you call “inner and

outer arcs of inquiry”. We have both transcended conventional boundaries between personal and professional domains of inquiry and we both wrestle with where to set the boundary between public and private. We are both exploring what it means to live our lives as inquiry and how that qualifies as “research”.

So, I guess my direct response to the question I put in your mouth Judi, is that I have articulated the qualities and practices of my inquiry processes to the best of my ability and understanding at this time. I would be very interested to hear what you think of my attempts and to discuss ways in which I might craft them more finely.

Jack, you asked: “What are the values that underpin your living inquiry?” And I reply: I like your definition of values as those human goals for the sake of which we do things and I admire the clarity with which you are able to articulate your values as your living standards of judgement and practice. You have often encouraged me to explicate my *living inquiry* in terms of my own values and I continue to struggle with this. I don’t think that I can account for my *living inquiry* in terms of a few overarching value statements, though I do find it helpful to elucidate some “core beliefs” about people, education and the educative relationship when considering my educational practices in *Reshaping my Professional Identity*.

For some reason I am reluctant to claim “big” social values such as academic freedom or the sanctity of the person. I do not decri them and I know that for you and many others, it is important and inspiring to do so. I am more comfortable when I stay closer to the idea of my “core beliefs” or personal values.

Let me illustrate what I mean with the following short piece of “freefall writing” entitled *Credo*, which came out of a creative writing course I went on last year (May 2000). The words were written in response to an invitation from the facilitator to write down statements beginning “I know” or “I believe.”

**Credo**

I know that I am here today and that I will be gone tomorrow. That some trace of me will remain in those I have loved. That my children and my children's children will take their place and that my purpose in being here has been to bring them in to the world.

I believe, too, that there is something of me that is uniquely mine – not mine in the sense of possession, but mine in the sense of manifesting my self. I refuse to believe in nothing, in existential anomie – no matter how intellectually fashionable it has become to regard the self as an illusion.

I know that I have heard the sound of my own soul and that it (he, she) can guide me to a wider sense of purpose – my vocation, my calling – where, as I once heard it said, my own deep longing meets the world's needs.

I believe in light and shadow, that to banish either is impossible and to try is fruitless. I know that my strength comes out of darkness and my joy is in the light.

I believe people matter and strive to put this into practice with everyone I meet – though I often fail. To attempt anything is to fall short of what might be, but we grow most through our glorious failures.

I believe it is possible to love another but that first we must love ourselves. I believe in truth and beauty and that they are the same thing.

I believe that the planet is living and maybe dying, though I rarely have the courage to face the devastation and desolation, preferring to pretend that all is well.

I know that I will die, but not what comes after – if anything. I know that I am alive and am grateful (to whom? to what?) for this life.

I believe in men and women as equal and different. I know that we men have an enormous (if neglected) capacity for love and nurturing and that the same fierce energy that turns so eagerly to destruction can be used for good in the world.

By letting the words flow uncensored onto the page I think I got closer to the heart of what I believe than a more considered or analytical approach would have achieved. These are not definitive statements, they are not “true” in an absolute sense but I am happy to stand by them, at least for the time being.

Perhaps I get closest to articulating some overarching values in the sense in which I think you mean it Jack, early in the thesis when expressing my determination to live with authenticity, integrity and joy. A strong sense of these “personal values” supported me through the pain and trauma of separation and divorce into a new life. They were also central to my inquiry into my educational leadership (How can I lead in this process of Action Inquiry with authenticity, integrity and joy?) during the *Developing Ourselves as Leaders* project. I notice though, that when I refer to them in *Postcards from the Edge*, I say that I have become less attached to them, anxious that they might feed a stereotypical male agenda of heroic independence. That may have been a little premature but it is true that I am reluctant to offer them here as guiding principles for my life.

