

“I want to conduct research that is part of ‘a network of loners’. I do not want to be identified with a particular school or approach. I do not speak as part of a collective voice. As a researcher and teacher, my voice echoes other voices, but it does not seek to mimic or impersonate other voices, or to silence other voices, or to harmonise with other voices. Instead, I seek to cry out like trumpet calls an urgent invitation to listen to the light, to wake up, to know the world differently, outside the typical parameters and predications”.

CARL LEGGO *A Calling of Circles: Living the Research of Everyday Practice*
(University of British Columbia, Vancouver), 2001

PART 3

How can I offer an evaluative framework for my thesis that honours, tests and explains its generative and improvisatory form?

Chapter 13

Introduction

When I began my research I brought very little prior knowledge of higher education to my work. In fact, I still carried a negative perception of academic research as an exercise in squeezing originality of mind into a linear comparison with writers who lived outside the sphere of the individual researcher’s own experiences. I neither understood nor appreciated the value of relational qualities in my work and could only view the work of others as a source of external and restrictive criteria. I could not enjoy the dynamic interplay of dialogue and question, could not appreciate the creative possibilities of my own critical engagement with other scholars and practitioners.

In the early months I sat through seminars on action research, and listened intently to arguments of validation and validity. It seemed important in this university environment that 'I' be given a voice, that research be oriented from this 'I'. That was initially strange for me – it was in fact a need to express my 'I' that had driven me to research in the first place, a need to re-constitute the negative structures of my life-patterns and re-formulate them into something that would feel intuitively authentic. I knew how I learned, was constantly overwhelmed by the responsibility of my own persistent questioning, and simply wanted space in which I could somehow temper this obsessive behaviour with the aesthetic and spiritual calm of my remembered experiences. Action research, inquiry, dialogic and 'live' thinking, reflective practice – each held something of value but as systems and disciplines each also seemed to deny and silence the very voice I was trying to nurture.

So, in the first few years I deliberately cut myself off from their determining frameworks and concentrated instead on the content of my research, the personal data that was already forming at the core. As I did this I was able to clarify my own intentions as a practitioner-researcher, to determine clearly that:

- I would sustain the integrity and motivating strength of my original purpose
- I would find a way to come closer to my aesthetic connectivity through my accounts
- I would focus on my obsessive habit of self-inquiry until I could claim it as a creative 'art'
- I would form my own meaningful way of relating with other researchers

I was aware of the characteristics and behaviour of my own innate practice of growth and learning, and could already list them as:

- learning 'out loud'
- the careful shaping of non-linear messiness

- emergent and improvisatory
- the formation of an organic, dialectical architecture
- questions constituting awareness
- fluidity of attention and intention

But I could not yet form them into a methodological whole, could not yet articulate them as the defining qualities of an inquiring practice.

As I approach this final stage of my work I realise with some satisfaction that I am now extremely confident in the expression of my own authentic voice, that I am now able to express it in ways that both respect and reflect the integrity of my learning practice. My relationship with the work of other researchers has evolved into the rich possibilities of generative dialogues, creating opportunities to question and broaden my own thinking and providing me with my own careful positioning alongside them. I am confident that as I form my dialogues around the standards by which you might judge my work in the following chapters I do in fact clearly evidence qualities of critical engagement as I move forwards into the clarity of the description of my own thesis.

I also take up the challenge of formulating the outcome of the research in such a way that the very personal nature of the work can engender a dialogic response, the emotional honesty and authenticity of its inquiring questions generating a form of ongoing and inquisitive dialogue. I want my thesis to be appreciated both for its complexity and its simplicity. I want it to be appreciated as a unique living form of inquiry practice, characterised and defined by its transformational uncertainties, its improvisatory dialogue, its qualities of spiritual and aesthetic awareness, courage and emotional honesty, and the affirmative and generative qualities of its engagement with others.

It is important to me that this account of my own self-development, and the explanation of my own learning, be appreciated as clear evidence of an ability to engender the development of an inquiry practice from within the living expression of an aesthetic and spiritual connectivity. It is also important that I evidence just how I am learning to focus my attention on the aspirational reality of my authentic 'I', bringing me to a state of knowing that can ultimately re-form my practice from the inside out.

As I focus on how I might now engender an appreciative response to my work I consider the need to shape my own evaluative framework, a reflective analysis of the underpinning qualities of my research. It is important that this framework emphasises both the improvisatory form of my practice (that is, its intuitive and evolving form) and acknowledges the integrity of purpose I hold steadfastly at the centre of the inquiry. As I define its shape in the following chapters I evidence just how I have been able to explicate its living qualities from the creative development of the research itself.

I clarify my own notion of 'truth', referring to it as a generative coherence formed from the integration of 'intentional' and 'attentional' inquiry. I develop a notion of 'dialogic patterning', comparing it first with *Grudin's* notion of the ability for "live thinking" (1996) and then sharing my understanding of the power of personal stories on its developing form as I examine the work of *Rosenwald and Ochberg* on 'storied lives' (1992). I explain how the intricate patterning of my personal stories and my dialogic inquiry process demonstrates an ability to juxtapose the emotional glimpses and living expression of my journal with the developing awareness of a narrative dialogue. And I respond confidently to the challenge of evidencing new meaning from this type of fluid text.

