

“...in dialogue, you operate with a very different premise, actually, a completely different frame of reference. In dialogue, you’re not building anything, you’re allowing the whole that exists to become manifest. It’s a deep shift in consciousness away from the notion that parts are primary”.

JOSEPH JAWORSKI Synchronicity: The Inner Path of Leadership (1996: p.116)

PART 4

How can I position my own distinctive form of dialogic inquiry practice as an original contribution to an appreciation of inquiry as a creative art?

Chapter 20

Introduction

In this final part I begin to crystallize the notion of my inquiry practice as a creative art, formed from the aesthetic and spiritual qualities of my integrative consciousness and inseparable from the ontological inquiring of my commitment to growth. It is a unique living form of inquiry practice, characterised and defined by these methodological qualities:

- Valuing the transformational uncertainties of self-dialogue
- Trusting the generative and improvisatory qualities of intuitive questioning
- Respecting the authority of my own structuring role
- Developing an awareness of attentive space
- Speaking with courage and emotional honesty
- Engaging in affirmative and generative dialogue with others.

I am offering this creative merger of rigorous form and instinctive practice as an original and significant contribution to the development and understanding of a practice of dialogic inquiry as a creative art.

In the Preface to my thesis I clearly acknowledge the influence of *Torbert* on the aspirational quality of my work. I refer to his description of the practice of first-person inquiry as

“the ability to inquire in the midst of the real-time actions of our daily lives”
(2001: p. 250)

stressing the development of a capacity to experience a quality of attention that holds in one inquiring behaviour the ability to notice, question, and transform our moment-to-moment experience of ourselves. I explain how I am drawn to this notion of transformational self-development, and particularly to the potentiality of his description of triple-loop learning and its ability not only to transform the tactics and strategies of our living but more significantly to transform our actual visioning, our actual attention in the world. From this description I am able to understand the capacity of my own research practice, to examine more closely the experiences of my own self-transformation and by transcending the boundaries of my own consciousness reach towards a new sense of musicality and connectivity in my life.

As I explicate the detail of this practice in the following chapters I become increasingly aware of its origins in the personal process of my inquiry. In the Abstract to my thesis I present it as a synthesis of the attentional qualities of the dialogic principles of *Bohm* (1985, 1992, 1996), *Isaacs* (1999) and *Grudin* (1996), the embedded behaviours of *Marshall*'s inquiry practice (1999, 2001) and my own 'exquisite connectivity'. I put forward a belief that it is resonant with elements of the current work of *Senge & Scharmer* (2001), *Jaworski & Scharmer* (2000a) and *Jaworski* (1996) on 'emergent learning', its significance in the living expression of

my journal accounts and the new ‘truth’ of their connective possibilities. In this final stage of my thesis I examine the methodological, relational and practical qualities of my work that support this positioning.

In Chapter 21 I examine the influence of *Dadds and Hart* (2001) in forming my own questions around an explanation of creative methodological choices, developing my own conviction that we need to be able to demonstrate that the ‘how’ and the ‘what’ and the ‘why’ of the research are inextricably linked. And I pay attention to *Marshall’s* warning (1999) that research must be political process as I preempt a claim that my form of dialogic self-inquiry will make a significant contribution to an understanding of learning practice. I carefully articulate the defining qualities of this learning practice. I explain how, as an intrinsic part of the research itself, I have formed my own art of dialogic inquiry and learning, a creative habit of dialectic and dialogue that I ultimately seek to share as a potential form of connective learning. I introduce my notions of self-dialogue and the challenges I experience in enjoying their transformational uncertainties. I share the way in which I consider the authoritative voice of my practitioner-researcher role, respecting its ability to draw boundaries of purpose and appropriateness around my work yet at the same time holding open the possibilities of the unexpected and the unknown. I describe the qualities of attention that hold me within the improvisatory experiences of my dialogues, clearly differentiating between the purposeful listening of intention and affirmation, and the attentive, generative dialogues that engender creative speculation and discovery. I value the listening and attentive qualities of *Isaacs* (1999) and *Bohm* (1985, 1992, 1996). And I acknowledge the risks, stressing the need for courage and emotional honesty as I also admit a sensitive awareness of the boundaries of obsession and exposure and vulnerability.

In Chapter 22 I explain the relational qualities of my work. I start with an examination of *Winter’s* definition (1997) of ‘improvisatory self-realisation’, appreciating both the creative and generative implications of his theory. As I describe

and explain my own and meaningful way of engaging in dialogue with other researchers, stressing the need for respect and acknowledgement as I absorb an eclectic mix of ideas into my own creative space, I demonstrate the dialogic qualities of my own improvisatory self-realisation. My 'exquisite connectivity' and the integrity of my purpose and motivation are evident throughout. I clearly differentiate between the affirmative dialogues that provide resonance for me and those generative dialogues that cause me to stop and think and question. I share my understanding of the implications of working with emergent order and meaning and evidence how that impacts the fluidity of my relationship with the work of others, holding me in the midst of learning each time I write. I also acknowledge the discomfort I originally experience as I search for my own meaningful form of engagement with my own research community, realising and understanding as an integral part of the research itself that part of my learning must be directed at the relational connectivity I form with others.

In the next chapter, Chapter 23, I take time to contextualise my methodological qualities. I critically explore the definition of a 'culture of inquiry', tracing the explanation offered by *Bentz and Shapiro* (1998) before articulating my own understanding of a culture of inquiry and firmly placing my own form of learning within its definition. I critically explore the affirmative definitions of *Marshall's* 'inquiry as life process' (1999) and the qualities of dialogic, and 'live' thinking developed by *Isaacs* (1999), *Bohm* (1985, 1992, 1996) and *Grudin* (1996). As I evidence the formation of my own synthesis of learning and attentional inquiry practice I am able to articulate my own distinct and unanticipated identity as a practitioner-researcher. I consider the positioning of my own research practice, focusing on those details which I believe clearly define my unique position. I acknowledge a developing understanding of 'emergent learning' through the work of *Senge & Scharmer* (2001: p.246), *Jaworski & Scharmer* (2000a) and *Jaworski* (1996), and carefully place elements of my own inquiry practice alongside theirs.

In Chapter 24 I respond to issues of methodological and epistemological pluralism by carefully drawing my own theory of knowledge from the evidence of my inquiry practice. I make my theory explicit in two ways. First, I track my alignment to a notion of 'live' knowing, exploring the meanings of *Marshall* (2001) and *Whitehead* (1999a, 1999b) as they each formulate their understanding of knowledge-formation within their respective practices of 'inquiry as life process' and educational action research. I then explore my contribution to the development of an understanding of an extended epistemology, first tracking my understanding of *Reason's* (1994), *Heron's* (1996, 2001) and *Reason and Heron's* work (2001) and then identifying just how far I myself have extended the boundaries of practitioner-researcher knowledge-creation through the development of my own theory of 'living' knowledge.

In the final chapter, Chapter 25, I raise the question of 'use-value', and draw you into my own ongoing inquiry into the public and private intentions of self-study. In Chapter 25.1 I carefully trace out my own understanding of the catalytic value of telling a particular story, identifying the contextual threads of my accounts. I offer my personal story in the spirit of mutual dialogue and inquiry. In Chapter 25.2 I consider the impact of sharing this unique and detailed account of my learning practice, its emergence and instinctive development interwoven with the formation of my transformative inquiry. I review its methodological qualities, its theory of 'living' knowledge and its contribution to an extended epistemology. And then confidently, I offer my thesis as an original contribution to an appreciation of inquiry as a creative art.

Chapter 21

Explaining the methodological qualities of my work

21.1 Explaining methodological choices

As I consider the original contribution of my thesis in Chapter 25 I claim that I am making a significant contribution to the development of an understanding of the creative art of inquiry. I have both formed that practice and formed an account of the implementation of that practice through the main body of my research. As I begin to form a public voice for its presentation I am aware that I need to explain my intention in forming my practice in this way and that I need to try and contextualise those reasons through constructive dialogue with others. It is through these dialogues that I believe I evidence my ability to both appreciate and synthesize some of their dominant views.

I find support in *Marshall* (2001) as she considers research as political process, referring to the issues of challenging the boundaries of mainstream power-holders. She recognises the need for disciplines of approach, and the appropriateness of proving the rigour of qualitative research by locating it in a tradition and being faithful to its originating texts and ideas. Conversely she also recognises that an enforced fit, the use of research terms without substance, falsely avoids the dilemmas of

“fully living qualitative, interpretive, action-based forms of researching”. (p.437)

And, worse, this enforced contextualisation could encourage individual researchers to play out

“roles of defence, flamboyant radical or something else”. (p.437)

As she considers the implications of encouraging energy to be directed at developing diverse ways of doing research well she also expresses her awareness of the inherent risks and the need for this development to find supportive environments in which to prosper. If not, then we are in danger of losing our originality as we collude with dominant frames, whether they are frames of research, managerial norms or societal values. She becomes interested in the choices researchers make either to ‘play it safe’ or conversely to take a confrontational stance, possibly over potentially contentious issues. Her conclusion overall appears to be one of encouragement:

“At times, often, I think we have to take the radical path in content and method, to make a double leap. Otherwise the limitations in orthodox methods stifle the radical potential of inquiry” (2001: p.437)

As I share a description of the defining qualities of my practice in Chapters 21.2 to 21.7, and in the account of its detailed formation in Chapters 6 and 7 in Part 1, I evidence just how I have enacted her aspirational ‘double leap’.

Looking for a context in which to make this claim for originality I was drawn to *Dadds and Hart* (2001), “Doing Practitioner Research Differently”. In their study of six practitioner researchers, who each found individual and innovative routes through their research, they focus on the driving forces that lie behind innovative practitioner research. Their focus is on the ‘processes’ leading to innovation, and the ‘quality’ of the practitioner research.

They appear to be asking themselves three key questions:

- Why do some practitioner researchers break with convention and find their own creative and unique paths through their research?
- Why are they prepared, sometimes, to take methodological risks?

- What do they gain from doing practitioner research differently and what are some of the challenges and dilemmas they face in doing so?

Dadds and Hart discovered through their analysis that there was a common experience of tension between the available models of research and what the researchers felt they needed to do. Interestingly this need is expressed as intellectual, emotional and professional, and is firmly situated within the context of the intended purpose of the researchers. For the researchers studied it was key that their approaches added value and were capable of becoming integral to the body of the research itself. Each researcher brought a different life background to their questioning and challenging and each formed his or her own approach as an extension of this merger of research purpose, current habits of professional practice, the needs of the data and their life-background. For practitioner research to have resilient value I could argue that this should be the norm. Accepting *Reason & Bradbury's* (2001) definition of the purpose of action research as

“to liberate the human body, mind and spirit in the search for a better, freer world”
(2001: p.2)

then I think we face a new challenge of explaining how we would not form our own innovative approaches.

I find particular resonance with the analysis of *Liz Waterland's* and *Linda Ferguson's* work (in *Dadds & Hart* 2001: p.147). Their views of worthwhile research, and how it shapes their approaches to the research, are intimately bound up with their knowledge of themselves as people and their personal strengths as learners.

Other researchers were:

“drawn to experimentation because of a sense that their invented methods might be capable of yielding more powerful insights into their chosen topics than the approaches that were more routinely used.” (2001: p. 147)

I am struck by the use of the word ‘invented’ here and the idea that some form of experimentation must be taking place if things are other than routine. *Dadds & Hart* may be justified in using this term in the context of their explanation of the worth of ‘doing research differently’. I though would prefer to see it expressed as ‘creative development’ and allow that terminology to encourage a move towards the emergence of a notion of research as a creative ‘art’. Experimentation and invention seem to carry with them inferences of one-off occurrences, with carefully justified excuse. I would much rather encourage an openness to new forms, to an organic fluidity in our understanding of the outcomes of practitioner research and the impact of its being embedded in the applied activity of life and professional practice.

Dadds and Hart also identified one other driving factor, the need to move forward from feelings of insecurity and a lack of confidence in the recommended ways of doing research.

“For these practitioners, claiming for themselves the right to pursue the research in their own way was important as a means of re-establishing their sense of their own power and efficacy as learners. Their chosen topics were so important to them, and so complex, that they needed to be pursued from a position of strength rather than one of weakness and lack of confidence. The choice to do it their way was made in order to create for themselves what seemed to be the most empowering conditions for learning.” (2001: p.148)

This reference to strength is significant to me, echoing my own constant references to courage and resilience, and the risk of vulnerability and exposure that unlike

Marshall (1999) I allow in to my work. I believe I evidence how I learn to work constructively with its potential limitations.

As they reflect on innovation and quality in their studies *Dadds & Hart* also draw attention to the way in which the practitioner-researchers studied were able to form their own set of criteria inherent in their particular projects. They each felt that this had to be achieved in order for them to achieve their purposes. In this sense these are very much personal criteria used by the individual researcher to construct the research. Although the formation of these criteria might not be overly deliberate at the time of their formation the researcher is however able to articulate an explicit and rational analysis as they are able to reflect on their work. It is this growing ability to share this articulation that is so important. Because the criteria emerge from and are inherent in the purpose of the research then the individual researcher is able to develop a sense of them in the midst of development, already applying them to their work even as they are emerging. This has clear echoes in the construction of my own evaluative framework.

There is also a link to a deep commitment to purpose, to the extent to which the outcome of the research matters so personally that the researcher will work to measure up to his or her own determined standards. *Dadds & Hart* make an interesting differentiation between these criteria and externally located academic criteria:

“These personalised criteria were different from the ‘standards’ established by academia in order to promote rigour and scholarship; they were particularised ‘standards’ rooted in what they themselves knew they wished to achieve with the work. There were consequently not the same problems of interpretation that can be associated with externally located academic criteria. The practitioners ‘owned’ the criteria and pressurised themselves to improve their work, because the awareness of their importance came from the inside”. (2001: p.153)

I am confident that as I have tracked the emergence of my own practice as an integral part of the formation of the body of Part 1, explicating its form and description from the ongoing dialogues of my research, I have in fact evidenced just how this framework of practice can be formed 'from the inside out'. In the following chapters I review each of these defining principles as they have emerged from the practice of the research itself.