I think also, I am resisting your invitation to codify something, which for me, lies close to the ineffable mystery at the heart of living and inquiring. In the *Prelude*, I allude to a traditional Russian folk tale, *Go I know not whither, bring back I know not what*, in which the protagonist, *Fedot* follows a golden ball rolling before him on the first part of his journey. I speculated that the ball might represent some guiding values and wondered if mine were to do with authenticity, integrity and joy. Now, this seems to me to be an oversimplification and I think the question of what guides us is more complex and more problematic than I had allowed. In the story, the golden ball can only guide *Fedot* part of the way. To reach his destination he is aided by a frog, a creature traditionally associated with transformation, and one that brings together the elements of *mythos* (water – territory of the soul and the unconscious) and *logos* (land – territory of the active principle and the conscious mind).

And that seems to be where I have got to in my story, still going I know not whither to bring back I know not what, and guided less by concepts of social values and more by the mysterious voice of my soul – intimations, intuitions, insights and a kinaesthetic sense of rightness or “fit” – emerging perhaps from that “third place” where *mythos* and *logos* meet. I do not want to reduce this mystery to a set of propositional value statements. Jack, it is not my intention to be dismissive of your suggestion to explicate my values but,

right now, I would rather honour this mystery – as I do with my telling of the story of *Jumping Mouse*<sup>2</sup> – than seek to explain it.

### **Responding to my examiners**

As I prepared for the *viva voce* examination of my thesis, I determined that I would seek to conduct myself in a manner congruent with the form of *living inquiry* that I espouse and enact in the thesis itself. Thus I wanted to defend my thesis without being unduly defensive and to keep myself open to the possibility of learning from the experience. The *viva* took place on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2002 with Professor Helen Simons and Doctor Donna Ladkin. Whilst welcoming the scope and ambition of the thesis, they pressed me hard on issues relating to the theory, method, rigour, ethical propriety, and contribution to knowledge of my *scholarship of living inquiry*.

In recommending the award of a PhD, my examiners have asked me to make four minor amendments to clarify certain points in the text for the benefit of the reader. Responding to their request in the spirit of my continuing life of inquiry necessitates a transparent approach in which the amendments are presented explicitly as new material rather than being smuggled into the existing text. In this way, I hope that my learning from the process of examination and the contribution of my examiners to that learning will be apparent.

In the *viva*, Donna Ladkin had asked me to “say something about your theory of living inquiry” and I struggled to conjure up a suitable reply as, temporarily afflicted by the “crippling mutilations [of] an objectivist framework” (Polanyi 1958), I wrestled with conflicting notions of theory. Later, my examiners as a substitute for the word “theory” offered the helpful term “informing principles”. Bringing together and making explicit the principles that inform my continuing practice of *living inquiry* is the first of the requested amendments.

Let me begin by offering a more considered view of what constitutes an appropriate form of theorising for a *scholarship of living inquiry* – a process in which, as Donald Schon puts it, we are more likely to find ourselves in the swampy lowlands of important though “ill-formed, vague and messy” problems, than on the high ground of familiar and

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<sup>2</sup> See – *Chapter Four: Healing Journeys*

relatively unimportant problems which are more susceptible to the conventional strictures of “technical rigour and academic respectability” (Schon 1995).

Consonant with the need to establish new forms of rigour for such research is the need to adopt a different form of theorising. Just as a post-modern sensibility is characterised by the demise of the grand narrative in human inquiry (Lyotard 1984) so too we must look to theory that is particular and situated in the context of the inquiry rather than to generalisable “grand” theories that offer universal explanations of individual and social phenomena through sets of interconnected propositional statements. Stephen Toulmin and Bjorn Gustavsen make the same point very effectively in relation to action research (which they call developmental research) in their book *Beyond Theory*<sup>3</sup> when they argue that its focus is:

...particular not universal, local not general, timely not eternal, and – above all – concrete not abstract (Toulmin and Gustavsen 1996)p3

and that:

If... we accept that a theory can be validated through acting on it and seeing how it works, even a modest interpretation, based on limited data from a few people involved in a joint process of change, can be highly scientific *if it actually helps those concerned to do things better and achieve goals they value* (ibid p 27 – my emphasis).

