PART TWO: THE STORIES

CHAPTER FOUR: MAPPING THE PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL SELF - CHOICES AND SELF DETERMINATION

Introduction

In this chapter I present and reflect on two life stories, or rather events in my life, which are in part about choices and self-determination. Through these stories, I make connections between the past and present, in respect of my sense of self and, in particular, the implications for change in self-identity that are embedded in these stories, and which shape the process of self, voice and mind; in-turn shaping and influencing the relationship between my personal and professional development, as a way of being in the world.

Pye (1994) uses a life course framework of past, present and future against which we can begin to ask "What does it mean for me to learn from experience?". It is a dynamic framework where past and present come together to reframe learning for the future, thus facilitating a transformative process.

The 'stories told' draw out the impact of 'stories we live by', in particular the profound influence they can have on one's life direction. They are a part of my inquiry process, enabling me to gain fresh insight into my own development, marking a stage in my development between silence and voice.

It has often been said to me that I have determination and courage that enable me to persevere in the face of adversity. Jack, my Ph.D. supervisor, is one such commentator. For example, I have been determined to complete my Ph.D. in spite of serious illness and with limited support from my organisation. I would suggest that it is within my nature to be determined, implying that adversity is

no stranger to me. Through reflective conversations with Jack, I have tentatively explored where this so-called courage might come from. In making sense of these assertions, I return to stories of my childhood and formative years when I can say, with absolute certainty, that I had to make choices and have resolve. Let me share with you two stories that I have returned to as I inquire within myself where my sense of determination comes from.

But before I do, let me share with you the process of their emergence in the context of this inquiry. The second story was told to Jack at a supervision meeting in February or March 2003, when we were discussing choices, determination and overcoming adversity. It was Jack who suggested I might write it down and see what emerged. As I reflected on the possible relevance of this event to my life and current practice on the train journey home, I remembered another story that seemed to have a connection, yet at the time what the connection might be alluded me. I know that I just felt compelled to write it down too. I also felt compelled to write it down first, thus the connections that I draw out in the following account is the product of an emergent process.

To put these stories into context, they need to be told in the wider context of my life story, versions of which I have told in earlier accounts in this inquiry journey, for example in my M.Phil. transfer paper. However, to enrich and add background to these particular stories I will retell a version of my life story here.

Background

When my parents married in 1956 they settled in Coventry, where my father had been working for a year or so in one of the car factories as an electrician's mate. They both originally hailed from Scotland. My mother had been in the same class at school as my father's brother and she met my father at a dance in the

Co-operative hall when he was home from leave towards the end of his period of national service. They courted as people did in those days for about eighteen months, and when my father decided to come to Coventry after the war to look for work, she remained in Scotland with her family until their wedding. Coventry had been bombed during the war, and with the rebuilding of the city and the decommissioning of the factories (commissioned during the war to build munitions) there were plenty of employment opportunities, and the chance for people to build new lives.

With my father's job, they were able to afford the deposit for a mortgage on a new house. They were becoming part of the emerging aspiring working class with their own home and a higher than average income, all the trappings of modern material wealth. When they were first married my mother worked as a bookkeeper in the bus garage but lost her job when she was pregnant with me, having had a minor epileptic fit (*petit mal*). Whether she had intended to return to work part-time after I was born is not clear, but I think my father had anticipated that would be the case. In the event, she did not and in later years I often heard her say she could not get a reference from the bus garage as a result of her illness. For the first ten years of their marriage the financial burden of provision fell to my father, a consequence of which was total financial dependency on him by my mother, a situation not that unusual for women of her generation.

Story 1.

The first story emerges from a memory of walking with my mother around the streets where we lived. It was 1964 or thereabouts and my mother was pushing my baby brother along in a push-chair. I would have been seven years old at the time. I recall the wind and the drizzle of the rain, and holding on to the push-chair with one hand. As we walked, my mother became distressed and tearful.

She said we were leaving home and that she wanted to go back 'home' to Scotland. I do not recall what had happened to prompt this decision. It was not the first time we had left. I was becoming aware that she and my father had many violent arguments, and that my grandparents' home provided a place of safety and respite. But this time she seemed different, whether she simply did not have enough money for the train fare, or whether she believed that if she left this time there would be no going back, I do not know. What I do know is that she was in despair. As we walked, I sensed her desperation as she explained to me her perceived dilemma, "impossible to go and impossible to stay". But she had another solution, one that she could control, effectively disempowering my father.