I examine the way in which I express myself through the aesthetic qualities of my language. I consider the development of this language, sharing my intentions around the aesthetic unity and linguistic expression of my text, and explain how I will

develop my presentational form as an extension of the experience itself, a living expression of a glimpsed reality.

I consider *Whitehead's* notion of embodied values, fundamental criteria in the formation of a 'living' educational theory and critical in his development of a "*new disciplines*" approach to educational inquiry (*Whitehead* 1999b). I pause to consider the significance of their definition and then demonstrate how I have gone much further in my own work, sharing my fundamental belief in a living and connective consciousness that can balance my 'inner' and 'outer' worlds. I share a notion of 'exquisite connectivity', an integrative consciousness that holds together the mystery of my emergent aesthetic and spiritual awareness. I position this notion of 'exquisite connectivity' clearly at the centre of my learning practice, confirming its 'live' and 'life' meanings as I begin to form my own understanding of an evaluative framework.

I acknowledge the questions raised by *Lincoln* (1997) around evidence of authenticity, and link her insistence on evidencing the 'I' with her own notion of multiple selves. I compare her 'I' with *Rowan's* notions of 'real self' and Real Self (*Rowan* 2001). And through the complex experiences of forming and re-forming my identity demonstrate that my authentic 'I' is present as a single voice, modulated by intentional and attentional questioning and expressed with courage and emotional honesty.

I respond to significant questions raised by others as they judge their own and others' work, evidencing the formation of my own certainties from an affirmative and generative engagement with their own.

I acknowledge the significance of *Marshall's* (2001) encouragement to consider the qualities of my practice, to ask if it is 'well done' rather than constrain myself with questions of validity. I show clearly how I am in fact moving beyond *Marshall's* reflective possibilities and am actually enacting her call to:

“take the radical path in content and method, to make a double leap”. (2001:p.437)

I search for an understanding of artistic quality I feel is lacking in a ‘discipline’ of inquiry and briefly consider the ‘practice of an art’ described by both *Lyotard* (1986) and *Polanyi* (1962). I use their interpretation of the ‘rules of art’ to help emphasise my own notion of inquiry as a creative art.

And finally, I invite you to engage with my work with a quality of dialogic attention that respects both the appreciative lens of my own evaluative framework and enables you to explore it with your own.

Chapter 14

Developing a notion of generative coherence

14.1 Integrating intention and attention

The ‘truth’ or knowledge I am pursuing is not something that exists by itself, a problem to which I need to find a solution. Nor is it a form of truth that can be judged solely on the evidence of my consequential acts. It is instead formed by a continuous state of inquiry and question-forming, the oscillation between their certainty and uncertainty re-defining both my ‘I’ and my current state of knowing. It is evident as an intricate web of intentional and attentional inquiry, an ability to differentiate between those dialogues I choose to pursue now and with defined purpose, and those which I will pursue incidentally and because they have drawn my attention to them.

I develop this notion of ‘intentional’ and ‘attentional’ inquiry in Chapter 6, contextualising it alongside the ‘inner’ and ‘outer arcs’ of *Marshall* (2001) and the intentional and attentional dialogues of *Bohm* (1985). It is however important that I explain here just how this patterning works, evidencing through a particular example how it can impact both the selection of accounts and the decision to defer some of the emergent inquiries.

There are four defining characteristics that I need to address. First, it is critical that I share the integrity of the constituent process of the research, remaining open and honest when confusion and emotional vulnerability mask the clarity of the intended form. Second, my writing is integral to my research, allowing me to write through my confusion and questioning until I can articulate the clarity of my emergent understanding. Third, I have developed an innate habit of journaling to the point where I can access a rich record of much of my life, the collected images, reflections and constant questioning drawn in by the improvisatory form of my inquiry. And

fourth, there are boundaries to my work. I do make deliberate decisions about what I do and do not include and I am open to new possibilities as my focus shifts.

I find myself in an exciting place, energised on the one hand by my pre-defined purpose – my ‘intentional’ inquiry - and on the other enjoying the anticipation of an unfolding sense of its realisation – the ability to allow the ‘attentional’ inquiries to grow and take form. I am acutely aware of the focus I need to hold on these parallel tracks of inquiry, learning just when and where to probe – and when to simply sigh with relief as understanding floods through me and I can smile with the richness of it.

It is this combination that underpins the emergent nature of the work, an artistic performance that extends beyond the normal boundaries of inquiry and moves forward into a creative space defined by the underpinning principles of dialogue and a theory of ‘living’ knowledge¹. I need to illustrate the complexity of this art, to ensure that the ‘performance’ will be appreciated for its improvisatory form.

I ground the motivation for my research in a range of accounts that recall a particular quality of connectivity, a connectivity I can trace in the natural world and just occasionally perceive in connective relationships with others. These accounts are drawn in by the intentional direction of my thesis, their aesthetic expression seeking to share the qualities of the original experience. I refer to the musicality of this style in Chapter 15, pushing the imagery even further as I explore my language as a craft, as a form of musical composition. These accounts are an essential part of my journey, ‘intentional’ in their fit with my strategy for the research. But they also draw my attention beyond their original meaning, pulling me towards an innate musical sensibility and allowing me to form an ‘attentional’ exploration around the boundaries of my own written form.