I gave a great deal of thought to the title of the thesis. **Unlatching the gate: Realising my scholarship of living inquiry** reflects my concern to avoid reifying *living inquiry* into an abstract theory or transferable set of precepts for others to adopt. What I offer is my scholarship of living inquiry – a unique and original constellation of processes,

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<sup>3</sup> I could equally well have turned to Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) analysis of the shortcomings of universal “nomic” generalisations within naturalistic forms of inquiry.

practices and principles. I offer it in the hope that others may be able to relate to what I have to say and in the belief that we each have the capacity to develop our own forms of scholarship. The principles that inform my continuing life of inquiry are therefore simply an articulation of my current understanding of what guides and motivates my practice.

Much of this is contained in the twelve ontological and epistemological standards of judgement and criteria of validity that permeate the text. Indeed, in terms of “living theory” (Whitehead 1993; Whitehead 1998) I could argue that I have already offered these standards and criteria as an explanation of my learning in my life of inquiry. However, without detracting from their importance in developing and defining my *scholarship of living inquiry*, I believe that it is possible to identify a number of underlying principles – already implicit in the text – that may help the reader better understand the essential basis of my continuing life of inquiry. I present them here in no particular order of importance.

The *first* principle informing my continuing life of inquiry is to trust the primacy of my own lived experience whilst remaining open to the world of ideas and to what others may have to offer. As John Heron (Heron 1992) makes clear, experiential knowing is the absolute bedrock of human inquiry. Only when the experiential base is broad and deep can we build high quality presentational, propositional and practical knowing upon it.

The *second*, and related, principle is to value the originality of mind and critical judgement inherent in my own forms of sense-making and knowledge-creation. Without such a stance, as Mary Belenky and her fellow authors assert in *Women’s Ways of Knowing*, one is simply a consumer of received knowledge (Belenky, Clinchy et al. 1986). From such a stance, I am free to explore and express my inquiries in poetry, stories, pictures, even dreams as well as through systematic analysis and conventional academic prose.

The *third* principle draws on Viktor Frankl’s notion of the *will to meaning* (which he describes as “striving to find concrete meaning in personal existence”) as a primary existential drive (Frankl 1984). It is to move towards what brings a sense of significance and purpose to my life. Such understandings must not be allowed to become fixed and



unquestioned but have, as I describe in *Reshaping my Professional Identity*, helped me to identify my vocation as an educator.

The *fourth* principle reflects an existential choice of optimism, of doing my best, of striving to make things better or to make the best of any given situation – for myself and with others. In *Chapter One: Living Inquiry*, I describe how this optimism may be born of joy (Fox 1983) or tragedy (Frankl 1984). Perhaps it is this desire to work for good in the world that has led me to become an action researcher.

The *fifth* principle, illustrated in the poem *Meeting the Giant* in *Chapter One: Living Inquiry*, can be summarised as finding my own path. By this I mean something very similar to what mythologist Joseph Campbell (Cousineau 1999) calls “following one’s bliss” or what Jungian analyst and author James Hollis says in *Creating a Life*:

As individuals, we are not meant to be well-adjusted, sober servants of collective values. We are not meant to be sane, safe or similar. We are each of us, meant to be different. A proper course of therapy [and I would say also, living a life of inquiry] does not make us better adjusted; it makes us more eccentric, a unique individual who serves a larger project than that of the ego or collective norms (Hollis 2001) p109.

The *sixth* principle derives from a profound belief in the value of every human life and the possibility of learning from each other through communicating the particular events in which we participate and the choices we make. This entails a responsibility to account to others for my life of inquiry in the same sense as Polanyi’s declaration:

... that I must understand the world from my point of view, as a person claiming originality and exercising his personal judgement responsibly with universal intent (Polanyi 1958) p327.

I have kept the description of these principles necessarily brief because it is not my intention to open up new lines of inquiry at this point though it strikes me as I write, that they offer fascinating possibilities for some post-doctoral research. My continuing life of inquiry – informed by these six principles – follows its own *telos*, towards that place where as James Hollis (Hollis 2001) puts it: “choice and destiny have been intending to meet since before we were born” (p122).