As I have already mentioned, my mother had epilepsy for which she took a number of barbiturates. As she grappled with the impossibility of her situation, she reasoned that we could escape. She resolved to crush a tablet and give it to the baby in his milk, and she explained to me that she and I would swallow the others. Until that moment, I do not ever recall questioning her authority. Perhaps the innocence of childhood gave me hope, but whatever my motivation, I was choosing life, and I was determined that no matter what she did I would not take the pills. I remember feeling confidant that she could not trick me into taking them, as I knew their smell. They were so pungent that I reasoned she would not be able to crush or dissolve them into anything which I would eat or drink. I do not remember what I said to her. I may have said nothing. Perhaps she sensed my resistance, for I have no recollection of trying to reason with her, just my strong instinct to choose life. If I did influence her at all, I know she was not fully swayed, as I recall her saying "if he hits me again, I'll take these". We walked until it became dark, returning home, uncertain of the mood we would find my father in, or indeed, if he would even be there.

At the time, I was unaware, as was my mother, that my father was having a nervous breakdown, which would account for his unpredictable moods and rages. He only talked about this to us shortly before he died. His own account of childhood with an alcoholic father and a mother who relied on him to help look after his younger siblings whilst she cleaned steps and worked in service, goes someway to explain the impact of this legacy on my father's character and my childhood.

He felt compelled to be the breadwinner and provide for his family, and to this end he worked 'every hour God sent'. Overtime was available, and he was willing to work on the water tower that kept the electricity generator going for the factory, which involved climbing a steep tower in often precarious and windy conditions. He was regularly on call on a Monday night and during Saturdays and Sundays. I now understand that the strain was too much for him, and though apparently earning good money, financially they were stretched with only one income.

The year following this event we moved to another part of town, where we became more integrated into the local community through the school and church. My mother was able to meet other women who, like her, were not from England but who were intent on creating a life for themselves here. In time, she began to feel established and settled, getting part-time work and becoming involved in the running of the 'Union of Catholic Mothers'. My father continued to work 'every hour God sent', and they continued to argue and fight. He still controlled the purse strings but with her new-found independence, she became less of a victim. However, I was frequently caught in their arguments, trying to hold the peace or trying to avert a fight. My father was less volatile, but would simmer slowly, at times exploding when he could not contain his anger. I began to see how they constructed these arguments, but I was unable to stop them. Once they began to escalate they would stoke

the argument and keep provoking each other until one of them had the ‘last say’.

My brother still had not uttered a word and when he was three, recognising that this was not normal, my mother sought help. He was placed in a nursery to support his socialisation and he began a programme of speech therapy that continued throughout his school life. When he did speak it was with a severe stutter, and so he learned not to speak. He was in effect mute, in other words, silent most of the time. At the time, it was not obvious to me or possibly to anyone else how the family system contributed to his silence, as his stutter was always attributed to a difficult birth. Throughout his school life and to this day he continues to have a stutter, though not as severe as it once was. He now also has a history of mental illness.

During this period I attended the local Catholic primary school. I was extremely quiet and deferential to those in authority. The teachers were neither particularly interested in me nor encouraging in respect of my abilities, which contrasted with the encouragement and positive feedback I had been given in my previous school. At home, I took on increasing responsibilities for domestic duties and the care of my younger brother, as well as caring for my mother, who I would frequently find, on return from school, having or recovering from a blackout. I did not pass the eleven plus examination, and I probably was not expected to by the school. Months before the results were published my mother, who worked part-time in the school, claimed that she found a list on the headmaster’s desk which had my name on it, along with the names of other girls allocated to the secondary modern school. Although I did not feel particularly intelligent, I believed that I was more able than others who were selected to attend the grammar school. My mother was convinced that in the parish there was a class demarcation drawn by the parish priest and the men who ran the parish affairs, and in this respect she perceived our family to be ‘out’ not ‘in’.