¹ See detail in Part 4, Chapter 24

Throughout the thesis I make repeated references to this musicality, yet there is only one example of its literal grounding in my work. This is represented by the images of a twenty-year old account of my life in France and the relationships I formed around an ability to share music there, recalled by the insistent questions of a fellow-researcher. Although I do deliberately include the account (Chapter 3, ‘Sounds of Music’), intuitively sensing its connection with the major theme of my research, I cannot absorb it into the flow of my inquiry. I am paralysed by its raw emotional images and hidden memories. It emerges as an ‘attentional’ inquiry, but then remains undeveloped in the context of this thesis. It becomes instead a ‘shadow-inquiry’, wrapped around in childhood autobiography and present only as an instinctive ability to shape my text as I would a musical score – and in the form of a piercing image of a small, talented child playing a trumpet in ‘Further Glimpses’ (Chapter 3).

The authoritative voice of my practitioner-researcher role is heard as the counterbalance of construction and creativity, the quality of the encompassing dialectic gently forming a dynamic interplay between intention and attention. I have learnt to trust the creative potential of this form of dialogic inquiry, appreciating the focused intent of its deliberate questioning whilst respecting its intuitive sense for the significant and generative.

14.2 Dialogic patterning

My thesis has emerged in its present form through an organic, dialogic architecture that represents the embodiment of my learning practice, constantly forming and reforming from the stream of generative and affirmative questions that constitute my awareness. I experience the world as questions, absorbing each one into a complex web of dialogues which jostle for space and attention, enfolding and unfolding each other in turn (*Bohm 1985*)². The questions become both subject and object of the

² I find Bohm’s concept of ‘folding and unfolding’ particularly evocative of the constant and fluid movement of understanding, and use it here in the same way as I use my own descriptor ‘emergent’

dialogues, each one live and vibrant as I continue to pursue aspects of truth, integrity and meaning, prodding each one of them with a new barrage of questions as they vaguely come into focus. As the dialogues form they increasingly absorb my awareness and energy, exhausting in their demands but rich in their possibilities.

This emergent process is fundamental to my work. I construct meaning with new perspectives as I tell and re-tell my accounts, awarely balancing their “*accuracy*” with the new “*truths*” of my constructive memory (Rubin 1996)³. There is no linear sense or form in my act of learning. My method is one of dialogue and dialectic – multiple texts in multiple forms, each one revealing a new aspect of sense, and each one rippling on to the next. It is a creative process, born out of a determination and an ability to move beyond the cerebral disciplines of traditional teaching into the fluidity of a new and dynamic experience.

It raises a significant question around the formation of coherence in my work, the extent to which my life-patterns are actively manipulated by my questioning or conversely, how those life-patterns are allowed to emerge as the realisation of their own descriptions.

In his work on dialogue, in which he refers to the ability of ‘live thinking’⁴ Grudin (1996) considers a tension he perceives between the coherence formed by his own dialogic thinking and a coherence imposed by external patterning. He holds a notion of liberty at the centre of his work, understanding this liberty as an art, or a network of arts. He describes them as:

³ I acknowledge Rubin’s influence on my understanding of memory and the construction of accounts from memory. It’s a formative process, presenting data as ‘true’ in the context of its impact on understanding and knowledge but acknowledging its fictional quality in terms of the accuracy of the exact recollection of words and events.

⁴ Grudin develops this notion of ‘live thinking’ at the beginning of his work (p.16) to fully express the dynamic and fluid nature of meaning-making through dialogic thought.

“arts by which individuals and groups can gain awareness of their own condition, preserve it and improve it” (Grudin, 1996: p.2)

He describes the practice of liberty as the ability to create our own knowledge, to remain alert, inquiring, questioning and developing a free mind that can conceive projects of renewal. He then draws a contrast with his perception of the risks and limitations of language, systems of collective ignorance, documented positions and consistent argument, and draws a picture of mental tyranny. It is from this understanding that he focuses on the ability to free ourselves through self-seeing and puts forward the ‘dialogic’ process as an ability to momentarily surrender our

“pretensions to coherence in an effort to understand and refine its responses” (1996: p.5)

It is this dialogic process and its ability to help form my own coherence that I am claiming to evidence in the formation of my thesis.

14.3 The power of personal stories

Throughout my work I have found the work of *Rosenwald & Ochberg* (1992) particularly influential. It is through reading their work that I have been able to confidently include my own autobiographical texts. Right at the beginning of their work they make their foundational belief clear:

“Personal stories are not merely a way of telling someone (or oneself) about one’s life; they are the means by which identities may be fashioned. It is this formative – and sometimes deformative – power of life stories that makes them important”. (1992: p.1)

I include this reference in Part 1, as I look for support in my writing. But now, as I come to the confident end of the journey, I find a new sense in it. They appear to be saying that the telling of the story is so much more than a data tract, and that as such it cannot be evaluated or 'tested' for its accuracy or veracity as we would a transcript. It is in the telling that we raise our awareness, become aware of the limitations, whether cultural, political or social. Their emphasis is not just on the scenes of the account but also on the process, the product and the consequences. All this becomes part of the coherence we create as we weave

"the fragmentary episodes of experience into a history" (Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992: p.5)

They are presenting the stories we tell about our lives as unpredictable, both constructive and de-constructive, and integral to the continuing formation of our sense of self.