I want now to move on to the second amendment to the thesis, namely to be more explicit about positioning my *scholarship of living inquiry* vis a vis some of the related fields of inquiry that I refer to in the final section of *Chapter One: Living Inquiry* and in *Interlude V: Turning for home*. These include: action inquiry (Torbert 1991), co-operative inquiry (Reason and Rowan 1981; Reason 1988; Reason 1994; Heron 1996), narrative inquiry (Connelly and Clandinin 1999; Clandinin and Connelly 2000), naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln and Guba 1985), living educational theory (Whitehead 1993; Whitehead 1998) and living life as inquiry (Marshall 1999; Marshall 2000) as well as the autobiographical tradition of educational self-study (Bullough and Pinnegar 2001).

I want to respond not by framing *living inquiry* in terms of these approaches but by identifying some of the ways I draw upon them and some of the edges I am pushing against in claiming to make an original contribution to an emerging scholarship of inquiry. The spirit in which I do so is one of opening up new territory for exploration rather than staking an exclusive claim to proprietorial rights. I shall concentrate here mainly on those that have received less attention elsewhere in the thesis.

As the term *living inquiry* begs a comparison with naturalistic inquiry, perhaps that would be a good place to start. My primary source is Lincoln and Guba's (Lincoln and Guba 1985) seminal text *Naturalistic Inquiry* which both challenged the prevailing positivist orthodoxy and offered a form of inquiry inspired by the notion of conducting social research in a "natural" setting. Whilst I have been much influenced by their critique of the positivist research paradigm, I find their description (which sometimes reads like a prescription) of naturalistic inquiry less convincing.

Thus, whilst I draw upon such notions as emergent research design, the holographic metaphor for information distribution (in which each part contains the whole), and the legitimacy and value of offering situated and specific findings rather than pseudo-scientific attempts to generalise on the basis of particular cases, there are also features of this methodology that I find unduly constrictive.

Although naturalistic inquiry challenges the positivist research paradigm, it is still cast in the mould of what Boyer (Boyer 1990) would call a traditional scholarship of discovery.

That is to say it is largely concerned with *third-person research*<sup>4</sup>, framed in terms of researchers doing fieldwork, selecting samples, analysing data, developing grounded theory and writing case reports. There is no suggestion of practical intervention through action research, little concession to endogenous *second-person research* nor, beyond a brief discussion of the researcher as “human instrument,” is any consideration given to *first-person research*. Furthermore, the pre-eminence of propositional knowledge and conventional forms of data representation go largely unquestioned.

By way of contrast, my *living inquiry* steps beyond the boundaries of the scholarship of discovery, towards the realisation of a scholarship of inquiry in which the focus is on living the questions rather than seeking answers. My main concern is to better understand and improve my own personal and professional practice as a form of *first-person action research* although this involves me in *second-* and *third-person research* from time to time. When it does (as, for example, in the *Developing Ourselves as Leaders* project) I am very conscious of researching participatively with others. I am also pushing at the edges of naturalistic inquiry by espousing and enacting a complex and plural epistemology (in which logocentric and mythocentric forms of sense-making are equally valued) and by using a wide variety of alternative forms of representation (Eisner 1993; Eisner 1997) such as drawing and painting, photography, sculpture, poetry and creative “freefall” writing to convey emotional, aesthetic and spiritual values.

During the *viva*, particular mention was made of the relationship between *living inquiry* and forms of narrative inquiry. In view of this, I shall now turn to the work of Connelly and Clandinin (Connelly and Clandinin 1999; Clandinin and Connelly 2000), two Canadian teacher educators whose work on narrative inquiry I draw upon, particularly in *Chapter Five: Reshaping my Professional Identity*<sup>5</sup> where, in the opening pages, I acknowledge how influential their concepts of the “professional knowledge landscape” and “stories to live by” have been. I use these ideas to map my own changing professional knowledge landscape and to tell some of the stories I have lived by as my professional identity has shifted from policeman to educator. I share too their view on the place of theory in narrative forms of inquiry, beginning my *living inquiry* not with theory

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<sup>4</sup> See the section entitled *Questions of scope* in *Chapter One: Living Inquiry* for a discussion of the terms *third-*, *second-* and *first-person research* and how they are addressed in this thesis.