21.2 Valuing the transformational uncertainties of self-dialogue

I am energised by a notion of dynamic self-transformation, an ability to heal and regenerate through the qualities of a critical consciousness that constantly challenges my certainties with its living self-dialogue. I depend on the authenticity of my voice, listening to it forming and re-forming the realities and truths of my practice through its persistent questioning. I am becoming increasingly aware of the dynamic uncertainty of my identity, concentrating instead on the temporal certainties of authentic representation, on the ability of language to hold the counterbalancing weights of the impermanence of my knowing and the certainty of my aesthetic expression. I am happy to stay with the constant and incremental doubt that my dialogues generate, encouraged by *Marshall* to work with temporary truths (*Marshall* 1995) whilst remaining aware and open to review. I am fascinated by the temporal relativity of my truths, by the ability of my cognitive mind to lay out in some sort of order the incremental creation of a new truth, logical in its apparent development but unlikely in its linear progression. I know that as I develop my knowing it is tempting to present it as finite and carefully defined, complete in its description and experiential grounding. However, I know it is only part of an organic, living framework of knowledge-creation and as such can only ever be my truth in action. I remain open to its newness, to its constant flux, always expectant and changing. I am learning to enjoy the sense of renewal it engenders, to look forward to its

possibilities, and remain constantly attentive to the free-flowing questions and doubts that dictate its pace.

21.3 Trusting the generative and improvisatory qualities of intuitive questioning

I trust the creative potential of my dialogue, rich in its unpredictable conversation and defined by its constant oscillation between intention and attention. I develop a notion of ‘intentional’ and ‘attentional’ dialogues, comparing them first with *Bohm*’s own notions of intentional and attentional dialogue (1985, 1992, 1996) and then exploring their potential similarity with *Marshall*’s practice of ‘inner and outer arcs’ of attention (1999, 2001). I refer to parts of my inquiry practice as ‘dialogic inquiry’, looking closely at the ability of my dialogues to catalyse reflection on both past and continuing experiences, intuitively creating and sometimes even imagining, new and possible futures. ‘I’ can be both subject and object, an out loud counterpoint of different and challenging perspectives that subtly change as the dialogue emerges into unforeseen territory and outcome. It is habitual, almost addictive, and very often is triggered by the focus of today’s sphere of attention. But it has the capacity to reach beyond the linearity of logical and cognitive thought, to transcend the limitations of cyclical learning, and to leap haphazardly into the generative realms of poetry and aesthetic consciousness.

21.4 Respecting the authority of my own structuring role

I am becoming increasingly aware of the role of another voice, an encompassing dialectic that gently forms a dynamic interplay between intention and attention, a counterbalance of construction and creativity. I refer to this as the authoritative voice of my practitioner-researcher role, and create an image in my mind of a focused and constant awareness. I appreciate the subtleties of its deliberate questions, its intuitive sense for the significant and generative, and its ability to create an enabling structure around the instinctive reflections of the emotionally-charged dialogues and aesthetic

images of my autobiographical and poetic expression. I do for the moment still hold the concept separately, a cognitive busyness moulding and shaping the structure of my inquiries while my human qualities of fickleness and inconsistency are allowed to enjoy their creativity.

21.5 Developing an awareness of attentive space

I value almost to the point of obsession the fragile and attentive space that enables the conversation to form and hold its own shape. I envisage the silent listening of musical pauses, the full beat of mutual attention that each performer freely gives to the formation of a virtual and relational space. It is a space in which I constantly try to ignore the interference of premature images or assumptions, try to suppress the limitations of my assumed pre-understanding. *Isaacs* (1999) stresses the criticality of this quality of attention when he says

“to listen is to develop an inner silence” (1999: p.84)

and I am reminded of the incessant tension I experience as I try to disconnect from the constant voices of my own dialectic in an attempt to listen openly to emergent new truths. Even as I focus on it I am bombarding it with suppositions and intentions, and resolve to try harder and harder to hold on to those images of aesthetic consciousness that just occasionally override it with their musicality.

21.6 Speaking with courage and emotional honesty

I realise that I am relying increasingly on notions of courage and emotional honesty and that they may well be taking me to the edges of a boundary that needs clearer definition. Throughout my thesis I am constantly aware of the risks of therapeutic wanderings, of first-person inquiry as a self-indulgent past-time and do address the issues as they arise. As I focus more intently on my inquiry practice I am also

becoming much more aware of the political impact of my dialogic behaviour, and realise that I must pay increasing attention to its implications as I extend my focus outwards and into a community of practice. However, I do also believe that emotional honesty, and the courage to express it out loud, are essential characteristics of a dialogic practice and as such need to clearly outline my position here. Much of the power and motivation for my continuing inquiry is sustained by the sheer exhilaration of learning, and the tremendous sense of anticipation as a dialogue is precariously balanced between reflective sense and emergent possibilities. The emotions are not all positive. There is confusion, there is frustration, there is anger and even embarrassment. There are moments when the tension of unknowing and lost certainty intrude beyond the boundaries of the current inquiry and threaten to de-stabilise the comfortable certainties of my professional persona. And there are times when I become so totally engulfed in the complexity of the incessant voices and changing truths that I simply want to escape their glare and intensity and retreat to an unthinking world. But I consider them an intrinsic part of the inquiry experience, allow their expressive voices to develop their own critical and emotional edge, and gradually allow their audible debate to creep into the awareness of the current dialogue.

21.7 Engaging in affirmative and generative dialogue with other researchers

Although I include a brief description here to acknowledge it as a significant and defining quality of my inquiry practice I develop a much more detailed explanation in Chapter 22 as I examine both my dialogic engagement with fellow-researchers and respond to *Winter's* notion of “*improvisatory self-realisation*”¹.

I have developed my own form of critical engagement with other researchers through a creative partnership of affirmative and generative dialogues, initially evidenced in my text as self-dialogues and then in the second part 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 my 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.

¹ Winter, R: Fictional Writing in Action Research, Brit. Ed. Res. Jnl. Vol. 17, No.3 pp. 251-262, 1997

Chapter 22

Developing new relational qualities in my work: engaging in affirmative and generative dialogues with others

22.1 Evidencing a dialogic form of improvisatory self-realisation

In this chapter I explain just how the formative text of my research, and my subsequent thesis, have been shaped by my understanding and appreciation of the work of others. I differentiate between the form of dialogic engagement I hold with the written work of established thought and the constructive dialogues I hold with the fellow-researchers of my learning community. I refer to this second category of dialogues as aiming at a sense of mutuality, evidenced in their detail in Part 2 and their influence explored in Chapter 22.2 of this part under the heading 'Learning through conversations with others'. Together these dialogues evidence the relational qualities of my work.

These relational qualities have evolved over the period of my research. In the early days I met regularly with my supervision group, enjoying both the similarities and dissimilarities of our journeys. I enjoyed our sort of friendship, a strange mix of fellowship and argument fuelled by highly original and disparate worldviews. As I moved along in the journey our meetings became more argumentative. Some hostility developed. I began to doubt we were actually helping each other- and more seriously, worried that we might be harming each other. I began to lose the confidence of my uniqueness in the face of traditional argument and chose instead to continue my development in a form of secure separateness until I could develop my own understanding sufficiently robustly and share it in a more confident form.

I subsequently recognised that I needed to develop a form of critical engagement with others that would allow me to develop my own voice alongside theirs. I recognised that my dialogic inquiry practice demanded a different notion of critical engagement

with the ideas of others, one that would neither compromise my originality nor lose its essential connectivity with the original experience I was seeking to understand. I needed to be able to acknowledge the breadth of dialogue I was able to engage in while still countering any potential concerns around the shallowness of the engagement. I needed to acknowledge the value of their thought in the construction of my own learning. I needed to be able to demonstrate that I both respected and acknowledged their influence while at the same time articulating my own unique positioning. But I also knew that if I tried to develop a naturally acquisitive form of learning into a disciplined intent I risked denying its instinctive form. And similarly, if I tried to shape my creative process into a linear discipline then I risked masking the unique qualities of its non-linear form.

As I have worked with these challenges in the formation of the relational qualities of my work I have begun to appreciate the implications of working with emergent order and meaning, integral qualities of my form of dialogic inquiry. I am constantly holding a delicate balance between the empowering anticipation of my own knowing and looking for help and energy in its articulation, and the disempowering sense of vulnerability I experience as I sometimes struggle to find a connective spark in the experiences of others. I enjoy a sense of fluidity as I oscillate between the two extremes, holding the multiplicity of their perspectives both at the heart of my dialogues and on their boundaries. I differentiate between the ‘affirmative’ qualities of these dialogues and the ‘generative’ qualities of these dialogues, enjoying the formative influence of both as I absorb them differently into my own understanding.

I find echoes of this process in *Winter*’s explanation of “*improvisatory self-realisation*”, and particularly value the creative and generative implications of his theory.

In his paper in the *British Educational Research Journal* (1997) Winter explores the relationship between theory and practice in action research. He presents four models of theory, the first being:

“Theory in action is a form of improvisatory self-realisation”.

He goes on to describe the emergent nature of its focus, the emergent nature of its theoretical angles, and uses this concept of action research to support his argument that the theoretical resources of our research are inevitably drawn in by the process of the inquiry. He claims that we can neither determine the theoretical base for our work in advance, nor can we predefine our theoretical resources. I appreciate the clarity of his explanation but also sense a new need for caution. There is a fine balance to be achieved between respect for the emergent qualities of experientially driven research and the need for a cohesive approach to the construction of a thesis. Improvisation is an exciting and inspirational quality of action research, but can remain so only as long as it does not become an excuse for a lack of clear purpose or intent.

As I consider the formative role of my dialogic engagement with others I respond to this challenge. I hold the integrity of my purpose and motivation for the research centrally in my mind as I allow the dialogues to form and re-form within their dialectical framework. Each one is shaped by a question that has emerged from the focused attention and intention of my inquiry, and each one helps shape my emergent understanding of the personal stories constructing it. As I draw in the voices of other researchers, I intentionally select them for their ability to stretch my understanding, to extend the margins of my familiarity and to draw me into new and unfamiliar territories. And as I ultimately form the explanation of my learning from this creative ability I do I believe demonstrate the real practice of *Winter's* theory.

Affirmative Dialogues

The body of my research, that is the text of Parts 1 and 2, is primarily constructed from an ability to absorb an eclectic mix of ideas into my own creative space. This busy eclecticism plays a critical role in my educational development, enabling me to respond to the challenges of forming and shaping my own knowing through the affirmative and creative experiences of my inquiry patterns, and proving both appropriate and intensely rich throughout the journey.

Although the dialogues appear to be separate, sometimes even disjointed or irrelevant, they are in fact synthesised into my cumulative knowing. They represent a constant practice of scanning for help in articulation, scanning for words that motivate and open up new questions, and scanning for the catalytic potential of more fundamental dialogues that may have some deeper meaning for me.

Where I experience delight in a phrase or a selection of words then I will acknowledge it as such, including it simply as a footnote. Sometimes I will even include a comment to share that special delight. Where my sense-making is new and still fragile in its expression I will search through a range of writers, looking for encouragement in their definition and articulation. Where a particular concept or perspective articulates my own current thinking, providing a confident frame for its expression, then I will acknowledge the resonance and include it as a reference in my text.

I have begun to refer to this genre of dialogue as my 'affirmative dialogues', relying heavily on them in Part 1 as I separate out and define the boundaries of the inquiries that are propelling my thesis. These dialogues are inclusive in their incidental familiarity, their dialogic resonance live and fluid in the text, while my constant questioning precludes any risk of sycophancy.

It is through these dialogues that I have begun to articulate and appreciate my own unique sense of the world, inevitably creating new forms of expression but still maintaining a faint echo of resonance where their own certainties have helped shape my own. Re-visiting *Isaacs'* work on dialogue (*Isaacs* 1999) I recently came across this description of resonance as something that

“carries an aspect of your voice, temporarily holding it for you as you find your way back to it” (1999: p.160)

and know that I share its definition. These dialogues are evident throughout my thesis as I acknowledge the reassurances and possible influence of an eclectic mix of writers.

I initially worried about establishing this form of relationship, one that honours the starting-point of my own experiences and my need to understand them rather than a starting-point of intellectual inquisitiveness. I still anticipate a lack of appreciation for its rigour and depth of questioning and feel I need to find reassurance from another source.

As I unexpectedly find an explanation in *Margaret Guenther's* book on spiritual direction (1993), in which she emphasises the importance of the individual voyager finding her own path, I also recognise that she is in fact demonstrating just how this dialogue works. *Guenther* works with both men and women and is explaining some of the differences she has observed in their approaches to spiritual inquiry. In this reference she is focusing on the way in which women ground their inquiries:

“...the starting-point will in fact be the raw material supplied by their own daily life” (1993: p.131)

She then accesses the work of *Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule* (1986) to support her own observations, to both demonstrate resonance with her own understanding and to help her better articulate that understanding. She finds that once they feel safe enough to be themselves, women will approach their inquiries as an exploration of their experience rather than as an exploration of theological abstractions. She includes this reference from *Belenky et al*:

“Most of these women were not opposed to abstraction as such. They found concepts useful in making sense of their experiences, but they balked when the abstractions preceded the experiences or pushed them out entirely. Even the women who were extraordinarily adept at abstract reasoning preferred to start from personal experience”.