Her defence of my integrity was to send me off to the secondary modern with a message that "it was better to be top of the secondary modern school, than bottom of the grammar school". I accepted the logic of her argument and got on with my education. My recollection of the secondary school system was that there was opportunity and if you showed enthusiasm and aptitude you were encouraged to achieve.

Story 2

The second story concerns a conversation I had with a medical consultant when I was fifteen and the consequent outcome of that conversation.

I had become ill in the October of my fourteenth year (the fourth year of secondary school) with influenza and jaundice. I then developed encephalitis, a virus that causes inflammation of the brain, and drifted into a coma. I was later told that I had a fever accompanied by symptoms not unlike rabies and when the fever eventually subsided, I drifted back into a coma for a period of time. It was a life and death situation and no-one, not least the doctors, expected me to survive. They predicted that if I did survive, it would be most probably with brain damage, deafness or some other disability. After months of hospitalisation I was allowed home.

My mother's strategy was to 'wrap me in cotton wool'. I was confined to bed. It was suggested that reading would be too stressful, and return to school was deemed out of the question. The doctors had suggested that I must be kept quiet. Commotion or excitement were to be avoided if a relapse was to be prevented. I was at home for a few weeks, after which it was arranged that I would spend a while in a convalescent home accompanied by my mother (which was intended to give her a break as much as give me supervised rest and

recuperation time). Almost immediately, on my return, I was back in hospital, the virus was still active and I had relapsed. This was characterised by lethargy. I remained in hospital for another month, after which I returned home to the 'cotton wool' treatment. This continued through the summer. I could not stand it, and begged my mother to buy me a book to read. She relented but suggested I read slowly, so as not to tire my brain. But I read it within a day or so, and I was hungry for more, so I pestered her to buy another one, and then another and another. I was still confined to bed with no prospect of being allowed to return to school in the foreseeable future.

The meeting with the doctor took place in the summer. Almost a year had passed since the onset of the virus. We were on our own, my mother was speaking to someone else and he seemed to be eager to talk to me about how I felt things were going. Although I was physically not that strong, I believed that the virus was now dormant. I was less lethargic and the tests were in my favour. Not being able to predict what the future held, the doctor suggested that a personality change might occur, but he was neither certain nor specific. I recollect telling him that I felt stifled by the 'cotton wool' treatment. I was taking a number of drugs, including Valium, and ironically my head felt like cotton wool. Life seemed to be in limbo. He intimated that I might consider a residential hospital. Basket-weaving was mentioned.

The hospitality of an institution was mildly appealing. It had crossed my mind that long-term hospitalisation might be an option presented to me. I was aware that some people thought I was mad or brain damaged, including some friends, their families and nuns at the school. Most ordinary people did not understand the concept of a virus in those days. It was understandable that they might believe that I would never be normal again. Some had heard stories of rabid behaviour (when my fever was raging) and there was also a fear that I might still be contagious, as I had been kept in isolation for months during the initial

periods of illness with barrier nursing and limited visitors, who had to be masked and gowned. It was common knowledge that our home had to be fumigated because of this virus.

I had been told by the doctors that I was a medical rarity, since very few people got this virus and even fewer survived. During the initial period of hospitalisation, a consultant neurologist had been flown in from London to advise the medical team. I can only presume that he would have known about the survivors of the influenza pandemic of the 1920s who later developed *Encephalitis lethargica*, a colony of whom were resident in the Highlands Hospital in London. These patients were the only cases known about on which a prognosis could be made, and whilst the longer-term disease was alluded to, my consultant did not appear categorical about this. There was something in his tone that suggested to me that he did not really know. At that moment, I resolved to reclaim my life. In the following months I actively sought his co-operation in doing so, by way of a letter from him supporting a request to return to school, albeit part-time, attending a limited number of classes.

I returned to school on this basis sometime in the autumn term, initially for two mornings a week, and later on for half a day, every day until the end of the year. During this time I was chauffeured in and out. I did not attend assembly or do any physical education, and I was free to come and go to classes as I wished. I did not have to do homework, no-one expected anything from me, and there was a degree of consternation when I asked to be entered for public examinations. Somewhat reluctantly, the school entered me for five CSEs and an 'O' level in English. Unable to attend all the classes, I realised I needed notes to cover the syllabus, and these were provided by a circle of friends who each took it in turns to copy a notebook for me on the classes I missed.