<sup>5</sup> Indeed, even the title of this chapter was inspired by their book *Shaping a Professional Identity* Connelly, F. M. and D. J. Clandinin (1999). *Shaping a Professional Identity*. New York, Teachers College Press.

but with “experience as expressed in lived and told stories” (Clandinin and Connelly 2000) and:

weav[ing] the literature throughout the dissertation from beginning to end in an attempt to create a seamless link between the theory and the practice embodied in the inquiry (ibid p41).

However, in other respects their notion of narrative inquiry is presented as an exogenous form of research, directed at describing and understanding the practice of others within a fairly conventional methodological framework of researcher-as-observer making field notes and writing research texts. In contrast, my *living inquiry* turns the storied lens upon myself in both personal and professional contexts to describe, understand and improve my practice through action research.

What then of the autobiographical tradition of educational self-study summarised in an excellent recent article by Robert Bullough and Steffinee Pinnegar *Guidelines for Quality in Autobiographical Forms of Self-Study Research?* (Bullough and Pinnegar 2001) There can be no doubt that this thesis falls within the broad category of self-study research and I find myself nodding at most of the fourteen guidelines they propose for high quality autobiographical research. I certainly agree with their comment that:

... self-study researchers inevitably face the added burden of establishing the virtuosity of their scholarship within and through the writing itself; lacking established authority each researcher must prove herself as a methodologist and writer (ibid. p15).

What I have drawn most strongly upon is the claim made by action researchers in this tradition for the legitimacy (and the importance) of practitioners researching to improve our own practice and of the inclusion of the self as integral to that process.

My *living inquiry* pushes at the edge of autobiographical self-study in the way I have “folded the text back on itself” to show how my distinctive standards of judgement and criteria of validity are embodied in and emerge from my practice. It pushes at the edge of educational self-study in my primary concern to address the holistic and inclusive question: **What does it mean to live my life as inquiry?** rather than the more typical educational action research question **How can I improve (some aspect of) my professional practice?** Both these assertions can be tested by comparing this text with

the various autobiographical and educational self-study theses and dissertations posted by my supervisor Jack Whitehead on his website<sup>6</sup>.

The relationship of my *living inquiry* to Bill Torbert's (Torbert 1991) work on action inquiry is ambivalent. On the one hand, I frequently find his language impenetrable and I reject the eight-stage linear model of human development (from impulsive to ironist) in which he places so much faith in favour of more generative notions of Jungian individuation and of the parallel cross-gendered development of *animus* and *anima* described thus by Labouvie-Vief (Labouvie-Vief 1994):

The concept of an integration of logos and mythos, often personified by the image of the marriage of the masculine and feminine... offers an important new metaphor for the mind and its development (p14)

On the other hand, I find his work full of brilliant insights and some aspects have profoundly influenced my own. Indeed, I have even appropriated (with acknowledgements) the terms *action inquiry* – which I use in connection with the *Developing Ourselves as Leaders* project – and *living inquiry* – which is central to my thesis – from the concluding chapters of his book *The Power of Balance* (op. cit.).

Torbert uses the words *action inquiry* to signify a kind of *first-person* “scientific inquiry that is conducted in everyday life” with the aim of achieving “consciousness in the midst of action”:

... a special kind of widened attention that embraces all four territories of experience (intuition, reason, one's own action, and the outside world) [and] is, therefore, both the ultimate aim and the primary research instrument in action inquiry (p221).

I use the same words differently in relation to the *Developing Ourselves as Leaders* project, to signify a form of *second-person* research process in which a group comes together collaboratively to inquire into and improve their practice in a particular area.

In terms of *living inquiry* it seems to me that Bill Torbert (in *The Power of Balance*) and I (in this thesis) have asked ourselves the same question: **What does it mean to live my**

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<sup>6</sup> [www.actionresearch.net](http://www.actionresearch.net)

**life as inquiry?** In response, we have both traced the course of our personal and professional lives through the trials and tribulations of family life, marital breakdown, the joys of friendship and the renewal of love, the struggles to be truly effective in the world and to find some peace with ourselves. It seems to me that we are both committed to living our whole lives as inquiry and that – to appropriate another phrase – we each walk this path with our own distinctive “stumbling gait”.