There are two significant points for me as *Guenther* clarifies this explanation. First, she demonstrates the value in being able to position her own personal experience alongside the explanations formed in a different context. She broadens the impact of her own observations through this implied extension. And second, she shares her observation that there are conscious choices being made between either starting from the clarity of personal experience or from examining the abstractions of concepts that have been formed by other writers external to that experience.

Generative Dialogues

I also form a generative relationship with the work of others, where difference prompts me to wonder and question, respectfully and usefully.

I borrow the courage of these researchers, critically sharing my explorations of the possibilities of both their form and content. In the initial stages of my research I needed and found encouragement in *Rosenwald and Ochberg*'s 'Storyed Lives'

(1992)² and realised that I could and would develop my own autobiographical writing as an integral part of my research. At other times I have needed a multiplicity of dialogues to help me separate and articulate a tangle of sensory experiences, depending on an engagement with similar notions and concepts to clarify and simplify their emergent form. I acknowledge these influences as I develop my thesis.

As I form my own position more certainly and am able to interact with them from an informed and confident position the dialogues take on new creative possibilities, improvisatory in their emergent meanings and exciting in the imagined futures they depict. I refer to these as my ‘generative dialogues’, and increasingly depend on their detail as I develop my own purpose and meaning through my inquiries. I admire the logical and systematic construction of their progressive arguments but find them mechanistic, a feat of technical prowess alien to my own dialogic form. I am sometimes tempted by the reassurances of their tradition, tempted by the certainty of their boundaries and promises of membership, but am equally discouraged by the perceived threat to my own originality.

I focus time and time again on my originality, tempted on the one hand to define and share it but on the other hand intent on protecting it. It is indicative of the ethical qualities that contain my work. As I continue to develop my form of engagement with other researchers I begin to combine a respect for their individual perspectives with the generation of new and meaningful frames for my own research. I find great resonance in *de Bono*’s “*constructive*” use of intelligence as I develop this fluid movement of reading and listening and imagining, focusing always on the creative development of new and unanticipated clarity and intention. In differentiating between the “*constructive*” and “*critical*” use of intelligence *de Bono* (1985) highlights the potential immediacy of the satisfaction gained from the critical use of

² I was particularly influenced by Wiersma’s “Karen: the Transforming Story”, in which she shares the story of Karen whose authorial voice grows stronger as she reclaims herself only to then face the real obstacles of social insight and engagement. I subsequently wrote the two autobiographical pieces included in Part 1.

intelligence, the superiority gained from proving someone else wrong. He uses it to illustrate the greater satisfaction and longer-term enrichment of a constructive use that allows us both to agree without risk of sycophancy and to trust others with the evaluation of our ideas.

I hold in mind this meaning of 'constructive' as I form a quality of dialogue with the work of fellow-researchers which both draws from their perspectives and challenges my own, integrating our respective individuality in my own new exploratory research. I absorb our difference in a form of out loud dialogue, clearly acknowledging individual contributions and honouring the use-value of their work within the context of my own.

Together these affirmative and generative dialogues form my methodology of engagement with other researchers.

Scoping the dialogues

As I turn my attention to the exact criteria I use for selecting these dialogues I become increasingly interested in the implications of my new practitioner-researcher role, and particularly in the implications of amalgamating these two distinct roles within a single identity. Concerned initially with learning the 'craft' of research I exposed myself to a range of work by fellow-researchers, stretching my intentions beyond their original boundaries and exploring new and unanticipated possibilities. But I became increasingly concerned at the potential alienation this half of my borrowed identity seemed to be causing me within my professional context, disconnecting me from the flow of everyday thinking and positioning me uncomfortably in a juxtaposition between good research and good professional practice. As I carefully stepped towards the reflexive possibilities of my emerging thesis I sensed an inevitable widening of this gap, increasingly motivated to explore the new questions but similarly discouraged by the deconstruction they were catalysing in my professional life. There have been times when I have felt intense

discomfort with both identities, unable to find either resonance or affirmation in the work of other researchers and disoriented by their lack of familiarity.

In response to questions referring to the planning and intent of my research, and my intended referencing, I struggled at first to provide the answers in an acceptable form. I could not pre-define the theories or models that would catalyse my work, nor could I list the schools of thought within which I would seek to place my own thesis. I was initially concerned by this failure, not yet confident enough to offer back the dilemma as an intrinsic quality of action research as described by *Winter* (1997). As each sub-inquiry caused me to ask the next unanticipated question I formed new lists of possible insight and clarity. Sometimes the lists became so broad in their scope that I wondered whether I would ever have the energy to pursue them all. Other times I would absorb myself for days in the pursuit of vague promises of new inspiration simply to be disappointed at the evident lack of connection with a writer's experiential source or grounding.

I have therefore evolved my own way of usefully selecting the work of others, working with the emergent nature of my own thesis and then exploring the new dialogic opportunities each piece of work presents. I begin with a question, a need to understand, to find resonance, to even find inspiration. I then deliberately or perhaps inevitably select a range of writers with whom I feel some sense of connection, with whom I feel I can hold a form of constructive dialogue. I have developed a combination of intuitive choice and an empathetic response to language and style. Sometimes my choice is probably unexpected, other times predictable, inevitably taking me beyond the boundaries of research and into the work of a wider range of practitioners. These may or may not be familiar to all my readers but for me they do maintain important connections with my own professional colleagues. So, whichever choice I make, I share the reasons for that choice and include them as an integral part of my inquiry.

22.2 Learning through conversation with others

As I have created a research process that has both formed the subject of my inquiry and has enabled me to articulate my own learning practice I have been drawn into unintentional questions around the capacity of that practice to engender new qualities of relational knowing. I evidence the first stage of this emergent inquiry in Part 2 as I invite fellow-researchers in the Centre for Action Research (CARPP) at the University of Bath to explore with me the possibilities of a sense of mutuality, an ability to form both separate and shared meaning. In the responses below Paul and Geoff are members of my own supervision group, Moira is a graduate of the School of Education and Eleanor is a member of the wider CARPP community.

My expectations are influenced by *Bohm's* description of generative practice in his work '*On Dialogue*' (1996) in which he describes this dialogic engagement as enabling

"...the continual emergence of a new content that is common to both participants".
(1996: p. 2)

Although I am now re-forming my questions around relational knowing with the intention of exploring them as part of my post-doctoral work I do want to acknowledge just how much I have learnt from this tentative activity. Each response has influenced me in some way, causing me to ask new and unanticipated questions, and in some cases I do believe we experienced some form of mutuality. I would like to acknowledge that work here.

Paul Roberts

In his email of 4/2/02 he alerted me to the potential risks I run in proposing my research as 'valid' through its identity as a piece of inquiry. He raises the question of

the difference between simply living life and living life as inquiry. He asks me two specific questions which I subsequently absorb into Part 2 and address further in Chapter 23 as I examine the contextualisation of my inquiry practice.

"how and in what way do the processes of inquiry we write about make a difference to our lives and our practices?"

and

"what is the nature of the discipline in the inquiry?" (email 4/2/02)

He also caused me to raise my own question about the significance of the 'quality' of the inquiry habit rather than its 'validity' as process or method, or indeed the possibility of a framework of embodied values. He caused me to further consider this point, and enabled me to clarify my own understanding of the integrative consciousness that defines the unique qualities of my research practice, the 'exquisite connectivity' that both merges and helps define my aesthetic and spiritual sense of the world.

Moira Laidlaw

Moira's input to my thinking has been extensive, her lengthy emails bursting with questions and challenge. Up to this point I was unfamiliar with her own work and after her first email response found it extremely useful to read her Ph.D. thesis before responding. I needed this connection with the qualities of her own research. Moira has corresponded with me in two phases, first as a response to the invitation to review draft versions of Chapters 6 and 7 and then in a very different voice as she responds to a complete copy of Part 2 she subsequently requested.

Like Eleanor, Moira recognises and acknowledges the strength and integrity of my driving motivation for the research, inferring that even though we might not entirely understand another's intent we can identify with the quest:

"it was that determination to access, nurture and honour your own spirituality that really spoke to me". (email 11/2/02)

And like Geoff below she alerts me to the potential issues with my form of expression, the unique qualities of my text. She begins by acknowledging the qualities of its art and then as she attempts to engage with its content experiences a sense of frustration. At this point she emailed me and asked me to respond to five specific questions around context, standards of practice and judgement, my expectations of her response, what I understood action to be and why I thought my work mattered, both to me and to others. This is her subsequent response:

"First, let it be understood that your prose is exquisite. Really quite the most elegant prose-style of any research I have read in a long time. The nuances of your self-awareness are staggering.....My first response to the text was bewilderment which set up frustration. My problem. I haven't read anything like this before, so it confounded my expectations. So I knew that I had to get past that, so I asked you several questions which I needed your responses on to infiltrate my own biases. And as I said, your spiritual integrity shone through in a way I could relate to". (email 11/2/02)

Having responded to both her and Geoff's responses as examples of the potential response to presenting something so different as a thesis form, and having clarified and stressed the significance of the consistency of my research purpose, I now had to turn my attention to the quality of my explanation. Moira had used the answers to her five questions to navigate her personal route around the text; although a viva might

present an opportunity for one or two to do the same it is equally important to me that I make my text available to a wider group. So, I attempt to address these issues in Chapter 25, first examining the value of the telling of a particular story, and then moving on to consider the catalytic effect of such a text and its potential contribution to a practice of developmental first-person inquiry.

Moira also contributes to this question of the potential wider relevance and connectivity of a piece of self-study, not in her response to the draft chapters but in response to Part 1.

"...your words truly spoke to me. Sometimes I felt your writing was doing some hard-wiring in my mind, if that makes any sense. That happens to me sometimes. I read something, or listen to Bach, or hear a blackbird singing, and I can physically feel it altering parameters in my mind somehow". (email 9/3/02)

I value this expression of 'hard-wiring' and trace the particular threads of connectivity Moira acknowledges in this response:

"I agonised with you at the sexist treatment you received...Your accounts of being overlooked, ignored, subtly misrepresented, and not so suddenly sidelined, made we wince. I would imagine most women could identify with that.....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)

I include this lengthy extract here not because I am seeking to promote my own appreciation but because I learnt a great deal from the qualities of Moira's response. Having read by now her own thesis I was able to detect the background to some of the connectivity. I also noticed how her responses had changed significantly from the frustration of the analytical drafts to her own aesthetic response to Part 1. The style of our emails also changed from this moment, and we each began to share current and live images of the contrasting Springs of England and Guyuan. Part 1 had engendered a connectivity the chapters could not.

Like Eleanor below, Moira also raises the issue of external referents. She specifically asks:

"there is a certainty in this text, as if consciousness is autonomous, without necessary connection with the consciousness of the other. Where are the dialogical forms here that might make me see more generative purpose for this research? If robustness is sought, then surely testing its quality with the outside world could strengthen its resolve". (email 11/2/02)

My response at this stage has to be that I acknowledge the issue. It is true that I present the text as an interconnected web of self-forming inquiries linked by an overriding purpose to better live my emergent sense of spirituality. As such it is a singular journey, one on which I have been accompanied by learning friends and partners, usually in the background, but one which essentially I have had to form and understand on my own. I have formed my own meaningful way of engaging with other researchers and propose it in Chapter 23.1 as a unique way in which I have been able to absorb an inexhaustive breadth of writing that has enabled me to both shape and form the sense from my own experiences.

Eleanor Lorr

Eleanor's questions came from an unfamiliar and extremely challenging place for me. I respect her deep spiritual commitment and alignment to her faith and tread tentatively in an attempt to both respect her own definitive stance and to sustain my own ability to remain open to the possibilities. Her first question is framed around *Marshall's* work, specifically questioning my ability to demonstrate the equivalent of her 'inner and outer arcs of attention'. Eleanor wants to know how my inner attention is altered and shaped by the outer happenings, concerned that

"to be in constant transformation feels to me like too much postmodernism – too much relatedness either to be truly satisfying or to provide a basis for deciding what is good or true". (email 3/2/02)

It is an extremely timely question, more so now even than in February when she originally asked it. It was as if she had held a mirror up to me, and I had only just seen (in reflection) the enactment of this constant state of uncertainty and transience that in reality does threaten to paralyse me. She pushes me further, again along the lines of *Marshall's* inquiry process, and asks me to think about my cycles of action and reflection. Clearly her expectations are of something systematic, some form of disciplined framework that I too perceive in *Marshall's* work. As she moves on to questions of purpose and motivation I then realise just what it is that holds my 'inquiry as life process' together. Rather than a systemic framework it is in fact the strength and integrity of my purpose and motivation. It was in this way that I was able to so strongly identify this as one of the unique qualities of my research and to respond at length to her in Part 2 as I fully realise this link. She also prompts me to acknowledge the emergence of a new sense of my spirituality, framed as my 'exquisite connectivity' in Part 1 and now today moving so much further onwards as I explore its possibilities through spiritual direction.