I was not allowed out to socialise, but my friends were allowed to visit me, which they did regularly, often visiting as a group. On this basis we established our own study group, supporting each other through the preparation and revision period for the exams. And, much to the amazement of the school, this circle of friends all achieved good results and we returned to school in the September to register for the sixth form (we were among a handful of non-grammar school girls who registered to study for 'A' levels). I was, by this stage, feeling well again (at least, most of the time). The school agreed to let me back full-time and, as far as I recall, I participated in most classes, including some physical education. This return to normality was, for me, a precursor for getting some freedom to reclaim my social life outside of school.

I was aware that almost everyone, including my father, had expected me to finish school after the CSEs. It was said to me on several occasions that by anyone's standards it was a considerable achievement to have gone back to school at all, let alone go back and achieve good grades. The message was to quit whilst I was ahead. My father thought I should learn to type, and he set about arranging a job for me at the factory he worked in, within one of the offices.

But I was adamant that under no circumstances would I learn to type or take the shorthand course. I could foresee my prospects if I went down that road; first a job in the factory offices, followed by marriage to a local apprentice. I dug my heels in and resolved to get two 'A' levels. I knew that if I could get admission to a college my parents would probably accept it as a legitimate basis for leaving home. I assumed all colleges had accommodation and that from my parents point of view there would be a responsible adult on hand to keep an eye on me should I become ill again.

One of the subjects I was studying was sociology. Family and kinship were hot topics at that time and I felt that I understood quite a bit about families. Social work seemed the obvious career choice, and with the help of the sociology teacher I applied to several polytechnics in the UK, of which six subsequently interviewed me and offered me a place on their social science degree course, specialising in social work or other professional options. To cover myself, I also applied for a trainee social worker post in a London authority, which I held on to as an offer until my 'A' level results were confirmed. As I was not a grammar school girl, I was not seen as university material. As far as I know, I was the first pupil ever to go to a polytechnic from my school. My circle of friends, also non-grammar school girls, went on to a Catholic teacher training college that had a long history of links with the school and local dioceses. At that time, I did not see myself working as a teacher. The parochial nature of the job and the Catholic education system was for me off-putting. I had by then extracted myself from organised religion, despite the indoctrination of my upbringing and my parents' continued devotion to Catholicism and their belief that I was a walking miracle. In the event, I began a four year social science sandwich degree with the BPS Psychology track at Middlesex Polytechnic in 1975.

What Did I Learn From These Experiences?

In both cases I learned something about the social construction of reality, although I would not have described it in that way at the time. From the first story, I learned something about 'learned helplessness' and dependency. Although the child of a silenced woman and socially isolated, I believe I had a sense of my inner voice from an early age.

Both cases taught me about the fallibility of authority figures, my mother, the doctors and those at school (teachers and nuns). Despite my deference to authority, I was able to think for myself. These experiences were instrumental in

breaking the 'silence' for me. The first story helping me realise "my still small voice" (Belenky *et al.*, 1986) and the second, released "the roar behind the silence" (ibid.).

If I had a personality change resulting from encephalitis, as predicted by the medical authorities, it is in respect of self-preservation, fuelled by determination, assertiveness and the discovery of my voice. Perhaps that is why I appear to be courageous or so determined in the face of adversity.

I would suggest that my experience has enabled me to empathise with others, and may explain why I am inclined to work with others who have experienced silence and oppression in their own lives and who have chosen education as a vehicle for liberation and the reconstruction of their self-identity. Perhaps the importance of educational opportunities to me in shaping my life course is why I value education so much now, and recognise why and how it can be the making of others.

More generally, perhaps these stories tell us something about the nature and process of a shift in the relationship between self and others. A shift that is self-organising in response to the trials and tribulations of life's experiences and that marks and punctuates in those moments a quest for self.