Finally, let me touch upon the approaches exemplified by my tutors; co-operative inquiry (Peter Reason), living educational theory (Jack Whitehead) and living life as inquiry (Judi Marshall). These are already addressed elsewhere in the thesis so I shall be brief.

The *Developing Ourselves as Leaders* project, described at length in *Chapter Five: Reshaping my Professional Identity*, drew heavily upon the form of co-operative inquiry developed by Peter Reason and John Heron (Reason and Rowan 1981; Reason 1988; Reason 1994; Heron 1996) but – like all such inquiries – was shaped in response to the demands of the context and circumstances in which it was conducted, in this case particular attention being paid to the challenge of conducting a co-operative inquiry in an overtly hierarchical police organisation. Generally speaking however, my use of this methodology in the *Developing Ourselves as Leaders* project was within a well-established framework. I am pushing at the edges of scope and scale in co-operative inquiry (and at the edges of my understanding and competence as a co-operative inquirer) as I develop my role as director of the action inquiry element of the Public Service Leaders Scheme<sup>7</sup>, setting the parameters for, and supervising the practice of, a team facilitating eight parallel groups involving nearly one hundred participants.

Throughout the thesis, I have acknowledged the multifarious influence of Jack Whitehead, my supervisor. As I make clear earlier in this chapter in our imaginary dialogue, I have resisted subsuming my *scholarship of living inquiry* within his notion of living educational theory, though I have adopted elements such as “I” as a living contradiction, and the embodiment of theory in practice. In particular, I stop short of articulating a set of overarching values in favour of twelve distinctive “standards of judgement and criteria of validity” and six “informing principles” for my continuing life of inquiry. By folding the text back on itself to show how my standards of judgement

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<sup>7</sup> A three-year programme for present and future leaders in central and local government, health, police and voluntary sectors established by the Cabinet Office in 2001.

and criteria of validity are embodied in and emerge from my practice, I have pushed at the edge of living educational theory to create and communicate an epistemology of practice (going beyond my practice as an educator) that others can use to inform their own judgements as well as to test the validity of my claims to knowledge.

Some of the ways I draw upon Judi Marshall's recent work on living life as inquiry (Marshall 1999; Marshall 2000) are also outlined earlier in this chapter in the imaginary dialogues with my tutors. Despite the obvious similarities, there are several significant differences in our respective approaches to living life as inquiry. Our work is embedded in very different contexts and follows different trajectories: mine represents an attempt as a lay researcher to bring the stuff of my everyday life into the realm of research and scholarship whereas Judi's work might be thought of as extending the focus of her academic scholarship outwards to incorporate aspects of her everyday life.

Whatever the underlying reasons (and they can only be speculative) I would point to three aspects of our written or published work where these differences surface: focal width, vulnerability and forms of representation. *First*, Judi's recent published work on living life as inquiry (Marshall 1999; Marshall 2000) has quite a tight focus, zooming in with finely grained attention on specific aspects of her personal and professional practice. In this thesis, with the luxury of many more words at my disposal, I am more inclined to zoom out and sweep across the panorama of my life, tracking the emergence and development of my inquiries into my practice as a man, my conduct in loving relationships, my search for healing, and the shift in my professional identity from policeman to educator.

*Second*, despite Judi's declaration that she does not want to "tell confessional tales to no purpose... or to make myself or others vulnerable" (Marshall 1999), she is prepared to risk making herself vulnerable as a professional academic (for example by writing from the perspective of her own gendered experience about her inquiry into *speaking at Senate*). I too have pushed at the edge of vulnerability, revealing intimate details of ritual experiences, writing from the "ruin" of my marital breakdown, sharing my healing journeys and the vicissitudes of thirty years in the police service. In this I have, perhaps, followed the opposite tack from Judi by making myself more personally than professionally vulnerable (though, of course, the two cannot be separated).