I am also pleased to notice that she too acknowledges my own influence on her own thinking and writing as she writes:

"As I write this I am beginning to hear my own thoughts on this, to clarify my thinking about my own inquiry" (email 3/2/02)

Geoff Mead

As a long-standing colleague of our various supervision groups (nearly six years) Geoff has regularly responded to and participated in my developing work. His response to my early writing of Emergence and Images is already included in Chapter 3 of Part 1. As he responded to this specific invitation to comment on the chapters we had not in fact met or spoken for quite some time. He himself was in preparation for his Ph.D. viva just a few weeks later. He makes an extremely useful comparison between these two earlier papers and this new, explanatory part:

"Then I was profoundly moved by the vulnerability and human quality of your narrative. Now I am impressed by the brilliance of your thinking. 'Brilliance' in the sense of a certain gem-like quality, sparkling and multifaceted". (email 7/3/02)

This is the first time I am made aware of the very different qualities of my writing, and the potential difference in response they can engender. I am grateful to Geoff for this insight. More importantly though he also alerts me to a potential issue with my writing, to the need to anticipate the potential alienation of a form and expression that is moving towards the outside of the boundaries of current writing. As I seek to share the musical unity of my aesthetic sense of my experiences Geoff warns me that I might not always connect with my reader, he himself feeling possibly alienated by my evident musical reference:

“What you write is fascinating and so different from my own experiences of inquiring and sense-making (for example the musical metaphor which recurs so often in your writing is one that – as a non-musician – I find hard to access) that I found it quite difficult to connect with your inquiry process, though there is one particular passage that I loved and can relate to very easily.” (email 7/3/02)

I hope I have addressed his concerns as I have clarified the very particular and significant role I am ascribing to the language of my research, and that the catalytic impact of my work can be appreciated as much for its difference as for its familiarity.

Chapter 23

Contextualising the creative energy and dialogic rigour of my first-person inquiry practice

23.1 Appreciating a culture of inquiry

Rather than examine the potential similarities/dissimilarities of my own research practice, detailed in the preceding chapter, within the parameters of a specific practice of action research I find it more constructive to explore it within the concept of a ‘culture’ of inquiry. *Bentz and Shapiro* (1998) develop this concept in their work on “*mindful inquiry*” and offer this definition in explanation:

“A culture of inquiry is a chosen modality of working within a field, an applied epistemology or working model of knowledge used in explaining or understanding reality” (1998: p.83)

I understand them to be explaining cultures of inquiry as general approaches to creating knowledge, each with its own model of what counts as knowledge, what it is for, and how it is produced. They seem to be further explaining it as a way of answering a question through a practice of selecting, approaching and making sense out of information. It is this ‘practice’ that is the culture of inquiry, a practice that encompasses both its own assumptions about the nature of knowledge and about the appropriate methodology for obtaining ‘correct’ understanding.

They raise the issue of methodological and epistemological pluralism engendered by a synthesis of research and knowledge practices, and recognise that each practitioner-researcher must therefore be aware of their own epistemological choices. I respond to their epistemological challenge in Chapter 24. I show how I can account for knowledge not only through the formation of a ‘living’ educational theory (*Whitehead* 1999a) but also through my contribution to an understanding of an

extended epistemology (*Reason* 1994), (*Reason and Heron* 2001). I present this analysis as my theory of 'living' knowledge.

In this chapter I focus on the methodological context from which I have drawn the positioning of my own fluid and creative art of dialogic inquiry, a synthesis of 'inquiry as life process' (*Marshall* 2001) and qualities of dialogic practice. I begin in 23.2 by examining *Marshall's* inquiry practice (1999, 2001), appreciating the rigour and discipline of her dynamic process while at the same time highlighting the concerns I have that the creative possibilities may be restricted by her firm hold on deliberate intent.

In 23.3 I examine the qualities of dialogic and 'live' thinking developed by *Grudin* (1996), *Isaacs* (1999) and *Bohm* (1985, 1992, 1996), carefully drawing attention to their notions of listening, suspending and respecting. I appreciate *Bohm's* clarity around the constant and fluid movement of meaning and consciousness, acknowledging the influence of his concept of 'folding and unfolding' on my own explanation of an unfolding coherence. In Chapter 23.4 I consider my developing understanding of the work of *Senge & Scharmer* (2001), *Jaworski & Scharmer* (2000a) and *Jaworski* (1996) around the notion of "emergent learning" (*Senge & Scharmer* 2001: p.246) and acknowledge resonance with some aspects of their work.

And then I look forward, to the development of my own form of connective dialogue as the focus of my post-doctoral research and the emergent possibilities of an ability to presence my 'being' in my professional practice through the creative art of my own form of inquiry practice.

23.2 Understanding 'inquiry as life process'

In a description of her inquiry practice *Marshall* (2001) suggests that the criteria of 'good inquiry' are that we:

- Inquire well
- With appropriate quality and vigour
- That we achieve a rich and non-defensive articulation of process

In her paper “Living life as inquiry”, in *Systemic Practice and Action Research*, (1999) she defines this practice of inquiry as:

“a range of beliefs, strategies and ways of behaving which encourage me to treat little as fixed, finished, clear-cut. Rather I have an image of living continually in process, adjusting, seeing what emerges, bringing things into question”. (p.2)

In the same paper she stresses her ability to remain open to continual question, engaging actively with each question and processing its stages. She appears to hold a heightened awareness of the space between her espoused and actual practices and explicitly engages in a review of the possible mismatches. She seeks to maintain curiosity, staying alert to the part she is playing in creating and sustaining patterns of action, interaction and non-action. While sustaining her ‘self’ at the centre of her inquiring she also appears to have the ability to maintain an almost analytical stance, an ability to pay attention to her own methods of constructing ‘truth’, recognising how they are influenced and knowing how and what they shape. This is presented as a capacity to reflect and make sense as an integral part of action.

She conceives of her inquiry practice in one major and two ancillary, parallel framings that emphasize the dynamic process of inquiry:

- Inquiring through inner and outer arcs of attention
- Engaging in cycles of action and reflection
- Being both active and receptive

By 'inner arcs' she is referring to her ability to notice her own acts of perceiving, meaning making, the choices she makes, the assumptions she observes herself making. Through her 'outer arcs' she experiences her ability to reach outside herself in some way, possibly through questioning or raising issues with others, but not necessarily seeking collaboration. She explains her practice of 'cycles of action and reflection' as a classic action research format, a rhythm and discipline that generates its own momentum and so enhances different forms of attention and behavioural experimentation. She describes these cycles as a way of life. Her claim to be both 'active and receptive' is linked to her notion of the qualities of independence and interdependence she seeks in her life, her ability to maintain her self-protection, self-assertion and control of the environment alongside her notion of communion as a sense of interdependence and receptivity.

I am slightly uncomfortable with this element of 'control' and 'self-protection', and at the same time envious of its certainty. I question whether this focus on discipline and systematization might inhibit its improvisatory possibilities. This difference between *Marshall's* careful shaping and my own looser boundaries was particularly drawn to my attention by Eleanor Lorr in her email of 3/2/02:

"to be in constant transformation feels to me like too much postmodernism – too much relatedness either to be truly satisfying or to provide a basis for deciding what is good or true". (email 3/2/02)

I do openly admit to the risks and vulnerability I cause in my insistence on this fluidity. But as I consider the possibility of adapting my own practice to *Marshall's* model of inquiry I begin to feel distinctly uncomfortable, panicking even that I might miss some gem of knowledge if I order and select it too attentively. I prefer to think of my inquiry as an art, something creative and unpredictable – dangerous even – and wonder what I might miss if I adopt her sense of carefulness.

I am intrigued by her ability to test out the potential of her intended research, her testing that it will be personally energising. Like me she believes firmly in a sustaining purpose:

“Inquiry involves intent, a sense of purpose. This may be held tacitly. There may be multiple intents, in accord or discord. Often intents unfold, shift, clarify or become more complex. Working with this aspect of inquiry is vital to self-reflective practice”.
(2001: p.435)

I think at this stage of my practice I find this fluidity a much messier business than *Marshall*, who seems able to keep a deliberate intent around her inquiry practice. Perhaps it is simply a characteristic of her accounts – she does after all claim that any issue, event or theme can become an inquiry to her, helping keep her questioning open and helping it develop. In some ways I am envious, wishing in some way that I too could share this evident discipline and then realising at the same time that it would not be natural for me to do so.

Although I do not generally find *Polanyi’s* work (1962) generative within my own context of research I do find the clarity of his explanations useful in helping me articulate the stubbornness of some of my thinking. As I consider the issue of the boundaries of research raised by my comparison with the work of *Marshall* he helps me clarify a question on the potentially obsessive nature of inquiry. He talks of obsession with one’s problem as the mainspring of all inventive power:

“...the intensity of our preoccupation with a problem generates also our power for reorganizing our thoughts successfully, both during the hours of search and afterwards, during a period of rest”. (1962: p.127)

Marshall allows herself to carefully consider everything and anything as potential material for her inquiry, constantly processing and testing data as it comes into focus.

There are no boundaries drawn between her research practice and her practice of living. It is this quality of her practice that enables her to claim that she is 'living her life as inquiry'. I share that intention, possibly drawing the boundaries in a different place but still taking great care to draw appropriate boundaries between self-study and self-therapy. I am obsessive in my inquiry practice, absorbed by the constant forming and re-forming of my 'truth'. It is innate, a tacit behaviour and practice that I have come to appreciate as a creative art. Simply by labeling it an 'art' I feel that I have moved outside the definition of *Marshall's* practice and am able to make explicit its fluid and dynamic nature.

23.3 Developing dialogic and 'live' thinking

As I develop my thesis it is evident that I am beginning to discover and embrace my own questions, that my inquiry practice is a creative and improvisatory process. These questions are what define, shape and make sense of the thesis. It is important to understand the nature of these questions, not just as an integral part of my methodological standards but also separately as a significant quality of my 'being' as a practitioner.

In attempting to explain the nature of the questioning I must first explain my own understanding of a Socratic mode of questioning and then deny any similarity in my own practice. I understand this form of questioning to be an exercise in intellectual manipulation, one in which I as 'knowledge-creator' define the conclusion before I begin and then subtly manoeuvre the other, or indeed myself, into saying what I expect to hear. In Part 2 I share an account with my own supervision group in which I am actually accused of this, and earlier in Part 1 as I share the account of 'Karen' as she too appears to have the same sense of my intent. I take these lessons seriously and evidence my discomfort with the feedback. I subsequently re-focus on the qualities of my questioning and in examining it re-present it as a valid inquiry and learning practice.

I am learning to embrace my own questions. There are no right answers to the questions, only clearer vision and deepening questions. The Czech poet *Rilke* in 'Letters to a Young Poet' in talking about discernment and self-knowledge urges readers:

"...to be patient towards 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 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". (1954: p.35)

This notion of 'living the questions now' resonates with *Grudin's* concept of 'live' thinking (1996). He is writing from a context of liberty, a belief that liberty is not a guaranteed privilege, and engaging with the driving belief that individuals and groups must develop awareness of their own condition, preserve it and improve it. He talks of our need to be alert to the survival of our liberty, to its changing forms and constraints, to the potential oppressions and corruptions and sees only that

"the free mind, inquiring, questioning, can grasp these changes and announce them and conceive projects of renewal" (1996: p.3)

He therefore puts forward the dialogic processes of a single mind as a "*freed awareness*". He sees two opposed but complementary principles at the heart of dialogic thought – "*amplitude*", or the ability to look from every perspective, with curiosity and compassion, and "*independence*", enjoying the humour and delight and exhilaration of an autonomous awareness. He also proposes two defining qualities, those of "*reciprocity*" and "*strangeness*", or the ability to embrace the shock of new information. I equate these two qualities with my own notions of 'affirmative' and 'generative', the first determining the respectful mutuality of my learning relationship

with others and the second holding me open creatively to the possibilities of new experience and meaning.

He pushes his use of ‘amplitude’ still further and develops a notion of

“copious thinking”

By this he means to describe the ability to think generously, to expand into a subject we are trying to understand rather than use a reductive method of interpretation to understand the ‘truth’. He is talking about a mode of understanding, a method of interpretation, that is open, forgiving, unpunctuated and able to interact with living ideas. He experiences this form of thinking as empowering, as liberalising, and describes it as a living experience of expanded awareness:

“To think copiously is to think with the mind and the body, to have full and intimate contact with experience, approaching that of a wild animal’s in nature. Drawn into the universe of an idea, the mind loses its assumed shape, its entangled rationalizations are loosened, the self dissolves, the thinker becomes nobody, the thinker is one with thought”.

(1996: p.55)

As he develops this ‘copious thinking’ into a notion of dialogic thought, and begins to use the expression *“live thinking”* (p.16) he set out ten precepts for philosophical discourse (pp.108-109) and its practitioners, as part of inspiring people to independent thought. I value these as an aspirational framework to ‘live thinking’, one that mirrors back to me some of the qualities of my own dialogic inquiry while at the same time challenging me with new ones. I have paraphrased them here for brevity:

He proposes that philosophical writing should:

- Be subtle and complex only in its development, not its diction
- Be respectful and honest towards its reader
- Should enable the reader to differentiate between its premises and prejudices
- Despise no experience or detail that can hold a glimmer of truth
- Communicate in multiple forms rather than speak from a single position
- Inspire and cause the reader to question and self-question
- Be dialogic, allowing the reader to contribute to the text
- Undermine security, exposing an explosive issue beneath each stable monument
- Aim for liberation and teaching rather than the certainty of academic authority
- Display humility in the face of truth

When I then look at *Isaacs'* (1999) work on dialogue I again find familiar qualities in a description of dialogic practice, although in *Isaacs'* case this dialogic practice is first and foremost proposed as a reciprocal learning experience. The starting-point for his development of dialogue is an attempt to address the ability to think together, to engender human interaction, and to encourage the development of

“collective improvisation and creativity”.

I certainly respect his intention and increasingly return to his work as I move on with my growing interest in relational work and towards my post-doctoral research. At this point of this thesis though I am particularly interested in the qualities of his notion of dialogue, and how they help me develop my own articulation.

He perceives of dialogue as a quality of being, as a behaviour rather than a method. He makes a distinction between two types of dialogue. He describes *“reflective dialogue”* as the ability to reflect on what we have not been noticing, enabling us to pay attention to deeper questions and the framing of problems, and *“generative*

dialogue” as a form of dialogue that can create entirely new possibilities, create new levels of interaction. In my own terms, these are the ‘attentional’ dialogues of my improvisatory art, the creative dialogues and unanticipated questioning that through their unfamiliarity generate new and unanticipated turns of inquiry.