Their work has caused me to question my own sense of coherence, the pattern of sense-making evident throughout my research as the voice of my dialectical framework but unclear in the extent of its deliberate activity. I am aware that I am holding a particular quality of attentive space that allows my knowing to emerge. I appreciate that I am not solely creating if from the sense-making perspective of my overriding purpose and motivation for the research. I am in fact creating it from that interrelationship of values and integrative consciousness that have formed my underpinning framework, creating a form of coherent knowing that gives me insights and understanding on which I subsequently act. And because I act consequently then I have treated it as a 'truth'.

I stay with this question of coherence, fascinated by its formation from both the dialogic patterning of my work and the dynamic shaping of the living images of my personal stories.

As I read Chapter 1 of “*Storied Lives*”⁵ I begin to form these five questions about my data based on both *Elliot Mishler*’s text and the explanatory framework provided by *Rosenwald and Ochberg*:

- Am I forcing a coherence?
- Am I deliberately ordering the text to extract and lead others to extract a certain sense?
- Is there significance in their chronology?
- How do I justify the juxtaposition of awareness, emotional glimpses and narrative dialogue?
- How do I create new meaning from my ‘life’ stories?

I believe I have already responded to the first three questions. I have explained how my coherence is woven naturally and intuitively by my dialogic and creative art, held together by the interplay and flow of my ‘attentional’ and ‘intentional’ inquiries and given substance by my integrative consciousness. The dialogic framework itself, and my evident ability to absorb its emergent questions into the fluidity of my text, prohibit me from deliberately constructing either the form or the boundaries of my work. Neither is there any deliberate chronology in the data, its stories spanning over twenty years of professional and life practice, their memories drawn into the text as a question raises the possibility of new meaning. The very nature of the inquiry insists that I remain open to its intuitive sense-making, sharing that process as the transparent formation and re-formation of my ‘I’.

The last two questions now challenge me, the ability to juxtapose awareness and emotional glimpses with the voice of my narrative text and the ability to evidence the formation of new meaning from their coherent patterning.

⁵ Mishler, E.G. “Work, Identity, and Narrative: An Artist-Craftsman’s Story”, in *Storied Lives*, ed. Rosenwald, G.C. & Ochberg, R.L. 1992

Much of my personal data is presented in the form of my Journal, a descriptive account of images of aesthetic response, of musical resonance, and the emotional experiences of meeting very special, ordinary people. These entries have been written spontaneously and are un-edited. Some evidence the development of my language as I respond to the sensual and aesthetic nature of the experiences. Others are constructed from autobiographical detail juxtaposed with emotional glimpses of anger, frustration and loss. In each case they evidence the depth of questioning that their experiences engender, keeping the multiple strands of my research live in their constant ability to move between the attentions of my aspirational writing and the intentions of my sense-making and its subsequent impact on the structuring of my thesis.

In Part 1 I include extracts from my Journal that describe the historical account of my professional practice, carefully extracting the significance of the feelings of spectatorship by interjecting the power of my emotional and reflective commentary as I sense meaning today. This commentary is differentiated by its italic form. I include four Accounts of Relationship in which I track specific incidents in my relationship with close colleagues, observing in their telling the spectre of collusive behaviour I detected in earlier professional accounts. This time though I am also able to detect something in parallel, the formation of new qualities about to find their expression in my text. These images re-form in Part 2 as remembered images of conflict and frustration as I struggle to understand the relational qualities of my practice, giving way in one extract from my journal to images of precious and silent communion at a particular conference I attended. As I reach the end my last journal entry expresses a new certainty of understanding, an ability to hold freedom, detachment, connectivity and participation in one integrated sense of identity. As I understand this emergent sense of 'being' my text audibly slows down.

This is how I claim to build the research from the quality of the experiences – live in their descriptions and able to trigger my learning practice beyond the experience itself and into an imagined future. These are intensely personal experiences, experiences that are part of me and which are allowing me to find understanding and the expression of that understanding.

It is in this way that I allow my personal data to determine the direction and scope of my research.

There is one very clear example of this in Part 1, Chapter 2. I did not intend to focus on relationships and issues of relational connectivity, but the qualities of the experience documented as “Journal: A Transformative Encounter”, inevitably drew me into unfamiliar questioning. I had shared the account with a fellow-researcher at the University of Bath, *Moira Laidlaw*⁶, and appreciated her response to the story for its perceptive and connective qualities. (Since graduating from the University of Bath Moira has actively participated in on-line discussions concerning the work of doctoral students in the Department of Education and on several occasions has offered feedback on my own work.) Moira wrote:

“You write with such stunning authenticity, that I felt your accounts with you. The one about the family on the beach brought tears to my eyes, because there was, you are right, something so very very important about such ordinary specialness. In societies in which we mess up human relationships and call them families, such events are almost magical. To perceive the threads of connectivity in such everyday happenings, these are the thrills of a life well led! I can truly relate to that.” (email 9/3/02).