*Third*, realising my scholarship of living inquiry in the form of a PhD thesis has allowed me to express myself through a wide range of “alternative” forms of representation such as drawing and painting, photography, sculpture and poetry as well as the academic and creative prose forms favoured by Judi in her published work.

In all these ways I am pushing at the edges of established methods and approaches to realise *my scholarship of living inquiry* through what I called earlier, “a unique and original constellation of processes, practices and principles.” Doing so has been a profoundly emancipatory act for myself and possibly for others who may come to realise their own scholarship of living inquiry in their own way. I am encouraged in this belief by the comments of several colleagues who read my PhD submission. The following, for example, is quoted with permission from Eleanor Lohr, a fellow PhD student in the CARPP research community:

Your obstinacy and determination to pursue and create your own living inquiry has inspired me and shown me how it might be possible to write my own story in my own way – and to discover and frame theory around the narratives in such a way that it expands my understanding and adds depth and meaning. Your draft has enabled me to respect and honour my experience, and has given me the courage to try again to write what I mean, and to think more clearly about the fundamental beliefs that inform my sense-making.<sup>8</sup>

The third amendment requested by my examiners, was to make a stronger point about my methodology of action research through writing about my inquiries.

Although the text already refers to writing-as-inquiry at several points, it seems important to make this quite clear “up front” in the opening sections of the thesis. Understanding this will affect the stance of the reader who will then be able to see how I gradually come to realise *my scholarship of living inquiry* as I develop my capacity to deepen the dialogue between the originality of my authentic inquiry process and the rigorous application of my critical judgement. I have therefore added a short section to this effect towards the end of *Chapter One: Living Inquiry* as well as making further explicit references to this method in the *Abstract* and the *Introduction*.

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<sup>8</sup> Personal communication 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2002



The final amendment (ironically given the many intervening variants) was simply to reinstate the original version of the *Abstract* at the head of the thesis - albeit with some amendments to emphasise the methodology of action research through writing about my inquiries and to include some reference to the principles informing my continuing life of inquiry. I have done so gladly (and also amended *Interlude III: Writing an abstract* to reflect this change).

That concludes the four amendments requested by my examiners at the *viva voce*. I have taken the time to engage properly with them because I genuinely wanted to learn from the process and each of them has added something of value to the thesis. Articulating the six informing principles draws out the dynamics of *living inquiry*. Positioning it in relation to some established methods and approaches clarifies the originality of my contribution to an emerging scholarship of inquiry. Highlighting the method of action research through writing about my inquiries provides a clear signpost to the reader. Reinstating the original *Abstract* gives a more comprehensive (and comprehensible) overview of the thesis as a whole.

### **Last words**

Having responded as well as I can to what I imagine are the concerns of my tutors and to the issues raised by my examiners, I recognise too that all readers will bring their own standards of judgement and criteria of validity to bear when assessing this thesis. I welcome that and I just ask you to be open, also, to the standards that I set for my *living inquiry* as a work of art.

How well have I met my own standards? Like the Zen archer, by painting the targets after my arrows have landed, I could claim “every time a bull’s eye.” In that sense, *living inquiry* transcends (or possibly side-steps) notions of success or failure. Yet, in another sense, I confess that I constantly fall short of my aspirations and evolving standards. As Rilke (Bly, Hillman et al. 1992), one of my favourite poets, says:

Winning does not tempt that man.  
This is how he grows: by being defeated, decisively,  
by constantly greater beings.

In a third sense, and for the purposes of this PhD thesis, I think have articulated my standards of judgement and practice with sufficient clarity, and met them sufficiently well, to claim both epistemological validity and academic legitimacy for my *living inquiry*.