Isaacs then develops four qualities of practice that both form and underpin his dialogue process:

- Listening
- Respecting
- Suspending
- Finding voice

I consider them alongside the defining principles of my own dialogic practice, holding them carefully against my own notions of an embodied truth and the qualities of attentive space, and the living expression of my authentic connectivity.

Isaacs (1999) talks of “*listening*” as the ability to develop an inner silence, the ability to learn to trust the emptiness and to stay with the possible vulnerability it may cause, in order to stay present and fully participative. By “*respecting*” he means the qualities of attention we pay to each other, our social behaviour, our ability to form mutuality, to transform traditional authority relationships into ones of mutual respect. By “*suspending*” he means to loosen our grip on learned ways of seeing and thinking and doing, and learning to gain new perspectives. He sees this as integral to cultivating the conditions under which we might evolve and change. He describes “*finding voice*” as the greatest challenge:

“Speaking your voice has to do with revealing what is true for you regardless of other influences that might be brought to bear. ‘Courageous speech,’ says poet David

Whyte in his book The Heart Aroused, 'has always held us in awe'. It does so, he suggests, because it is so revealing of our inner lives.

Finding your voice in dialogue means learning to ask a simple question: What needs to be expressed now? To do this you need to know how to listen not only to your internal emotional reactions and impulses – or to the many images of how you think you should behave – but to yourself". (1999: p.159)

My own dialogic inquiry practice firmly positions this ability to listen to the formation of the qualities and nature of 'true' consciousness as integral to the process itself, the voice of my 'exquisite connectivity' clearly heard as I re-construct my world through my own notion of dialogic thought. I share this voice as the structuring voice of my narrative text and through the living expression of my journal.

Bohm (1992) also positions dialogue as a relational experience, focusing on an ability to create participatory meaning. He encourages us to trust its improvisatory nature, to let the meanings emerge without constraint of agenda or purpose and to act according to the meaning we see. Any apparent incoherence should be respected and we should be alert to our reflexive attempts to avoid or cover it up. He describes this emergent process as a moving process:

"From the meaning flows the sense of value. And from that flows the purpose and the action". (1992: p.207)

He develops a concept of 'folding and unfolding' to explain this constant and fluid movement of understanding. He proposes that all the aspects of mind show themselves as enfolding each other, and transforming into each other through "enfoldment and unfoldment" (1985). He perceives a stream of thought or perception as a sense of energy flowing between us, unfolding and forming the meaning of the dialogue. He sees this ability to form meaning as an inseparable part of our

consciousness. As we make a fundamental change in our meaning then we must inevitably be making a change in our own 'being' and vice versa. We are part of an inevitable whole.

Bohm (1992) also holds a notion of thought as a 'system', a multi-dimensional frame from within which he is able to draw together all aspects of sense-making into the construction of 'truth'. He emphasises that coherence is formed from the interconnection of all the parts:

"When you raise questions intellectually they may affect the non-intellectual parts or vice versa...If it is one system you deal with all the parts". (1992: p.43)

I acknowledge that he is developing this notion of 'unfolding' coherence within a participatory context but value the echoes of my own belief in an ability to form coherence and truth from the integration of my values, my integrative consciousness and my relational connectivity. Like *Bohm*, I believe that dialogue, and more specifically dialogic inquiry, can alter the shape of our identities as we change the meanings of our 'truths'. And like *Bohm* I hold a notion of the incessant nature of this woven truth at the centre of my theory of knowledge:

"I think one of the fundamental mistakes of the human race has been to say that when you have finished with a thought, it's gone. But it hasn't gone – it has 'folded back' into the rest of consciousness...it may unfold again, or unfold in another form. So there's a constant process of unfolding from the background of consciousness into the foreground, and then back again". (1996: p. 89)

Bohm (1992, 1996) views dialogue as a testing ground for the limits of our assumed knowledge, and offers it as a possibility for an entirely new order of communication and relationship with ourselves, our fellows and the world we inhabit. He believes in

a participatory consciousness that allows whole meaning to emerge from the group. He sees this as true dialogue.

One of his primary intents is to try and increase both the understanding of and the concern for the fragmentation he sees enacted in such developments as separate nations, economies and value systems. He believes that human beings have an intrinsic need to understand and relate to a “*cosmic dimension*” of existence. He believes that ‘attention’ rather than thought will be the way of learning, and insists that sustained inquiry into the nature of consciousness and the “*ground of being*” are essential if there is to be any effort to resolve this fragmentation. He believes that this fragmentation is formed by the incoherence of our own thought processes, and proposes the qualities of dialogue as an entirely new way of communicating and relating in first, second and third person ways.

Although my own thesis concentrates on the development of qualities of first person dialogue I am strongly drawn to the continuation of *Bohm*'s inquiry. I do explore forms of second person dialogue as I form affirmative and generative inquiries around the work of others. I also evidence the formation of dialogic inquiry with my own community of researchers. As I do so I develop my own expectation of this relational activity, inviting colleagues to explore with me the possibility that our dialogic engagement might grow and sustain our connectivity. I echo a similar invitation in the introduction to my thesis when I refer to the integral quality of dialogic engagement as ‘a delicate balance of mutual attention’, and anticipate our ability to exercise our own meaning-making while at the same time learning from the differences generated between them.

As I now move forward into my post-doctoral research and begin to form a new inquiry around the qualities of my relational practice I am motivated by these aspirational words from *Bohm* (1996):

“...if we can really communicate, then we will have fellowships, participation, friendship, and love, growing and growing...Such an energy has been called ‘communion’ ...the idea of partaking of the whole and taking part in it; not merely the whole group, but the whole”. (1996: p.46)

23.4 Aligning to notions of ‘emergent learning’

As I consider the significance of my ability to push the boundaries of experiential and presentational knowing, and my ability to work with the fluidity of my own generative questioning, I am drawn to the notions of ‘emergent learning’ and ‘presencing’ developed by *Senge & Scharmer* (2001) and *Jaworski & Scharmer* (2000a). Their context is one of building learning communities and new leadership capability, developing an emergent process of learning from the capacity to ‘presence’ as well as to reflect, and beginning to develop a new focus on the first-person learning capabilities of managerial groups.

I find it useful to specifically explore their focus on the ability to ‘presence’ emerging futures, to allow inner knowing to emerge. *Senge & Scharmer* (2001: p.246) simplify this emergent learning cycle into four steps:

- *Observe, observe, observe*
- *Become still: recognise the emptiness of ideas about the past or future*
- *Allow inner knowing to emerge (‘presencing’)*
- *Act in an instant, and observe again (Jaworski & Scharmer 2000b³)*

Their emphasis is on the third and fourth steps, the ability to learn from the development of qualities of still and open awareness. They refer to the work of *Jaworski* and *Isaacs* as formative in their thinking. In his work on ‘synchronicity’

³ Jaworski, J. & Scharmer, C.O., 2000. “Leadership in the new economy: accessing another cognitive capacity”. Hamilton, MA: Working Paper, Centre for Generative Leadership.

Jaworski (1996) develops his own understanding of this ability to work with emergent knowing, stressing the need to allow a deep sense of purpose and aspiration to gently unfold its meaning. He values the ability to release a constraining hold on the intention of his will, to allow an inherent pattern to emerge simply from his being. *Bohm* (1996) refers to it as

“a deep and intense awareness, going beyond the imagery and intellectual analysis of our confused process of thoughts” (1996: p.67).

In his work on dialogue *Isaacs* (1999) refers to the tremendous amount of creative energy released by an ability to suspend, the ability to simply acknowledge and observe as thoughts and feelings arise without being compelled to act on them. He links this notion of ‘suspension’ closely to an understanding of ‘listening’, an *“expansive activity”* (p.85) that enables us to perceive another world of possibility and to connect with a wholeness that pervades everything.

I understand each of them to be implying that there is a form of knowing that will emerge from this ability to be still that is not otherwise available to us. It appears to be a form of knowing that is present within us but which is unvoiced as a future possibility by the over-active busyness of our reflective structuring. It represents a new source of learning, an ability to learn from an experience that is barely forming, to access deeper levels of will that combine the qualities of our human knowing. *Versteegen, Scharmer & Kaufer* (2001) define these qualities as motivational, cognitive and emotional.

In their work on developing leadership capability for the new digital economy, *Jaworski & Scharmer* (2000a) identify what they refer to as a ‘critical new capacity’, an ability to sense and seize opportunities as they emerge. Their focus is on the ability to recognise the possibilities inherent in a new set of conditions. They identify this new core capability as one organic process, a fluid continuum constituted from:

- *Observing: seeing reality with fresh eyes*
- *Sensing: tuning into emerging patterns that inform future possibilities*
- *Presencing: accessing inner sources of creativity and will*
- *Crystallizing: creating vision and intention*
- *Executing: acting in an instant to capitalise on new opportunities (p.2)*

I am particularly drawn by their definitions of ‘sensing’ and ‘presencing’, focusing for the moment on the qualities inherent in a practice of heightened noticing rather than on the subsequent ability to translate into pragmatic action. They describe ‘sensing’ as a deeper way of seeing, one that

“...engages the imaginative mind as a tool for perception that will help you see patterns, make new connections, and deepen your understanding of your world as it unfolds.” (2000a: p.3)

This then combines with ‘presencing’, the ability to shift the focus from an external world to the nature and organisation of an inner world. It encompasses asking questions about the self, retreating to an environment that allows inner knowing to emerge, that allows an intuitive sense of ‘rightness’ or ‘fit’ to develop. They describe it as an evolving process, one that holds together a sense of personal integrity and coherence, and one that is experienced when

“the highest possible future that wants to emerge is beginning to flow into the now”.
(2000a: p.3)

They identify three root principles underpinning this notion of a continuum:

- The power of intention
- The power of mindfulness

- The power of compassion

By 'intention' they appear to imply the ability to act with deliberate purpose, to be willing to accept an enabling role in the realisation of something that is both greater than and simultaneously defines us. They explain their second root principle, 'mindfulness', as a condition of hyper-concentration, a quality of attention that can give access to a different form of awareness. They believe this form of awareness can help us participate in creating reality before and as it unfolds. And they explain their third principle as a belief in a collective energy system, one that is formed from the ability to access a form of 'intelligence of the heart', a principle of 'love' that dissolves boundaries. (2000a: p.7)

As I consider the significance of their work I also consider its context and scope. *Jaworski & Scharmer* are motivated to work with business leaders to incorporate this competence into organisations, to help build infrastructures and develop practices that will ensure these stages happen collectively and regularly. My own focus is on the ability to develop these qualities within an individual practice, to extend my own qualities of 'sensing' and 'presencing' out from my researcher practice and out into my professional practice. My research evidences this learning journey as I try to find my own way of stepping across the increasing divide between my 'old' worldview and an emerging one that focuses on the development of an integrative consciousness that holds together all the dimensions of my authentic human presence.

Although not claiming to develop the definitions of 'emergent learning' articulated by *Jaworski, Scharmer* or *Senge* to a next stage I do however wish to make a claim that I can put my own work usefully alongside theirs. As I track the significance of the images of my journal accounts and the new 'truth' of their connective possibilities I evidence an ability to hold their living expression side by side with the reflective and generative capacity of a narrative, dialogic voice. I show how an individual can develop her own learning practice by accessing the experience of her authentic future,

holding the integrative consciousness of an ‘exquisite connectivity’ centrally in that practice. I present a very clear account of a practitioner-researcher engaged in a form of first-person research, the outcome of the research formed from an ability to construct a practice of learning and inquiry from the inside out, the defining qualities and rules emerging as part of that construction. And I evidence an ability to form new qualities of knowing, learning to trust the intuitive flow of generative questioning and allowing awareness to emerge from the richness of attentive listening.

I was able to crystallize this understanding following a workshop facilitated by *Bill Torbert*⁴ at the University of Bath on July 5th 2002. As part of his presentation on the development of an understanding of “*timely action*” he presented a two-dimensional model in which he depicted the three research voices of first-, second- and third-person on one axis, and the time-frames of past, present and future on the other. Where first-person and future converged he referred to a capacity to intentionally shape our futures, an under-developed ability to actively engage with our emergent experiences and to influence their subsequent patterning. He referred to it as “*timely action*”, linking this critical capacity with the ability to gain access to an altered state of consciousness.

In a subsequent interview with *Russ Volckmann*, published on the LeadCoach website⁵, he expands his explanation within the context of describing the artistic qualities of action inquiry:

“A timely performance is an artistic performance. It can’t be generated by rules. It can’t be generated by generalizations. It has to be mediated by an awareness that is connected to movement in the moment”. (p.19)

⁴ Torbert, W. R., Professor of Management at Boston College’s Carroll School of Management

⁵ http://www.leadcoach.com/archives/interview/bill_torbert.html

After the workshop he invited our email responses. It was only through the drafting of my email to him that I began to fully appreciate the significance of this power of awareness in mediating action, and its resonance with the integrative consciousness of my own inquiry practice.

Just ten days before the workshop I had received some extremely distressing personal news. That personal news had invaded most of my thinking space. I explained this in the first lines of my email, subsequently evidencing the qualities of my inquiry practice as I tracked the impact of this news on both my subsequent action and my ongoing development.

“As I tried to process the news I felt an acute sense of my own fractionation, an overwhelming, cognitive power grasping hold of the disciplinary process, calmly tracing its outline, allowing that other voice of wife and friend and lover to become silently distorted by the emergent story. I held on to the calming effect of this ‘rational’ response, enjoying the ease and familiarity of its behaviour and intent on staying in this safe place. One by one I quietened the questioning voices, pushing the creativity of those last pages of my thesis into a darker corner, lowering the light on the images of dreams and futures. I became silently angry, unable to sleep, to talk or write, to touch. I touched life in very few places.