How Literature Informs My Understanding of These Stories

Belenky *et al.* describe subjective knowledge as: "the quest for self… As a result, her relationships and self-concept began to change" (1986:76). Perhaps the first story was the initial attempt to resist silence, the first stirrings, where my inner voice spoke. The second story, characterising a movement and shift in my relationships with all authoritarian figures, marks a change that is more profound, where I develop the psychological determination to resist the

hitherto all-powerful and overpowering voices of authority. It marks a turning point in my sense of self and in my state of mind, the outcome being a conscious and deliberate severance of connections, a choice to walk away from my past. Belenky *et al.* state:

> "Although subject to an extraordinary range of emotional pushes and pulls - anxiety, anger, insecurity, guilt, depression, exhilaration - most of the women were making these changes with a stubborn determination" (1986:76).

Furthermore, they cite "going away to school" as characteristic of "the push for freedom of younger, single women" (1986:77). Additionally, they acknowledge the extent to which the family context may reinforce actions such as risk taking or conformity.

> "The eventual path a woman takes is, in large measure, a function of the familial and educational environments in which she is struggling with theses problems. Families and schools differ tremendously in the degree to which they reinforce risk taking or conformity behavior in women" (1986:79).

I would, however, contest their assertion that subjectivist knowing characterises "a leap at the first chance to escape" (Belenky *et al.*, 1986:78). My determination and choices were neither simply opportunistic or self-indulgent, nor merely a consequence of the cultural narcissism of the 1970s. Neither would I describe my background as especially advantaged. We got by. Yes, we had more material wealth than some other working class families. Studying sociology, I identified our family as a product of the aspiring working class (Goldthorpe and Lockewood *et al.*, 1968). Going to college would not have been an option had the student grant not been available.

Life chances were an important factor that I weighed when I calculated support for my decision to pursue a higher education. In weighing the potential for risk and conformity that would be in my father's mind in respect of going to college,

I was mindful of his love for education and the lack of opportunity his life chances had afforded him for continuing his education. Indeed, perhaps my determination owes something to my father's own history. I was aware of his struggle against poverty and that his decision to leave school at fourteen was because he felt a responsibility to work and support his mother and three younger siblings. Despite his pragmatism and leaning toward securing a future for me based on the acquisition of practical skills, I knew that he would not stand in the way of my opportunity for an education that he would have loved himself, or one that afforded me the chance of social mobility. In my case, I had made my decision based on a calculated risk, in which the potential gains outweighed the potential losses.

I also want to challenge the notion that 'opposition' (defining one's self by what you are not) equals 'negative identity', a notion of Erickson's that Belenky *et al.* (1986:78) refer to. In my view, it is a natural process to identify with what you are not before you can identify what you are, because any construction is dependant on the relational-social context in which you live.

Belenky *et al.* assert that many subjectivist women turn against men, "turning all men out of their lives" (1986:80). This was not my experience, though I do understand and have some resonance with this assertion. I was far too attracted to men to contemplate turning them away. But I was in no doubt that I expected men to be on my side, to support my decision to work and pursue an independent career. As a consequence of this strongly held feeling, I rejected boyfriends and any relationship where there was any suggestion that we might get married and settle down, or where the men expressed a desire to have children, placing me in a domestic role or rendering me a 'kept woman'. Whilst I wanted a loving and secure relationship with someone, it had to be on my terms. Perhaps one of the reasons I chose to be with my husband, Richard, is

that I have never felt threatened by him, or felt that he would make me or expect me to be dependent on him.

During this period of development characterised by subjective knowing, Belenky *et al.* (1986:82) suggest that women's sense of self is still defined by past relationships, and that many subjectivists grapple with the question "who am I?". In my own case, this is probably true. It was not until my son was born, when I was thirty-two, that I stopped defining myself primarily as 'their daughter'. During my undergraduate years, I was not too worried about 'who' I was, I simply drifted through college like many of my contemporaries, enjoying the freedom that undergraduate education then provided, whilst slowly growing apart from my family of origin. My sense of self, in terms of a distinct identity, was in part formed when I graduated and went to work, albeit shaped by the experience that higher education brings and a new found sense of professional identity, an identity; which has also developed over time, and been subject to change both professionally and personally, for example, with the experience of mothering and with age.

With the shift into subjectivism, Belenky *et al.* warn of the possibility of what they call "maladaptive consequences" of subjectivism:

> "We wondered how trapped women might become in their subjectivist philosophy if they excluded others from their lives in an attempt at self-protection. We also wondered what or who might engage them in further questioning their assumptions about truth and knowing, propel them into further growth, and lead them to move beyond their trust of external influence" (1986:83).