I believe that my modest claim to be making a contribution to a scholarship of inquiry is sufficiently well articulated in its own terms to communicate my meaning and to be susceptible to your judgement. If I were to turn to anyone to support this claim, it would again be Rilke (Rilke 1934) who, as so often in my experience, speaks wisely and with a profound simplicity:

I want to beg you, as much as I can, dear sir [sic] to be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and to try to love the *questions themselves* like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. *Live* the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer. (p35)

I am seeking to “live the questions now” in my narratives of *living inquiry* and I am realising my *scholarship of living inquiry* now, in this thesis, as I both show and tell the nature of my contribution to this emerging scholarship through explorations of the purpose and scope of my *living inquiry*, my epistemology and forms of sense-making, my distinctive standards of judgement and criteria of validity, and questions of methodology and position.

As the author of this text and as the author of my own life, after all that I have experienced and written about *living inquiry*, I am wondering how to answer my own question: **What does it mean for me to live my life as inquiry?** I have cleared away the myriad books and articles that surrounded me as I wrote earlier chapters in order to address you, the reader, from the ground of my own being. I imagine you sitting, here and now, across the table, curious and expectant, a fellow inquirer, a fellow traveller on “the path with heart.”

Let me try to draw the threads together, well enough perhaps to attempt an answer. I want to address you in my own authentic voice, answering the question in its own terms

without reference to other scholars, claiming my originality and speaking “with universal intent”. My aim is to move beyond complexity, to speak simply and directly in a way that expresses my self-generated creativity and does justice to my different forms of knowing. I console myself with the thought that all I can do, all I will ever be able to do, is to answer my question provisionally. If *living inquiry* is to be a whole-life, life-long process, there can be no absolute, ultimate or definitive answer until the moment of death and, even then, it may be that our questing souls live on.

So. What does it mean for me to live my life as inquiry? It means, to live my life as fully as I can, from an optimistic stance, and choosing to act as if I matter, as if each of us matters, as if we can make a difference in the world. For me, living is inquiring. I am therefore I inquire. If inquiry is the attempt to live the best life one can, what alternative is there? It means widening the orbit of our lives, becoming concerned with bigger questions without losing sight of the smaller ones. My *living inquiry* spirals back and forth, inwards and outwards.

As Rilke<sup>9</sup> says:

I live my life in growing orbits,  
which move out over the things of the world.  
Perhaps I can never achieve the last,  
but that will be my attempt.

I am circling around God, around the ancient tower.  
and I have been circling for a thousand years.  
and I still don't know if I am a falcon, or a storm,  
or a great song.

Living my life as inquiry means everything that is in this thesis (and more besides). It is all these experiences, all these narratives, all this sense-making, all the words and all the images. This is what it has meant for me to consciously live my life as inquiry. This is also what it means for me to research my life as inquiry and to offer my embodied knowing as a contribution to an emerging scholarship of inquiry. I am claiming, rashly perhaps, that my ontology is my epistemology, that my living is my knowing, that the

standards by which I seek to live my life are also the criteria of validity for the knowledge I create. Let me share an image with you that may give some insight into what I mean by this.

I took this photograph (overleaf) of an orange tree in Spain last year (2001). I was sitting in a shady corner, writing about *living inquiry*, tapping out words on my laptop, when I glanced up and saw the tree right in front of me. I think it must have been the scent of the blossom that caught my attention. As I looked more closely, I could see (as the picture shows) that the branches carry ripe fruit, blossom and buds. “That’s me,” I thought. “I’m fifty-one years old. Some parts of me have ripened, some are gone, but I also have new growth and I’m blossoming too – as a man, a father, a lover, a healer, an educator, as a researcher, writer and storyteller.”



and duties of elderhood: to continue to inquire with passion and purpose: to be both more rigorous and more reckless in exploring the myriad possibilities of a life lived as inquiry.

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<sup>9</sup> Bly, R., J. Hillman, et al., Eds. (1992). The Rag and Bone Shop of the Heart. New York, Harper Collins.

And there you have it. Thank you for accompanying me on this “path with heart”. Your imagined presence throughout the journey has helped me to respond directly to the question that this whole thesis seeks to address: **What does it mean for me to live my life as inquiry?** I hope that it has stimulated you to ask similar questions. Let us have the tenacity and courage to go on living the questions. If we are fortunate, we may perhaps “live along some distant day” into the answers we seek.