Days later I began to notice images that I couldn’t erase. As I tried to sleep I concentrated on their dull, grey hardness, huge knots of iron bars blocking my way as I tried to avoid their confrontation. As I held on to their twisted images they began to move, slowly, easily, pliable now as their curving colours gradually softened into a pinkish-grey. I felt the tension drop from my body, only suddenly aware of the bodily distortion I had been holding on to for ten days. I felt myself breathe, as if for the first time. I became aware of

other conversations, other voices continuing the dialogues of my ongoing life. I picked them out one by one, deciding care-fully how I should respond. As I listened to one persistent voice I began to write, in the dark, enjoying the unexpected insight. And as this new quality of attention began to draw me deliberately back into my own body, into my own sense of being and emotional connectivity I knew I had begun to recover my sense of wholeness.

The next day I attended your seminar Bill.

I remember trying to explain to you how I hold separate notions of 'intentional' and 'attentional', how I experience them as different qualities of awareness. For me these different qualities of attention are inextricably linked with my determination to inter-weave the power of my cognitive mind with all those other sense-forming capacities of my wholeness. The first is an ability to inquire and engage with focus and pre-defined intent, with implications of traceable action and outcome. The second is more a fleeting sense of something significant, of something emergent, of something that may be lost if I don't deliberately turn my attention to it. There is no apparent purpose, no intended cycle of action – simply a sense of meaningfulness that emerges from a re-connection with my 'being'." (email 9/7/02)

It is this sense of meaningfulness, engendered by my heightened sense of 'exquisite connectivity', that I identify as a quality of emergent knowing in my inquiry practice.

Chapter 24

Drawing a theory of 'living' knowledge from the evidence of my inquiry practice

24.1 Responding to issues of methodological and epistemological pluralism

Acknowledging the need for a 'theory' of knowledge

I have been prompted to respond to the challenges of methodological and epistemological pluralism.

In their work on the development of a 'culture' of "*mindful inquiry*" *Bentz and Shapiro* (1998) emphasise the need for new practitioner-researchers to determine the shape of their own form of epistemology. They stress the need to see research as part of the way in which the practitioner engages with the world, as a way in which he or she can transform their identity. They propose that research needs to be thought of in connection with

"all of the ways that it is part of individuals' lives and lifeworlds". (1998: p.5)

They appear to support the belief that postmodernism requires epistemological explicitness and responsibility. They firmly believe that the research itself is shaped by the epistemological ground on which the inquiry rests, and that the same epistemological ground shapes just how we do the research and what we might find. By forming this strong interrelationship between the scope, shape and outcome of the work they are proposing that questions of sense-making are integral to the work, firmly positioning 'I' at the centre of inquiry practice as the voice of knowledge-creation.

It is this emphasis on 'whole self' as both object and subject of the research that has strong resonance with my own focus on the development of 'I' as an aware and reflective individual embodied in the research. I understand that my capacity for

holistic reflection, a habit embedded as an integral part of my life, is of immense value as a tool of self-knowledge and formative in the qualities of my relationships and mutual learning.

As practitioners begin to place their work alongside researchers and contribute to the formation of a new identity of practitioner-researcher I recognise that they need to show how they are making the tacit theories of their practice explicit (*Argyris and Schon* 1996). I acknowledge that as I offer my particular story as a contribution to scholarship then I too must demonstrate just how I have formed knowledge from that experience, so that it can be critically understood and appreciated. I value *Shotter's* (1993) perspective here when he proposes that we should use this formation of theory to:

- Test our ideas
- Generate new associations
- Enrich our thoughts and actions

I find particular resonance in these last two points as I refer back to my own intention articulated in the Preface to my thesis. My intention is to achieve a delicate balance of mutual attention as an integral quality of dialogic engagement, allowing each of us to exercise our own standards of practice while at the same time learning from the differences generated. I understand that as part of those standards of practice I need to be explicit in the description of my knowledge-formation, to be explicit about the principles in play as I generate my self-knowledge. That process can be heard reflected throughout Parts 3 and 4. And, perhaps more significantly, it can be heard as 'knowledge-in-action' as the constructing activity of Parts 1 and 2.

I have already shown in the introduction to my own evaluative framework in Part 3 that my sense of 'self' is constituted from the integration of my fundamental life values with my integrative consciousness and the subsequent methodological and

relational qualities of my practice. This evaluative framework has helped shape a generative coherence from the experiences of the research. As I now review this formation of coherent knowledge and re-consider my dialogic inquiry practice as a process of learning then I can begin to re-frame it as an explanatory framework of principles through which I can evidence both the form and formation of my knowledge. These principles constitute my own theory of 'living' knowledge and I offer it here as a unique contribution to the public and ongoing inquiry into 'new' ways of knowing.

I understand a 'theory' of knowledge to mean an explanatory framework of principles through which I both generate and explain knowledge from my experiences. It represents the particular framework of an individual practitioner-researcher, defined by the description and explanation of the scholarly rigour forming and being formed by it and motivated by a need to understand a significant experience. I understand 'theory' to mean the description and explanation of the concentrated and interlinked processes of recognising and naming my own principles as they emerge as an integral part of my self-transformational journey – my self-inquiry. And I understand that it is through my process of communicating and explaining this learning that I am in fact beginning to describe both my practical and scholarly contribution to knowledge-formation.

I make my theory explicit in two ways. First, I track my alignment to a notion of 'live' knowing, exploring the meanings of *Marshall* and *Whitehead* as they each formulate their own understanding of knowledge-formation within their individual practices of 'inquiry as life process' and educational action research. As I do so I am able to formulate my own contribution alongside theirs and articulate the formation of my own 'living' educational theory (*Whitehead* 1999a). I then explore my contribution to the development of an understanding of an extended epistemology, first tracking my understanding of *Reason's* (1994) and *Reason and Heron's* (2001)

work and then identifying just how far I myself have extended the boundaries of practitioner-researcher knowledge-creation.

Exploring 'live' knowing

In her work on inquiry *Marshall* (2001) reflects on how she has moved on from describing research as partly “*personal process*”, meaning its link to how we draw on our lives and their themes to inform our inquiries, to a preferred notion of “*inquiry as life process*”. As she has developed her practice of inquiry she has found the term ‘personal process’ too implicit of separateness. She has therefore chosen to refer to her practice as ‘inquiry as life process’, acknowledging the innate qualities of her practice as life-forming and connective, and embodying her full self of being. She describes her inquiry process in explicit detail, delineating each step of the process as a disciplined and rigorous form of sense-making. Although she does cross-refer to *Reason’s* and *Heron’s* extended epistemology she does not appear to situate it as central to an understanding of her own knowledge-formation. She appears instead to absorb their definitions into her own multi-dimensional frame of knowing as she works with her distinctive ‘inner and outer arcs of attention’ and intentional testing. There is an implied fluidity in her work of understanding, a natural ebb and flow, in direct contrast with the careful cycles of action and reflection I find described in *Reason’s* and *Heron’s* work. My own work on the creative art of a dialogic inquiry process shares her sense of transient truth, of ‘live’ and ‘life’ knowledge, and itself stands out in sharp contrast with any attempt to track its formation as clearly-defined action/reflection cycles.

In her chapter in the 2001 Handbook, *Bravette*⁶ appears to develop *Marshall’s* position by putting the contribution of her own Ph.D. alongside it and describing her intention as:

⁶ Bravette, G. 2001 Handbook of Action Research, Chapter 30, Transforming Lives: Towards Bicultural Competence

“to show the systematic nature of my work to become a self-renewing organism through the embedding of an inquiry process in my life”. (2001: p.315)

She goes on to refer to it as a ‘living inquiry’, and explains how she too is ‘engaging in inquiry as a way of life’.

This concept of ‘living’ is common across the work of *Marshall, Reason and Heron*, and *Whitehead*, in each case carrying a slightly different nuance in meaning. My understanding from *Marshall*’s work is that she uses ‘life’ process to convey its persistent nature. *Bravette* uses the expression ‘living’ inquiry to share a notion of inquiry as ‘self-renewing’, to imply the constant and systematic process of her growth and learning. The knowledge and understanding is ‘live’, as it is in *Marshall*’s work.

In their introduction to the 2001 Handbook *Reason and Bradbury* also address this need to describe knowledge as ‘living’. Their focus is on describing the evolving state of knowledge, emphasising the need for action research inquiries to be sustainable over a significant period of time. Over that period of time the knowledge will change and re-form as the cycles of action and reflection spiral upwards and outwards. Referring to *Shotter*’s work (1993) they consider the differentiation between the implied continuing activity of the word ‘knowing’ and the static qualities implied by the noun ‘knowledge’. As they articulate the five interdependent characteristics of action research they emphasise its dual role, the need for action research not only to lead to new practical knowledge but also the need for it to help create new abilities to form knowledge.

“In action research knowledge is a living, evolving process of coming to know rooted in everyday experience; it is a verb rather than a noun”. (2001: p.2)

The use of the phrase ‘live’ knowing or knowledge-in-action appears to resolve this dual role.

Whitehead (1999a) develops this concept of 'living' knowledge from a slightly different perspective, his focus starting from a careful understanding of 'systematic'. He responds to issues of evidencing claims to know in educational research practice by first claiming that a dialectical and dialogical form of knowledge is not amenable to systematic representation in a purely propositional form. He focuses instead on the living nature of the knowledge formed, clearly holding a belief that this knowing is formed from the interrelationship of the individual researcher's embodied values and critical engagement with others. This living knowledge can then be described and explained by each practitioner-researcher as he or she shares an account of their learning in practice. He underpins this with a belief that the intention to learn, to improve the individual's practice, is motivated by the tension experienced as these fundamental values are denied in both past and current practice. In his own thesis he offers this description:

"living educational theories are constituted by the descriptions and explanations which individuals produce for their own educational development. They are living in the sense that an explanation of present practice includes both an evaluation of past learning and an intention to live values more fully in a future practice". (1999a: p.12)

In a paper to BERA in 1999 (*Whitehead* 1999b) he qualifies this use of the word 'living':

"It is because they contain an intention to project oneself into creating a future which is not yet in existence that I have called the theories 'living theories'". (1999b: p.3)

I find *Whitehead's* concept of a 'living' educational theory extremely valuable in helping explain my own learning, with the understanding that it is living in the sense that its exact content is dynamic, organic and fluid. It is living through the constant change and transformation generated by my new perspectives as the questions

continue and I again enter the transient state of my ongoing transformation. It is educational in that it is an ongoing account of my learning and growth. As *Whitehead* says, this learning practice includes both reflective inquiry and an aspirational intention to achieve some form of change in future practice. I am conscious that I am asking myself questions prompted by a need and desire to learn and improve, and inevitably alter my sense of 'being' as I act to live more fully through my future practice.

In many ways my work can be understood and appreciated within this context, an evidential account of my own learning and educative process. I evidence the extent of the personal and scholarly inquiry needed to achieve a spiritual and aesthetic quality of 'being' and relationship. I contribute an understanding of the transformational possibilities of a creative art of inquiry through the sharing of my own learning and healing journey as I seek to find a way to belong in a post-modern world through my own integration, my own sense of unity and harmony. I focus on and evidence progress towards a consciously transformed life. I demonstrate how I allow an improvisatory framework of narrative and dialogue to be held together by my own structuring role. I evidence how my healing and re-formation is created and tested from the description and explanation of my own development. And I evidence the way in which the creative art of my dialogic inquiry forms and re-forms my knowing. I hold my own experiential qualities clearly at the centre of my practice, allowing them not only to form my inquiry practice but also to help form my evaluative framework.

I can therefore claim to be offering my thesis as evidence of the formation of my 'living' educational theory, clearly articulated as I have explored the fundamental connectivity of my life and the re-definition of my practice 'from the inside out'. In the process of forming this theory of my learning I have explicated an understanding of my own creative art of dialogic inquiry. And implicit in that description of my

inquiry process is the emergent understanding of my own form of knowledge-creation.

Exploring an extended epistemology

As I review my work I am aware that I am in fact holding two inquiries side by side, one 'transformative' in its focus on my 'being' and the other 'informative' in its focus on my inquiry practice. Each one helps generate the other. My research is as much about paying attention to something fundamental in my life as it is about learning to sustain and develop a self-transformational state of attentive and dialogic inquiry. The two inquiry strands are:

- Developing the attentional qualities of aesthetic and spiritual 'being' as the formative qualities of my professional practice
- Tracking the emergent form of my own living and creative art of inquiry

Although there is clear evidence of my knowledge-formation in action throughout my work, it is in Chapters 6 and 7 (Part 1) that I explicate a clear description of the process in the form of my creative art of inquiry. If I now focus on the nature of this evidence then I can extend my explanation beyond the epistemological frameworks of *Marshall* and *Whitehead* and can consider the broader contribution I am making to the development of an understanding of an extended epistemology.

In their development of an extended epistemology *Reason and Heron* (2001) claim that a 'knower' participates in the formation of knowledge in at least four interdependent ways. They find it useful to differentiate these ways with specific labels and then to demonstrate how they form the ongoing cycles of action and reflection that constitute an inquiry. As I review these four ways I am conscious of my interpretation being influenced by the experiences of my own research as I try to appreciate their usefulness for my own understanding.

I understand their notion of “*experiential knowing*” to mean the empathy and resonance felt in the original encounter that prompts the inquiry. It may engender a form of response that is characterised by its emotional, bodily, spiritual and cognitive qualities. “*Presentational knowing*” is the ability to form an expression of this experience, its form dictated by the researcher and integral to the formation of understanding about the experience. As the researcher then moves on to articulate the understanding he or she is deriving from this inquiry into the experience, drawing on existing concepts and ideas, informative statements begin to emerge as “*propositional knowing*”.