⁶ Laidlaw, M. Ph.D. (University of Bath)

I also include one piece of writing towards the end of Part 1, Chapter 5, that is very different - "Emergence of a Researcher". It stands alone as a thoughtful soliloquy. I wrote it as I reached a particular stage in the understanding of my aesthetic and spiritual connectivity and needed to extend that understanding by forming it out loud in my writing. It is presented as part of my journal but is so fundamental to my meaning-making that it appears to draw together the individual meanings of the preceding images and through its integration brings me to a totally new place of understanding. It is a piece of writing that allows me to hold myself open to an emerging sense of knowing and authenticity, what I understand *Jaworski & Scharmer* (2000a) to be describing as "*presencing*". It shares an experience of being able to turn my focus to the nature and organisation of my inner world, to share a moment

"when the highest possible future that wants to emerge is beginning to flow into the now". (*Jaworski & Scharmer*, 2000a: p.3)

I am offering my thesis as evidence of a coherence and knowledge created from a synthesis of dialogic inquiry, affirmative and generative dialogue with others, my own sense of 'exquisite connectivity' and an emergent sense of meaning and form. It is not the truth of the text that is significant – it is the truth formed by the writing and sharing of the text, the ensuing dialogue, the changing perceptions, the new engagements, the future images. These are truths that have real impact, on both my subsequent action and on my subsequent reflection and understanding. This is my 'living' truth, a truth that can engender action in the moment just as much as it can anticipate the next uncertainty.

I ask that you appreciate and acknowledge the integrity and authenticity of these claims to new 'truth' by paying attention to the things that have constituted it. You can use them to evaluate just how much I have achieved and then help me to improve and learn by helping form the next questions. This is not as much about 'judging' the 'truth' of my particular story – it's about appreciating, evaluating and helping develop

my claims to know through an appreciation of the interrelationships of my values and integrative consciousness, and the ensuing formation of purpose, method and relationships.

Chapter 15

Appreciating the living expression of my writing

Writing as a craft

As the modularity of my voice has become clearer, evident both as a subject of the research and as an expression of the research, I have developed a growing awareness of the care I take in selecting my written words. When I write I have a sense of composition as I select each word as carefully as I would the next note in a musical score. I choose each word to sit comfortably in the rhythm of the text, each meaning encouraged by the phrases and cadences containing it. Each paragraph denotes a silent pause, a counting of beats for reflection as I move through and sometimes beyond the accounts of my inquiries. It is a natural process, not a deliberate or contrived one. As I attempt to understand my own aesthetic sense of the world I learn to develop this form of musicality in all aspects of my text, using it to both express and explore the deep sense of connection I feel as I learn to live through my internal world. The evidence is in my writing.

Writing as an extension of experience

Both the form and the formation of my language play a complex and intricate role in the creative development of my inquiries. On the one hand I am held strongly aware of its dialogic and reflective structuring, recognising its clear influence on the unity and balance of my composition. On the other, I am reminded of its prominence as the subject of my thesis, exploring its ability to form the living expression of my emergent 'being', and learning to express my own sense of 'exquisite connectivity' as the new and fragile knowing of my practice.

I endow my writing with a very particular and significant role, reaching beyond the boundaries of 'presentational knowing' (*Reason* 1994), (*Reason & Heron* 2001) and creating a new understanding of written text as a living expression of an emergent sensibility to a connective world. I develop this understanding of 'presentational

knowing’ in the final part of my thesis, in Chapter 24.1, as I begin to consider how I am able to draw a theory of ‘living’ knowledge from the evidence of my inquiry practice.

My writing has become a form of renewal for me, an organic channel through which I can begin to define and project my presence in the world. My Journal is the living expression of the ‘exquisite connectivity’ of my aesthetic and spiritual consciousness, extending the life-affirming energy of that consciousness into words and images that can re-form my future. I pay attention to its structure, its sounds and its balance, and throughout my thesis challenge my ability to articulate this deep sense of connectivity as the formative knowing of my practice.

When I first began this inquiry, and shared the aesthetic accounts of Part 1 with the close colleagues of my supervision group, I received a particular response from Geoff Mead (University of Bath) that reassured me in this continuing certainty. He refers to two pieces of work extracted from my Journal: ‘*Images*’ and ‘*Emergence of a Researcher*’, now included in Part 1. I have already included an extract from a similar connective response to my Journal from Moira Laidlaw in Chapter 14.3. I include an extract from Geoff’s emailed response below:

“Your papers the ‘Emergence of a Researcher’ and ‘Images’ arrived by email a few days ago. I was immediately struck by two things: the quality of your writing and the immanence of your transformative journey.

In ‘Images’, the simplicity and precision of your description convey to me, without the need of further explanation, the essence of a profoundly spiritual experience. You reveal a wonderfully open channel, a continuity between your own being and the more than human world in which we live. I too have experienced such moments, although have never been able to express them

so beautifully. 'Images' is a fine piece of writing – a real merging of sense and sensibilities!

Whilst reading 'Emergence' I felt privileged to be present at the very moment of transformation. The authenticity and immediacy of your inner dialogues shine off the page. It seemed to me that you were not merely recording your lived experience, rather it was the process of writing itself that was transformative. I was a witness, not just a reader, and I was numbed by a glimpse of something precious.” (email April 1999)

I appreciate his affirmation now just as much as I did then. I believe that by sharing my writing with him Geoff was able to connect with me from his own attentive and spiritual space. He confirms that in his email. But his words were also generative, they caused me to ponder over his use of the word ‘witness’ and the implication that my writing had somehow formed a connective space in which we were able to stand alongside. That has had tremendous significance for me.

