

Interlude V

Turning for home

Saturday 5th May 2001

It is May Bank Holiday weekend and, for the first time this year, I am sitting at the dining room table in my flat with the French windows wide open: fresh air, blue skies and the sound of birdsong. I finished *Reshaping my Professional Identity* about ten days ago and I am preparing to write about my inquiry practice – what I have come to call *Living Inquiry*. My journey is not yet over (perhaps the most difficult part is yet to come) but I do have a sense of turning for home. “Turning” because I know that I need to shift the emphasis from telling the stories of my inquiries to a more critical scrutiny or (as I put it in the *Prelude*) “a deeper level of reflection and theorising to position the research conceptually and in relation to the literature.”

Throughout the thesis I have sought to bring mythos and logos together, to exercise both my originality of mind and my critical judgement. At our most recent supervision session¹, Jack Whitehead, having read *Reshaping my professional identity*, draws a clear distinction between these two activities.

The feeling I have with the way in which you are synthesising your journey and giving it a form is meeting my understanding of originality of mind... What I am really looking forward to talking to you about is what constitutes, from your perspective now, having exercised your originality of mind, an appropriate way of engaging with a sense of critical judgement.

I thought we might have some helpful conversations about, literally, how one can engage in understanding, expressing, defining and communicating the very standards of judgement that you might use in a

¹ Supervision - 29th April 2001

critical evaluation of your own self-study. And that would then satisfy both of the criteria of originality of mind and critical judgement.

For me, the distinction is not quite so clear cut. Creative intuition and conscious structuring are not mutually exclusive activities. Rather, as Nobel Laureate Peter Medawar argues in his classic text on *Induction and Intuition in Scientific Thought*, (Medawar 1968) though discovery and justification are “two separate and dissociable episodes of thought” (Ibid p51) it is the intimate relationship and interplay between them that lies at the heart of scientific practice. “Imaginativenss and a critical temper are both necessary at all times, but neither is sufficient.” (Ibid p58)

Nevertheless, my energy and interest are moving in the direction of understanding and articulating my inquiry practice. If the over-arching question that this text seeks to answer is: **What does it mean for me to live my life as inquiry?** then how has this been reflected in my life as inquiry and what contribution can I legitimately claim to be making towards a scholarship of inquiry? These are questions I now feel ready to address but which would have been empty and meaningless in the absence of the stories of my inquiries into my life as a man, of my struggle to find happiness and fulfilment in loving relationships, of my search for healing, and of the shift in my professional identity away from mainstream policing towards an educative role.

They are questions too that may lead me to a better sense of the significance of my work, something that Jack Whitehead generously encourages me to acknowledge in terms of the integration of ontological and epistemological values in self-study. In the following exchange² I respond quite emotionally to Jack’s suggestion that I am making a substantial contribution to self-study action research:

Jack: So... life as inquiry but you are actually putting it forward now as a knowledge claim and making original contributions to our

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understanding of the nature of appropriate standards of practice and judgement for self-study inquiry. It's superb – you've linked the personal with the professional in the course of your life as inquiry. It is a remarkable piece of work.

Geoff: I feel very moved by that Jack... **long silence... chuckle...** Well I haven't held back – that much I do know... **laughter...** When you say it like that it sounds a much bigger thing than I sense it to have been. You're giving it a value and importance that I don't necessarily find it easy to claim. I tend to think that it's only me writing about stuff that I do...

I ask Jack to suggest some papers that might help me understand where my contributions fit in relation to the leading edge of self-study and he directs me to several sources; Elliot Eisner's two keynote addresses to the American Education Research Association on *Alternative forms of representation* (Eisner 1993; Eisner 1997), Claudia Mitchell and Sandra Weber's recent work on *Theorizing Nostalgia in Self-Study* (Mitchell and Weber 1999), Mary Lynn Hamilton and Stefinee Pinnegar's chapter on *The Value and Promise of Self-study* (Hamilton and Pinnegar 1998), Carl Leggo's poetic and lyrical address on *Living the Research in Everyday Practice* to the 2001 I.C.T.R. Conference (Leggo 2001), and to the epilogue of Terri Austin's PhD Thesis *Treasures in the Snow: What do I know and how do I know it through my educational inquiry into my practice of community?* (Austin 2001) in which, in her capacity as Chair of the Self-Study for Teacher Education Practices AERA Special Interest Group, she writes to the Education Subject Area Panel of the UK Economic and Social Science Research Council, about the potential contribution of self-study action research.

I read the papers and notice, as I do so, that I am beginning to feel some pressure to situate my work within the framework of self-study in teacher education. The pressure is coming from within (I certainly don't think this was Jack's intention) and I shall resist it – just as I shall resist the temptation to define my inquiries in terms of any other single model. I

associate this pressure to conform to such a narrow approach with what Michael Polanyi once called “the crippling mutilations imposed by an objectivist framework” (Polanyi 1958). Instead, I know that to satisfy my determination to inquire throughout the process of writing the thesis, my PhD must set, justify and assess itself against its own original criteria as well as acknowledging and drawing upon the ideas of others. This is my task and, having drawn breath, I am ready to continue the journey.

At this point, my original text moved on to the material that now constitutes *Chapter One: Living Inquiry*. As outlined in the *Introduction*, I have reordered this material to “fold the text back on itself” and to critically evaluate my narratives of inquiry in terms of my own distinctive standards of judgement and criteria of validity. I hope that, having now read the four narrative chapters, you might want to reread *Chapter One: Living Inquiry* with a richer, deeper understanding of how it relates to the underlying and interrelated strands of inquiry before moving on to *Chapter Six: Living Inquiry (Reprise)*.