And then all three forms of knowing are consummated in the ensuing new action in the form of new skills and competence, as “*practical knowing*”. In this way the cycles of action and reflection are formed and re-formed. They assign a quality of congruence to this cyclic form of knowing:

“These forms of knowing are brought to bear upon each other, through the use of inquiry cycles, to enhance their mutual congruence, both within each inquirer and the inquiry group as a whole”. (2001: p.179)

I find their labelling useful in that it draws attention to the complexity of understanding knowledge-formation. I appreciate how they help me understand the call from *Argyris and Schon* (1996) to make the tacit theory of practitioner knowledge explicit, emphasising a need to be able to share the mental construction of our theories of reality so that they can be continually tested through action. I understand this notion of ‘testing’ to mean the evidencing of a changed form of understanding or implemented action as the traceable result of this knowing. I appreciate this position, slightly uncomfortable with its implications of linearity but equally comfortable with its implication that our new knowing must be worthwhile, that it must make a tangible contribution to human development and learning.

As I now consider my own theory of knowledge alongside *Reason and Heron's* extended epistemology I am able to demonstrate just how far I myself have extended the boundaries of practitioner-researcher knowledge-creation through the experiential qualities of my own self-inquiry practice. I can make three specific claims in this context:

- That I evidence forms of experiential and presentational knowing that appear to go beyond their own current practice
- That I am developing qualities of affirmative and generative dialogue that challenge their notion of propositional knowing
- That I am practising a creative form of dialogic inquiry that itself consummates my forms of knowing in a coherent pattern of 'living' knowledge

I need to focus on this understanding of 'presentational knowing' before moving on to articulate my own notion of 'living' knowledge.

I find it useful to start with an interpretation of *Heron's* notion of 'presentational knowing' (*Heron 1996, 2001*). I understand that he is positioning 'presentational knowing' as a conceptual bridge between the primacy of 'experiential knowing' and the enacted clarity of 'propositional knowing'. He emphasises the need to achieve a quality of understanding that intuitively grasps the significance of patterns of form and process, the need to articulate a shared world of such patterns. He proposes that language may dim and restrict our appreciation of the primary meaning inherent in our imaginal and empathic participation in the world and encourages instead the use of expressive forms of imagery – movement, dance, music drawing etc. His intent is to sustain the immediacy of the original experience, to sustain the resonance and empathy as we attempt to articulate our first expressions of meaning and significance.

Yet at the same time he appears to be describing this form of knowing as finite, a process of conceptualisation that enables the researcher to move on to the formation

of ‘propositional knowing’ and subsequent cycles of action/reflection in the certainty that a consensus of understanding has been achieved.

Although I am fully empathetic with his original intent I am however uncomfortable with this procedural inference. It feels inappropriate to frame the art of my dialogic inquiry so permanently and with such certainty. Because of the dialogic form, because of the ongoing creative performance, it feels inappropriate to think in this ‘procedural’ sense. I need to focus instead on the ‘living’ nature of my presentational form, to sustain an active, generative and ‘living expression’ that is integral to the gradual unfolding of meaning through and from my writing and one that over time enables the emergence of meaning and understanding through an ability to sense, embody and enact my authentic journey.

Sensing, embodying and enacting are the three qualities that sustain my capacity for emergent learning, clearly placed alongside *Jaworski & Scharmer*’s notions of ‘sensing’ and ‘presencing’ (*Jaworski & Scharmer* 2000a) in Chapter 23.4. I have already defined my understanding of ‘sensing’ by sharing this reference from their work in which they describe ‘sensing’ as a deeper way of seeing, one that

“...engages the imaginative mind as a tool for perception that will help you see patterns, make new connections, and deepen your understanding of your world as it unfolds “ (2000a: p.3)

and find it useful to repeat it here as I emphasise my ability to unfold the meaning and shape of the research from the capacity to achieve and sustain a deep shift in my consciousness and quality of attention. By ‘embodying’ I refer to my ability to share the primary experiences of this new framework of consciousness through the emergence of my poetic voice, an authentic and musical expression that gives voice to the felt immediacy of the experience. And by ‘enacting’ I refer to my ability to build and generate the form and direction of my inquiry through the quality of the

experiences and the richness of the attentional images, to trigger my reflective and inquiring practice beyond the experience itself.

This is an active, living form, one that takes me for a while into another, more 'conscious' world, the description 'living expression' conveying the meaning of the qualities of connectivity and aesthetic expression that I wish to live out as my connective form of belonging. I cannot share *Heron's* notion of a conceptual bridge. I need to form instead an expression of dynamic, living knowledge, a form of presentational knowing that can hold the counterbalancing weights of the impermanence of my knowing and the certainty of my aesthetic expression. It is this understanding of presentational knowing that I offer as a contribution to the development of *Reason & Heron's* (2001) extended epistemology.

I have earlier in the thesis considered my role as poet in the context of developing my inquiry form as a creative art. As I re-consider this artistic intent I focus for a moment on the generative possibilities of 'presentational knowing', on its ability to engender a catalytic resonance, to engender an attentive space where others can engage from within the depths of their own experiences. This aspiration invites me to consider the creation of a new presentational form, one that takes the reader beyond the expectation of established form and instead invites them back toward the primary experience itself, to create a new sense of their own re-vitalised images.

It is an aspirational resonance represented by the shadow 'we' of many of my own accounts. In each of the Journal accounts recording aesthetic connectivity I speak as 'we', acknowledging the presence of another as I unfold my own sense of 'exquisite connectivity'. So far I have left this identity undefined. This 'we' is in fact formed by my partner, the accounts written immediately after our shared experience of the events. I knew, intuitively, that we had each felt the significance of the experiences. I also knew, intuitively, that we had been impacted in different ways. What was critical to me was the balance between the resonance we felt, the shared memory of the

visual imagery, and our separate abilities to continue to form meaning from their living images. He does silently acknowledge the power of my journal as he continues to form his own ongoing sense and meaning from the documented images, images that are neither referenced from his experience nor created from any form of consensual memory. This is the catalytic resonance I reference above, a form of ‘we’ that represents the integrity of our separate and connected inquiries. But I have not yet tested it thoroughly, not yet moved it from the instinctive pages of my journal to the rigorous pages of my research, and can therefore only include it here as I think out loud, an emergent question already forming for my post-doctoral study.

24.2 Articulating my own theory of ‘living’ knowledge

I am gently challenging the boundaries of practitioner-researcher knowledge-creation and the standards by which we evaluate it, developing my own theory of ‘living’ knowledge from a synthesis of the methodological and epistemological ground of my dialogic inquiry practice. As I draw its form from the evidence of my practice I can articulate it in the shape of these five distinct and interwoven qualities:

- Intuitive structuring
- Unfolding an embodied truth
- Intentional and attentional patterning
- Language as a living expression
- Respectful and generative listening

I describe each of them below.

Intuitive structuring

Throughout the research I am heard as a live ‘I’, 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. Incessant questioning holds me permanently at the edge of my own knowing. I acknowledge each emergent doubt and question as it arises, not always able to give each of them full attention but always absorbing them into the fluid boundaries of my inquiry. My authentic 'I' is constantly in process, moulded into changing shapes by my lived experiences and the transformational uncertainties of my self-dialogue. I 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. I have just one voice, modulated by intentional and attentional questioning.

I am able to work creatively with the complexity of my own sense-making, its turbulent questioning and reflecting held together in some form of transparent pattern that assures me of its 'truth'. I am able to work with the emergent order and meaning, the text forming and re-forming its significance. I remain open to new territories and new questions, confident in the ability of my authoritative voice to draw the appropriate boundaries of purpose and intent.

Unfolding an embodied truth

I am able to form a sense of dynamic coherence from the creative art of my inquiry, a generative coherence formed and re-formed from the intricate patterning of my personal stories and inquiry process, their emotional glimpses juxtaposed with the developing awareness of narrative dialogue. As I engage with this personal data I rely on affirmative and generative dialogues with others to help form my own sense of the experiences. I know I am aiming for a transient truth, a truth unfolded by the writing and sharing of my text, the ensuing dialogues, and the changing perceptions I take forward into new engagements. These truths have impact on both my subsequent action and on my subsequent reflection and understanding. This is my 'living' truth.

I am able to intuitively weave this ‘truth’ and coherence from the inherent relatedness of my values, integrative consciousness, relational qualities and methodological qualities, an intricate web of intention and attention that brings me to a current state of knowing. This ‘exquisite connectivity’ has both ‘live’ and ‘life’ meanings. The meanings are ‘live’ in their ability to shape my learning and growth, deriving their current meaning from their contextual enactment and my ability to hold open a space of inquisitive questioning. These ‘live’ meanings are integral to the development of my capacity as a knowledge-creator. They also give ‘life’ meaning as they emerge as a source of sustaining purpose, a motivating force as I learn to live them more awarely. They are 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’.

Intentional and attentional patterning

Throughout my work I am able to form and sustain a living dialectic of intention and attention, separate dialogues differentiated either by their deliberate or intentional questioning or by the instinctive and improvisatory direction of their attention. I refer to these separate strands of dialogue as ‘intentional’ and ‘attentional’, their separate meanings merged through the dialogic patterning of my narrative voice and the dynamic shaping of my personal stories. As questions emerge and dialogues take on their own certainty they create a clear structural framework, a purposeful dialectic that balances the emergent and sometimes messy complexity.

I keep in play all the inquiries as they emerge, developing some more than others as their interdependence or increasing resonance becomes evident. My coherence is woven naturally and intuitively by my reflexive and creative art, held together by the interplay and flow of these ‘attentional’ and ‘intentional’ inquiries and given substance by my sense of an integrative consciousness. There is no deliberate chronology, no deliberate construction or boundary-drawing. This is a transparent

process of intuitive sense-making constituting the formation and re-formation of my 'I'.

I trust the generative and improvisatory qualities of my dialogic inquiry, its constant oscillation between intention and attention catalysing reflection on both past and continuing experiences, intuitively creating and sometimes even imagining new and possible futures. It engenders an ability to reach beyond the linearity of logical and cognitive thought, to transcend the limitations of cyclical learning, and to leap haphazardly into the generative realms of poetry and aesthetic consciousness. I am able to sustain a quality of awareness that allows my knowing to emerge, a focused and constant awareness that can counterbalance reflective understanding with constructed meaning. And I can listen openly to the emergent truths of intensely personal stories as the encompassing dialectic intuitively senses the significant and generative questions.

Language as a living expression

I endow my writing with a very particular and significant role. It reaches beyond the boundaries of presentational form and takes on a new significance as an extension of the experience itself, the living expression of my language holding the counterbalancing weights of the impermanence of my knowing and the certainty of my aesthetic expression.

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 presence through its unity of composition and aesthetic balance. On the other, I am reminded of its prominence as the subject of my thesis as I explore its living expression as the embodiment of my emergent identity. It represents a form of renewal, an organic channel through which I can begin to define and project my presence in the world. Journal images are written as a natural extension of the experiences themselves, extending the quality of my consciousness into an active,

living and moving form that takes me for a while into another, more ‘conscious’ world.

I am able to unfold the meaning and shape of the research from the quality of these experiences, live in their descriptions and their ability to trigger my reflective and dialogic practice beyond the experience itself. I extend my understanding by forming it out loud in my writing, the qualities of my journal so fundamental to my meaning-making that they appear to draw together the individual meanings of the preceding images and through their integration bring me to a totally new place of understanding. I am able to realise an emergent sensibility to the music of the living world, to realise the nature of my belonging, and to articulate it with a sense of musical phrasing and composition that in itself reflects the quality of my connection.

Respectful and generative listening

I have pushed the boundaries of my dialogic practice to engender new qualities of relational knowing, carefully differentiating between the purposeful listening of resonance and affirmation, and the attentive, generative dialogues that can engender creative speculation and discovery. I have developed qualities of respectful listening that can hold a delicate balance between my own fragile knowing and the improvisatory dialogues of challenge and questioning. I absorb these affirmative and generative relationships differently into the formation of my own understanding.

My affirmative relationships are evident as I scan for a better articulation, for motivating words, new questions, the catalytic potential of deeper meanings, and in the expression of delight as I encounter a connective resonance. The starting-point for these relationships is my need to honour and better understand my own experiences. I have an ability to absorb an eclectic mix of ideas into my own creative space, this busy eclecticism playing a critical role in my educational development. It enables me to respond to the challenges of forming and shaping my own knowing through the affirmative and creative experiences of my inquiry patterns, and proves both

appropriate and intensely rich throughout the journey. Although the dialogues appear to be separate, sometimes even disjointed or irrelevant, they are in fact synthesised into my cumulative knowing.

My generative relationships are formed from a need to understand, to work with differences that prompt me to wonder and question, respectfully and usefully. These are exciting in their imagined futures, improvisatory in their emergent meanings and able to generate unanticipated possibilities of meaning. My relationship is one of constructive intelligence, a quality of dialogue that both draws from their perspectives and challenges my own, integrating our respective individuality in my own new exploratory research. I absorb our difference in a form of out loud dialogue, clearly acknowledging individual contributions and honouring the use-value of their work within the context of my own.

I am also able to form relationships of mutual attention, working alongside fellow-researchers as the emotional honesty and authenticity of our inquiring questions generates a form of ongoing and inquisitive dialogue. I experience reciprocity in the delicate balance of mutual attention formed by the interaction of each of our perspectives, and anticipate its potential ability to form new relational qualities of learning. I recognise the capacity of dialogic practice to engender new qualities of mutuality and creative partnership, to grow and sustain respectful and reciprocal connectivity. And as I formulate the outcome of my research I test out the ability of my work to both engender and sustain its capacity to form both separate and connected meaning.