I am learning that through the recounting of my experiences I am in fact beginning to realise the nature of my belonging – articulating it with a sense of musical phrasing and composition that in itself reflects the quality of my connection. It is from this context that I put such emphasis on my writing, referring to it in Part 1 as:

“an aesthetic language which becomes for a moment my music, an active, living and moving form that takes me for a while into another, more ‘conscious’ world. It is a form of expression that confirms my connected identity, my form of ‘being’ in the world”.

Chapter 16

Appreciating the integrative power of my ‘exquisite connectivity’

As I focus on my ability to realise the possibilities of my learning journey, to balance the aesthetic and spiritual qualities of my ‘being’ with the busy thinking of my ‘doing’, I become increasingly aware of my instinctive connectivity. As I aspire to live out this changed sense of the world I begin to articulate the authenticity of my aesthetic responses in the living expression of my language, the non-verbal images of my aesthetic and spiritual communion evident in both my accounts and in my engagement with others. I develop new qualities of awareness in my dialogues and refer to it as the formation of ‘attentive space’, echoing *Isaacs* (1999) notions of listening, respecting, suspending and finding voice⁷.

I am drawn to the power of a connective relationship between my values and this new quality of awareness, conscious that this interrelationship is helping give shape and form to my emergent future through its influence on my sense-making. As I search for a way in which I can express the significance of this influence I consider for a moment *Whitehead*’s (1999a) notion of “*embodied values*”.

In his definition of a ‘new disciplines’ approach to educational research *Whitehead* (1999b) develops the notion of ‘embodied values’ as the ‘rules’ which

“*the individual uses to give purpose and to make meaning of their life*”. (1999b: p.2)⁸

McNiff (2002) describes them as the “*organising principles*” of our lives⁹, those principles by which we live in order to find the right way of living. I appreciate the

⁷ Developed in detail in Chapter 23.3: Developing dialogic and ‘live’ thinking

⁸ Paper presented at the BERA symposium at AERA 1999 on “Creating Educative Community through Educational Research”, convened by Pam Lomax. ‘Creating a new discipline of educational inquiry in the context of the politics and economics of educational knowledge’.

⁹ McNiff, J. Action research for professional development. Concise advice for new action researchers, 3rd edition 2002, www.jeanmcniff.com

aspirational sense behind her description and its implication of persistent and fluid inquiry, its fluidity implied by the very nature of living. Both *Whitehead* and *McNiff* describe these 'values' or qualities as deriving their meanings from their embodiment in particular contexts. As I consider the significance of their definition I understand how I have gone much further in my own work, interrelating my life values with the qualities of my spiritual and aesthetic connectivity in the formation of the methodological and relational principles of my learning practice.

I have placed my own changing sense of the world clearly at the centre of my learning practice, my authentic sense of spiritual and aesthetic belonging expressed as a sense of 'exquisite connectivity'¹⁰, an integrative consciousness that defines the very nature of my belonging in the world .

This 'exquisite connectivity' describes a constancy that flows through my life, a quality of awareness and connectivity that sustains me through the complexity of my learning and inquiry, filling me with a calm sense of belief and a certainty of belonging. It embodies the qualities of my fragile and aspirational knowing. It is evident in the living expressions of my journal and in the authenticity of my purpose for the research. It is formative in the development of my methodological qualities and in the development of my relational engagement. And it is clearly evident as a life-affirming energy and sustaining focus in the emergent possibilities of my text.

This 'exquisite connectivity' clearly shapes both my sense-making and action as I engage in the human process of my learning. It has both 'live' and 'life' meanings. The meanings are 'live' as they help form my own learning and growth, deriving their current form from their contextual enactment and my ability to hold open a space of inquisitive questioning. They help me develop as a knowledge-creator. It also gives 'life' meaning as it emerges as a source of sustaining purpose, a motivating force as I learn to live it more awarely. It is integral to the creative formation and re-formation

of my 'being', firmly moving the living images of the pages of my journal into the frame of today's possibilities and helping draw out the shape of my new 'truth'.

As I consider the integrative power of this 'exquisite connectivity' I am drawn firmly towards its significance in the formation and boundaries of my research.

I am clear about my purpose and motivation in developing the work, conscious of its ability to help sustain the integrity of my focus when levels of vulnerability and risk are particularly high. It enables me to work with emotional honesty, to develop the courage and resilience to resist the influence of external principles. I do experience alternate waves of energy and doubt, some days floundering in questions of significance and then on other days clear and confident in my purpose. I am open and honest in my text about these doubts, allowing their questions to emerge into the activity of my inquiring and clearly admitting where I am wrong.

I know that I am working with the fragility of my 'exquisite connectivity' and am able to trust its integrative qualities.

I need to have some form and direction in the inquiries but at the same time am reluctant to define the structure too clearly in case I simply follow its apparent linear form. I want to articulate what it is that I think is so significant yet at the same time I want to create a text that keeps on forming that significance. I want to offer a text that will encourage exploration into new territories and new questions, and above all share the emergent nature of my knowledge and understanding.

¹⁰ See Part 1

Chapter 17

Evidencing an authentic 'I'

As I begin to offer this evaluative framework as a dynamic interface to my work I realise that I must also respond to the questions of authenticity that it raises.