They do acknowledge, however, that the majority of subjectivists were neither "entrenched, oppositional or despairing", but rather, they were "curious from the moment they turned inward and listened to their still small voice" (Belenky *et al.* 1986:84).

Whilst I learned to trust my gut reaction (the inner voice of my subjective knowing) a long time ago, I have always retained a respect for external voices, particularly those with academic authority; not least because I discovered in the course of my experience the fact that professional opinion is often conditional on being able to support claims and assertions with some evidence. Rather than being trapped by the myth of subjectivism, I have at times been trapped by these external voices, such is the power of those in academia that one has to be both sure of one's ground and know the rules before such authority can be effectively challenged. From a professional capacity, learning skills of procedural knowing both in the context of management and in academia, has enabled me to give voice to my own ideas, as well as appreciate those of external voices.

One of the paradoxes of subjectivism that Belenky *et al.* (ibid.) describe is the notion that for subjectivists "going it alone can contribute to their isolation from others". I do resonate with this, in my experience the certainty that comes with subjectivist knowing does not by itself eradicate social isolation, and as a woman in academia this paradox is even more significant in holding onto one's sense of integrity in the context of academia as a 'man's world'. Whilst subjective knowing is characterised by watching and listening, like the respondents in the Belenky *et al.* study (1986:85), I would concur that knowledge gained about myself was possibly more valuable than mutual exchange.

> "Women's emphasis on beginning to hear themselves think, while gathering observations through watching and listening, is the precursor to reflective and critical thought" (ibid.).

Furthermore, Belenky *et al.* emphasise that it is during the subjectivist period that women lay down procedures for systematically learning and analysing

experience (ibid.). But what distinguishes these women, they suggest, "is that their strategies for knowing grow out of their very embeddedness in human relationships and their alertness to the details of everyday life". This includes a felt need to understand those who impinge on their life, even though they may remain during this period socially isolated from others, and this was certainly the case in my experience leading up to and during my adolescent years. With the exception of standing my ground in respect of my desire to go away to college, I had not then developed the confidence or sense of self, voice or mind to speak out. As suggested by Belenky *et al.* (1986:86), I engaged in a process of self-expression by talking to myself, as a basis for gaining voice and investigating the world, a strategy which I still employ, and is, I suggest, one part of the "double dialectic of meaning making" (Lomax, 1999); that being, making meaning for oneself, the other being, and making meaning in dialogue with others, through writing or other forms of representation.

Autobiography as a Vehicle For Inquiry

Drawing on the "authority of my experience" as opposed to "the authority of reason" (Parker, 1998:118), autobiographical writing has been a significant spiral of inquiry in my research. The narrative form facilitating a turn to action in my case.

Usher (1988), exploring the use of autobiography and the self, cites two stories of self that might be told. One is a modernist self that appears by the act of inscription in the writing of an autobiography to be fixed, but which he argues is illusory. He critiques what he calls the "appropriation of autobiography by an educational discourse of experience" and he challenges what he describes as "the assumptions of modernity concerning the self, experience and the developmental process"; in other words "the autonomous developing ego" (1988:20). He argues that:

> "…to tell the story of the self in terms of a journey of discovery is not simply to reflect [on] and accurately depict the literal journey of a life and by doing so reveal its meanings but rather to tell a story through a particular kind of modernist discourse, a culturally encoded meta story" (Usher, 1988:20).

He argues that to tell a modernist story of this kind is to simply reflect at the individual level what Lyotard (1984) calls 'the grand narratives' – the significant one here being achievement over life itself. This type of telling is consistent with a humanistic perspective of self. Autobiography serves to construct a human presence in the text, providing what Mann (1992:278) calls "a glimpse of the person" behind the text.

By contrast, a postmodern (structuralist) story of self points out the multiplicity of self and the notion of a shifting or decentred self. Access to the past is appreciated as problematic, recoverable only in traces. Such a story is a reconstruction of both the self and the past, a process of recreation and reinvention of the self. Usher suggests that a post-structuralist story poses difficult questions, for example:

> "Is the self fully in control of events and experience?… Is there a 'core' unchanging self or rather is identity shifting and fragmented?" (1998:20).