Chapter 25

Presenting an original contribution to an understanding of the creative art of inquiry

25.1 Appreciating the use-value of a particular story

In these final two chapters I consider the extent to which I am contributing to a shared notion of collective knowledge and scholarship. I approach the question from a perspective of tangible outcomes, thinking carefully about the use-value of my own form of dialogic inquiry practice, and the very real expression of my aesthetic and spiritual consciousness as I move from research practice to the practice of living and re-forming my practice.

I take a moment to reflect on the implications of sharing my thesis and wonder at its possibilities of impact and influence. I am forced to ask ‘Just why am I making these inquiries public?’ I constantly pose the question throughout my thesis, increasingly conscious of its challenges and driven by its insistence to form a new question around the ‘use-value’ of my research. Throughout the text I oscillate between this passionate intent to follow the course of my pre-defined purpose for the research and the intuitive attention I pay to the emergent questions formed from the creative art of the inquiry practice itself. This differentiation between ‘attention’ and ‘intention’ is critical in my work, evident in my ability to hold the fluidity of all the emergent dialogic possibilities of my inquiry alongside the carefully articulated questions of my purpose and intent.

The two perspectives are not mutually exclusive, their combined dialogue constantly pushing me to ask questions about the relevance of my inquiries and their accessibility to the stakeholders of my research.

I want to share the simple expression of those answers here. I believe my inquiries do in part articulate other familiar and personal journeys, sometimes similar in their focus and language and other times simply catalytic in their dissimilarity. Their sketches are based on the evident realities of my own professional practice, some of them possibly images of your own experience, others at the very least echoes of emergent thought. The exactness of the images is not the issue. What is important is their potential generativity, their capacity to engender a dialogic response that extends beyond the boundaries of my thesis and out into the public domain.

It is important that my own meaning-making does not over-power the text, that I explore the possibilities in such a way that I catalyse further and shared questions that have meaning for you. With that in mind I take care to form a public voice that is both accessible and inclusive, stretching the boundaries of its expression to encompass narrative, reflective, dialectical and even poetic choices. I try to engage you in the questioning, in the reflective dialogues as I share my own sense-making and through my own emotional honesty invite you to engage with a similar openness and spirit of inquiry. I am not expecting you to endorse or agree with everything I say. I am not even expecting you to share the whole journey with me. I am simply looking for a space in which I too can express a genuine voice, learning as I express it out loud, and feel that in some way my own unique contribution has been heard and valued.

So, the challenge for me now is to formulate the outcome of the research in such a way that the very personal nature of the work becomes a catalyst for public consideration, the emotional honesty and authenticity of its inquiring questions generating a form of ongoing and inquisitive dialogue.

I find these two questions raised by *Catherine Snow* (2001) useful in structuring my approach:

- How can my researcher-generated knowledge become relevant enough to be useful to practice?
- How or when does practice-generated knowledge become sufficiently embedded in theory to be useful to researchers?

I would like to take these questions and to respond to their challenge of presenting the personal knowledge generated by my own discipline of self-inquiry as publicly accessible and valuable knowledge.

Throughout my particular story I have both articulated and enacted a fundamental value of connectivity, of connectivity with my 'self', with others and with an aesthetic and spiritual world around me. I refer to this sense of belonging as my 'exquisite connectivity'. It is this journey that has helped me construct my own unique art of dialogic inquiry. Although the story is personal, both in its focus and in its construction around my 'I', it does have a much broader and universal context within my professional practice.

Over the lifetime of the thesis my focus on a search for spiritual sense has increased significantly, a search for a sense of 'other' that transcends and gives meaning and connectivity and belonging. I do not believe I am alone, either in the context of a private journey or in the context of a spiritual and aesthetic journey helping re-form my professional practice. Throughout the thesis I make constant reference to the works of fellow-professionals, those writers who have had and still do have a lasting effect on my own aspiration, my belief that I can and will develop my practice 'from the inside out'.

I started with encouragement and inspiration from such writers as *Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers* (1996), *Chappell* (1993), *Whyte* (1994), *Handy* (1997) and *Jaworski* (1996), recognising in their stories a universal engagement with issues of belonging, spiritual authenticity, aesthetic awareness and forms of connectivity within a

commercial environment. I have been alerted to the issues of responsible individualism and “*proper selfishness*” by *Handy* as I try to understand my own notions of separate and connected, recognising the echoes of responsible individualism in *Mulgan’s “connexity”* (1997) and his perceived tension between freedom and a need for growing interdependence. I have found myself alongside *Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers* (1996) as they focus on a form of consciousness that calls us to ‘be’, again returning to the role of this authentic ‘self’ in a relationally responsible world as I read their words:

“We cannot deny our connectedness as we build our separateness...self is an opening to connections, not a barrier behind which we fight for our survival”. (1994: p.53)

In a broader context I share their aspiration towards organisational coherence, and the possibilities of our achieving it through achieving fundamental integrity about who we are. I find similar themes of authentic and aware self in *Jaworski* (1996) in his concentration and focus on ‘being’, on connecting with the ‘highest self’, a changed consciousness, a heightened self-perception as the way to a universe that is interconnected and full of living qualities. More recently I have also included my developing understanding of the notion of ‘emergent learning’ formed by *Senge & Scharmer* (2001), *Jaworski & Scharmer* (2000a) and *Jaworski* (1996).

Whyte encourages me with a poet’s insight and powers of attention to form my own linguistic expression that will:

“weave the inner world of soul and creativity with the outer world of form and matter” (1994: p.143)

and help me develop more presence, more responsiveness, more alertness in my work. He encourages a concept of inner and outer conversations, the need for conversation with our own individuality in order to make real the outer and abstract

conversations. And *Chappell* (1993), with his notions of dignity rather than utility, shares his own journey towards the development of his 'soul' in practice as the source of his beliefs and values, as the source of his connectivity, as the sum of his 'self'.

Each of these particular stories has drawn my attention time and again to the possibilities of an integrated and connected 'I', their own words and aspirations for meaningful and human practice interwoven with my own. And each of these writers is surrounded by an endless list of other writers looking for and claiming to have found the ways in which we might work more authentically, with heart and soul, and from within our own spiritual connectivity. There are models, methods, self-assessment questionnaires, even short courses in liberating the innate energy of our souls. I see a risk of our personal journeys diminishing into commodity packaging, our particular searches and aspirations for spiritual and authentic meaning in our lives manipulated and coerced in the interests of economic success. *Hochschild* (1983) has already described the risk of 'emotional labour' in her work, "The Managed Heart", an evidenced example of this possibility becoming a reality.

I therefore know that my story is an integral part of a shared journey – and as long as I hold on to the 'purity' of my intent within this wider context then I may contribute my particular story as having universal value alongside theirs. Unless I do accept this wider social responsibility and sense-making context then I risk contributing to that very fragmentation *Bohm* (1996) infers is caused by our inability to form connective dialogues and dissolve our own fabricated boundaries.

I have increasingly questioned the relational and connective qualities of my practice. As I prepare to form the questions of my post-doctoral inquiry I have returned to *Wheatley's* work again, this time to her most recent work "turning to one another" (2002) in which she defines her principles of conversation. As I compare them with my own principles of 'being' and the ability of my authentic dialogues to engender

qualities of relationship and connectivity, I absorb them into my own knowledge-base. I find her words reminiscent of *Bohm* (1996)⁷:

“listening creates a relationship. We move closer to one another”. (Wheatley, 2002: p. 91)

Later on in the work she describes conversation as our chance to rediscover what it means to be human, to practice good human behaviours in connective dialogue.

As I reach this final stage of my thesis and begin to move back out towards my professional practice her work is gaining significance for me. It no longer offers simply an encouragement to express my own voice out loud but now a real insight into the enactment of those qualities of connected living. On re-reading this work she has also helped me find meaning in an aesthetic expression that reaches beyond my own particular story, that encourages me to share my stories in the spirit of enabling similarity and dissimilarity. I find these words particularly meaningful:

“...for those of us who still have nature available to us, it is even more important that we get outside. We need to experience the power and beauty of life on behalf of all humans who no longer can do this themselves.

On behalf of those who cannot, we need to feel the power of a storm against our faces, the fury of the wind, the cycles of destruction and creation that are always occurring. We need to experience sunlight shining off swamp grasses, to sit with the sunset, to rest under a tree, to go out in the dark and look up to the stars. If we can do these things, we will fall in love with life again. We will become serious about sustaining life rather than destroying it. And our commitment will help all those others who can't ever know what they're missing. ” (2002: p.108)

⁷ In “Unfolding Meaning, A Weekend of Dialogue with David Bohm” (1985), Bohm puts forward the notion that dialogic connectivity may engender a quality of consciousness that itself will engender the

Wheatley here is claiming that we have the ability to discover human experience whenever we listen to someone else's unique story. We don't have to agree. She is confident that the connectivity of our stories will be engendered by their uniqueness. *Polanyi* (1962) talks about a "*persuasive passion*" (p.150), raising questions for me around deliberate influence. My intention is not to persuade you to my own vision of reality but to persuade you to take part in the ongoing dialogue. This is how I interpret *Polanyi's* description of "*universal intent*", an ability to engender connectivity through the quality and scope of our communication, through our ability to share our particular and forming stories within a context that appreciates both the separate and the connected meanings. I envisage these meanings placed concentrically, the ripples flowing outwards from the individual and particular understanding to merge with the outer rings of collective and socially responsible thought and action. It is this catalytic effect on other people's similar and dissimilar experiences that I experience as the passionate and therefore universal intent of my research.

I share my personal story in the spirit of enabling and mutual dialogue.

25.2 Considering the pragmatic outcome of my research

In my particular story I have focused on the direct experience of my accounts, my ability to shape a coherent sense of self and nourishing spirituality from their living expression. I evidence the ability to hold my 'being' and doing as one integrated sense of identity, one modulated voice forming the dialogic architecture of the text. I articulate my own learning journey, an inquiry that has led to an exploration of my own connectivity and the emergence of the defining qualities of my own innate practice of inquiry. I form a very clear understanding of that practice of inquiry in a description of the creative merger of the generative capacity of a dialogic voice with

formation of human relationship.

the attentional qualities of an aesthetic and spiritual connectivity. And I have shown that the power of a particular story is in its generativity, in its ability to engender an ongoing and creative dialogue.

I now want to consider the use-value of the account of my inquiry practice, its emergent and defining qualities evident as an integral part of my research. This is a unique living form of inquiry practice characterised and defined by its transformational uncertainties, its improvisatory dialogue, its qualities of aesthetic awareness, courage and emotional honesty, and the affirmative and generative qualities of its engagement with others. I am offering it as an example of research that:

- carries implications of bringing research into every day life
- emphasises human qualities as integral to its authenticity
- focuses on the possibilities of a re-formed life through healing and self-transformation
- encourages the development of consciousness as the creative centre of the research process
- recognises the fluidity and improvisatory qualities of the creative art of inquiry
- enables a description of the world as it is experienced, in its felt immediacy, and in a language that gives it voice

I believe I have evidenced just how it is possible to perceive the emerging shape and form of an inquiry practice while living out its instinctive creation through the developing awareness of an 'exquisite connectivity'. I have shown how that new quality of awareness has become embodied in the form of an integrative consciousness that subtly moulds each of its defining qualities and principles. I have shown how that same shape represents an organic synthesis of the dialogic principles of *Bohm* (1985, 1992, 1996), *Isaacs* (1999) and *Grudin* (1996) and the intensity of *Marshall's* (1999, 2001) 'inquiry as life process'. And I have explored how I can

place aspects of my own form of inquiry alongside a notion of ‘emergent learning’ (*Senge & Scharmer 2001, Jaworski & Scharmer 2000a and Jaworski 1996*), clearly evidencing an ability to form new qualities of knowing from an intuitive flow of generative questioning and the richness of ‘attentional’ images.

It is the inseparability of these qualities and principles that is so critical to an understanding of my work, an ability to integrate the authoritative tones of my structuring voice with the transformational uncertainties of attentional dialogue in one holistic and creative art of inquiry. It is this intentional and attentional patterning that holds together the living art of my practice.

As I have already claimed in the Preface, I have found a way in which I can write the story of my own renewal, the intricate craft of my writing and the living expression of my voice becoming for a moment my music, an active, living and moving form that takes me forward into another, more conscious world. I have learnt to sustain and develop a self-transformational state of attentive and dialogic learning, allowing both my intention and attention to hold together the questions within the wider strength of the passion and energy of my clear purpose and motivation. I can articulate an emergent sense of my ‘self’ as an attentive and connected human being, sometimes passing very closely to vulnerability as I learn to be resilient to the inherent risks. I can hold separateness and connectedness side by side in mutual dialogue, lightly holding the creative possibilities of respectful and reciprocal connectivity as the embodiment of human relationship. I have an ability to form and to listen generously to the power of generative questioning, understanding the world from my own experiences. And I can weave my own ‘truth’ and coherence from a juxtaposition of the emotional glimpses of the living expression of my aesthetic and spiritual ‘being’ with the clarity of the narrative voice of my dialogue. I have detailed the process of my learning out-loud, articulating it clearly in terms of its defining qualities, gradually recognising the emergence of a unique practice of self-inquiry as I have enacted it in the search for my own connectivity.

I have raised an obsessive habit of questioning to the level of scholarly practice, merging dialogic patterning with the organic fluidity of aesthetic and spiritual connectivity. It is as much a tool of self-knowledge as it is formative in the qualities of my relationships and mutual learning. I offer it as a living form of inquiry practice – an original contribution to an appreciation of inquiry as a creative art.