Although *Lincoln* (1997) raises the question of authentic voice from within the context of ethnography, rather than a context of self-inquiry, I do find it provocative. In her chapter on 'Self, Subject, Audience, Text' (1997) she addresses the challenge of expressing an authentic voice from within her own understanding of multiple selves. It is a complexity that causes her to ask which self or which identity needs to write. She recognises that this choice will depend on more than the choice of a particular perspective. She acknowledges the implications of audience and the purpose of the text, and uses the expression 'audiencing' to challenge a perceived propensity to consider only the research community as the primary consumer of our knowledge. She clearly presents a view that the choice of voice is intentional, and that the choice is potentially both affective and effective.

I am not writing in the same context, nor do I share her same belief in multiple selves. However, I am prompted to ask myself some related questions. I enjoy these lateral opportunities, engendered unexpectedly by unfamiliar texts.

Lincoln (1997) prompts me to state quite clearly that my concept of 'authentic' self is not a fixed or 'true' image. It is an image that is formed in the moment, and in the process of inquiry, as an expression of the complexity of the values and qualities that constantly form and re-form my sense of 'self'. This is the nature of my authenticity – the evident 'I' present in the text as the voice of critical engagement, out loud wondering, aesthetic reflection and sometimes sheer ontological despair. I am live, constantly transforming, and constantly speaking in a voice that is intuitively formed by that moment. My voice can be heard moving from the aesthetic expression of my

journal, through my autobiographical remembering and then out into my narrative text and into the clarity of my explanation and sense-making.

It is not a conscious exercise, nor does it represent the existence of multiple voices. Instead, each aspect is integrated as the modulation of a single authentic voice.

Rowan (2001) helps me develop this notion of authenticity as I consider his work on the humanistic approach to action research. I acknowledge his influence on my understanding of the identity of my 'being' in Part 1 and now re-consider his notions of 'real self' and Real Self as new interpretations of the evidence of an authentic 'I' in my work. He offers these four possibilities:

- The 'real self', in quotes, as simply the way in which the self appears in certain contexts
- The Real Self that is real only in a particular context, encompassing a belief in interdependent truths, none of which can stand alone
- The self as a holon, self existing both as a unit within ourselves and as a function of a larger field
- The Real Self (the Centaur self) as an "*experience of authenticity*" (2001: p. 120)

This last description carries significant meaning for me. Unlike *Lincoln* I do not and cannot consider deliberately 'projecting a particular self'. I do not consider my 'self' as something I can consciously determine or shape at any one point in time. My authentic 'I' is constantly in process, constituted by the values and integrative consciousness that form its embodied identity. That embodied identity is itself molded into changing shapes by my lived experiences, the whole an 'experience of authenticity' as *Rowan* describes it.

I therefore share the authentic expression of that changing experience through the generative and improvisatory form of my text, holding open the boundaries of my woven truth to the transparency of my dialogic sense-making. And as I have just one voice, modulated by intentional and attentional questioning, I express it with the courage and emotional honesty that is integral to my true sense of 'self'.

This is how I evidence my authentic 'I'.

Chapter 18

Learning to engage with others

As I consider just how I have integrated both a firm sense of my own dialogic habit and an awareness of my 'exquisite connectivity' I become aware of these emergent qualities in my relationships with others and with their work:

- Holding separateness and connectedness side by side
- Engaging in creative and mutual dialogue
- Demonstrating care, respect and meaningfulness in affirmative and generative dialogue

I am aware that I have developed my own form of critical engagement with other researchers, initially evidenced in my dialogues with their written work and then in Part 2 evidenced in the shared dialogues with members of my own research community. Through these shared dialogues I test out my ability to hold my 'exquisite connectivity' at the centre of shared inquiry, exploring my capacity to connect with others in a way that is consistent with my authentic 'being'. I test out my own assumptions about generative dialogue, its potential to engender the creative construction of something new, a creative 'in the moment' experience of both separate and shared meaning. And I share an ongoing inquiry around the ability of our arts of inquiry to engender the mutuality and creative partnership of human relationship, our ability to grow and sustain respectful and reciprocal connectivity.

I am also aware that I hold a strong ethic of respect and learning in my engagement with the concepts and ideas of others, its respectful distance strongly influencing my readiness to engage in direct and de-constructive criticism. I therefore concentrate on defining a quality of engagement that challenges the binary model of argument that I find in forms of 'attack and defend' or 'propose and deconstruct'. I find it difficult to limit my learning to a focus on deficit and weakness and need instead to absorb the

catalytic potential of the material as I hear and read it, positioning it within my own inquiry process as a source of enrichment or affirmation. This is the nature of my dialogic engagement, developed in detail in Chapter 22, Part 4.

Chapter 19

Responding to questions of quality and value

As I reflect on the critical role of this evaluative framework I pick up both *Reason & Bradbury's* (2001) and *Marshall's* (1999, 2001) positioning on the achievement of 'quality and value' in inquiry practice.