There are, according to Usher (ibid.), " no neat answers to these questions".

> "As a site of interplay between the humanistic vision of autonomous egos and postmodern decentered selves, actual autobiographies stand at the intersection of the individual and the social, of agency and culture" (Usher, 1998:21).

The key to understanding a postmodern account of self is in the appreciation of decentred time in which past and future reflect the complexity of lived time,

enfolded in the past and unfolding in the future, in other words, the self as a work in process.

Conclusion

What I have done in this chapter is to explain and explore two stories, ostensibly about choice and self determination; life stories or events that may provide a trace of the development of my self, voice and mind in the context of past experience and my present professional interest in supporting others in an educational context work through issues of finding voice.

Developing the stories in the context of life history has, I suggest, enabled me to explore and make connections between the past and present. Specifically, the stories have enabled me to draw out and gain insight into the process of moving between silence and voice, particularly through the development of subjective knowing, which I have sought to analyse and critique in relation to the work of Belenky *et al.* (1986).

Finally, I want to say why I believe this piece of writing and inquiry is significant to my Ph.D. account. Witherell and Noddings (1991:3)[1] suggest "that to educate is to take seriously both the quest for life's meaning and the meaning of individual lives". In exploring my own stories it is perhaps evident that I take them seriously, not only as part of a quest for life's meaning, but also to show how my own subjective knowing has enabled me to take the meaning of individual lives of others, namely those of my students, some of whose accounts (including personal and professional narratives) I draw on elsewhere in this thesis. In the wider context of my professional role and desire to become an effective reflective educator, the power of narrative and dialogue has served

[1] In "Stories lives tell: narrative and dialogue in education".

as a springboard for ethical action in my work and for a number of my students. For me, that involves developing an ethic of care in the teaching and learning relationship, but that is the subject of another chapter.

On a personal level, these stories remind me that I am no stranger to adversity. In the first story, I am driven by strong instincts to survive and in the second, by a determination to return to school, seizing the opportunities for social mobility education ultimately affords. These same instincts and determination are, I suggest, characteristic of my quest to become an academic, in the context of pursuing this inquiry and persevering with this degree. In Chapter Five,[2] I describe the difficulties a woman in a new university can experience in being taken seriously as an academic and how the research assessment exercise has served to widen the gap between those who do research and those who teach; leaving those who are employed for their educative skills at a disadvantage in becoming recognised as research active. In the course of this inquiry, I have had to make a choice, to keep bemoaning my fate as a victim of circumstance, or take the risk toward becoming an academic by putting myself in the public domain through writing, presenting conference papers and submitting articles to journals. I have taken the latter path in my own quest for a meaningful life in education, as I address through my inquiry and writing questions of the kind "How do I improve my practice?". Through the communication of my own living theory, I attempt to educate and influence the social formation.

[2] Entitled "Finding voice in the academy: towards a politics of articulation, contesting power in the academy from an oppositional site".

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDING VOICE IN THE ACADEMY: TOWARDS A POLITICS OF ARTICULATION, CONTESTING POWER IN THE ACADEMY FROM AN OPPOSITIONAL SITE

Introduction

In this chapter I propose to explore the experience of finding voice in the academy, as a woman within a new university and thus in the higher education sector. Drawing on the authority of my experience and supporting literature, I aim to provide a glimpse of what it can be like for a woman to become an academic in the context of a 'man's world'. My critique suggests that the gatekeepers of the academy have constructed a privileged discourse that serves to uphold the status quo and protect their power base to the exclusion of others. I further suggest that this power base needs to be contested if other voices are to be heard. I propose that the politics of articulation might be best contested by a critical discourse that speaks from the margins to the centre and, in so doing, reveals, interrogates and reconstructs the power relations that serve to silence those other voices.