Reason and Bradbury (2001) draw together an ongoing debate around issues of validity and quality in action research. They acknowledge quite clearly that there are serious issues to be considered around this notion of validity, that we should be cautious about its inextricable links to the ideals of positivism. Their underlying concern appears to be around achieving an improvement in both the quality of our work and the collaborative relationships in action research. Their advice is to shift the dialogue about validity

“from a concern with idealist questions in search of ‘Truth’ to concern for engagement, dialogue, pragmatic outcomes and an emergent, reflexive sense of what is important” (*Reason & Bradbury*, 2001: p. 447)

They openly invite each researcher to contribute to the ongoing debate, setting out a suggested framework as a provocative start-point. I have interpreted their framework in the form of these questions, questions to be asked of each piece of research:

- Does it form new qualities of relationship? Is it connective, inclusive?
- Does it focus on practical outcomes? Does it have a worthwhile purpose?
- Does it respond to challenges of epistemological and methodological pluralism?
- Does it generate something new? Is it significant?
- Does it contribute to a real-life challenge?

I do I believe respond to each of their concerns in the final part of my thesis as I carefully explicate issues of aesthetic, methodological and relational practice. I show how I am pushing out the boundaries of an extended epistemology, developing a clear definition of my own theory of 'living' knowledge. I position my methodological choices within the context of a synthesis of inquiry and dialogue practice, and I am very clear in my own focus on defining both the use-value and wider significance of my research.

I am not claiming to present an account of participative or collaborative action research, which is the overriding focus of *Reason & Bradbury* (2001) in this framework. I am instead offering an account of the ability to perceive the emerging shape and form of an inquiry practice while living out its emergence and creation through the developing awareness of an 'exquisite connectivity', embodied as an integrative consciousness in each of its principles and defining qualities. In this context I find their choice-points both useful and challenging, stretching the boundaries of my own understanding of this inquiry practice and enabling me through the dialogue to contribute to their universal discourse.

In her work on self-reflective inquiry practice, and on developing 'inquiry as life process' *Marshall* (2001) suggests that instead of seeking proof of validity, which seems too positivist in its implied challenges of right and wrong, we should ask whether the work is valuable, whether it is work done well. She clearly acknowledges the need for each individual to form his or her own evaluative framework:

"Each person's inquiry approach will be distinctive, disciplines cannot be cloned and copied. Rather, each person must identify and craft his or her 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 sensemaking richly and non-defensively". (2001: p.433)

In her own account she traces the interwoven qualities of her own inquiry practice and the qualities of her attentional discipline. She explains how she is continuously open to questioning, self-reflective and self-monitoring, alert to any contradictions between what she espouses and what she actually does. She maintains her curiosity through ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ arcs of attention, understanding how her meanings and values are influenced by her purposes and perspectives and social connectivity. She claims to hold open the boundary between research and life generally, and is clear in her intent to avoid making either herself or others vulnerable. She talks of multiple perspectives rather than one truth, and treats little as fixed, finished or clear-cut. As I read her description and track its embodiment in her text I appreciate the clarity with which she is able to describe this rich discipline and I recognise it as her own particular response to the appreciation of quality and value in the practice of self-inquiry.

But I find myself focusing on this word ‘discipline’, and the implications of its ‘rigour’ and begin to question just how far the similarity goes. In an attempt to try and clarify this discomfort I reviewed two references, one from *Lyotard* (1986) and the other from *Polanyi* (1962). I am not especially familiar with these two works but do find the similarity of their focus on ‘rules of art’ revealing as I try and articulate my discomfort with *Marshall*’s work. In the first reference *Lyotard* writes:

“A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he (she) writes, the work he (she) produces are not in principle governed by pre-established rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgement, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for. The artist and the writer, then, are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what will have been done”. (*Lyotard*, 1986: p.81)

In the second *Polanyi* gives some further insight into this notion of ‘rules’:

“Rules of art can be useful, but they do not determine the practice of an art; they are maxims, which can serve as a guide to an art only if they can be integrated into the practical knowledge of the art. They cannot replace this knowledge”. (Polanyi, 1962: p.50)

I understand each of them to be saying that as we create our art we must at the same time remain alert to the emergence of those intuitive qualities that have helped form it. These qualities form both the knowledge and expression of the art. These qualities are the instinctive embodiment of the experiential practice of the art.

I have therefore confidently moved away from questions of legitimization and validation, focusing instead on an interconnected framework of qualities and principles that will engender an appreciative and meaningful engagement with my work. As I put forward my own notion of dialogic inquiry as a living and creative art in the final part of my thesis I increasingly consider its shape and form in terms of the formative principles and qualities that have constructed it. I acknowledge the embodied principles, explicit purpose, plural ways of knowing and focus on pragmatic outcome that have emerged from the practice of the art itself. I articulate the spiritual and aesthetic, methodological and relational qualities that have formed as I have increasingly appreciated the integrative power of my own ‘exquisite connectivity’. Together, they continue to shape my evaluative framework, a framework that is both unique and intrinsic to my particular story. I offer it as a response to questions around the development of ‘standards of my practice’¹¹, and the most effective means of helping you appreciate the quality and the uniqueness of my work.

¹¹ I am particularly responding to the call from Schon, D.A. in his 1995 paper “Knowing-in-action, the New Scholarship Requires a New Epistemology” (*Change* Nov-Dec 1995) to consider the challenges of helping define and gain legitimacy for a new epistemology of practice for the new scholarship, and the subsequent work of researchers in defining new values-based standards of judgement that they have clarified in the course of their emergence in practice and communicated as living standards of judgment.