To speak from the margins about the politics of articulation, and to see the margins as a place of radical critique from where the voice of authority might be contested, is to know there is authority in different epistemologies that are not utilised or favoured by academic tradition. The support of different epistemologies is evidenced by the work of Gilligan (1977), who suggests that women's moral development is more likely to be influenced by relational concerns in precedence to concerns of justice. Similarly, the work of Belenky *et al.* (1986) identifies the lived experience (socialisation) of women as having a direct influence on ways of knowing, and through their research they identify five epistemological perspectives, based on women's experiences, that reflect the development of self, voice and mind. These perspectives are silence (an

experience characterised by feeling deaf and dumb); received knowledge (which involves listening to the voice of others, usually those in authority); subjective knowledge (where one learns to trust one's gut feelings as a basis for self expression); procedural knowledge (in other words, the voice of reason, which includes forms of separate and connected ways of knowing, each with distinct gendered legacies); and constructed knowledge (in which one is able to integrate other perspectives in the process of knowledge construction). As such, my critique is informed by a different way of knowing, one that is relational and connected, that honours subjective as well as procedural ways of knowing, and which recognises that the politics of lived experience provide a site for the construction of knowledge, the process of articulation, and the reclamation of voice and mind.

The location of the margins as a site of political resistance against oppressive boundaries of race, class and sex, is taken up by hooks (1991:145) who advocates "choosing the margin as a space of radical openness". She asks, "do we position ourselves on the side of the colonising mentality? Or do we continue to stand in political resistance with the oppressed" (ibid.). Her choice is clearly the latter, from which she suggests that a space can be created which provides access to the "pleasure and power of knowing" (ibid.). The choice, she argues, is crucial because "it shapes and determines our response to existing cultural practice and our capacity to envision new alternative oppositional aesthetic acts" (ibid.). Furthermore, she argues that "it informs the way we speak about these issues", and that language is itself "a place of struggle" (ibid.). Similarly, Oakley, speaking specifically about gender and the university culture, argues that the marginalised are more likely to have a vision about alternative forms of knowledge production, saying:

> "The marginalized live in more than one world; developing a capacity to understand multiple worlds is a condition of their survival. Intrinsic to this capacity is the art of making connections. And making connections is surely one critical

> definition of knowledge, whatever world we inhabit" (2001:xiii).

This capacity is also appreciated by hooks, who says:[3]

> "Living as we did - on the edge - we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked from both the outside in and from the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as the margin. We understood both" (1991:149).

In a positive frame, hooks further describes the margin as not solely a site of deprivation, but positively constructed as a site of "radical possibility" (ibid.). This is an important insight, if speaking from the margins is to be appreciated as a constructive critique, one that may serve to reconstruct power relations, rather than one of collective despair, with the potential for nihilism.

The Gendered Nature of University Organisations

Hearn (2001:71) identifies three features that characterise the gendered structure of universities. The first is the exclusion of women, only admitting them to the universities in Cambridge, Oxford and London in the 1860s and 1870s, with the first academic posts for women being created in the 1890s; secondly, half of the university places at lower levels are now taken up by women; thirdly, men continue to dominate the top of universities in disciplines and management, with the first female Vice Chancellor in the UK being appointed in 1995. He states:

> "Women's position and experience in university and other organizations is clearly affected by the form and structure of management, the gendering of organizations, and the relation of men to management" (Hearn, 2001:70).

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[3] hooks (1991) in the preface to *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, cited in *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics.*

He further argues that management is a social activity based on hierarchy and power, with men dominating top management positions; one reflected in academic institutions. The homosociality of management that has dominated both private and public sector organisations "has also been endemic in the universities", and he describes universities as "a site of male culture" which include forms such as "the gentleman's club" and "the men's room", bound by a culture of patriarchy and feudalism (fealty), a legacy of traditional organisation in universities (2001:74).

The Demands of the New Universities

In the world of academia you have to learn to write if you want a voice in the academy. This has now become imperative to academic survival for individuals and organisations, since the research assessment exercise ties funding to output and publications. New universities are in the business of survival, and whilst many like Middlesex continue to build on their traditional expertise of teaching and learning, and are focused on building this empire with course expansion (particularly in new international markets), they are also aware that reputation can be enhanced or diminished by the rating the university gets from its research output. Although there have always been academics who have been research active, it has not been the case for the majority in the new university (old polytechnic) sector. Many tutors in this sector came into higher education from a practice base, bringing with them experience of vocational fields and a greater interest in learning and development in these fields than in academic research.

In the context of a business school which has traditionally relied on a substantial postgraduate and post-experience market, tutors have enjoyed the experience of working with mature students at both the early stages of their professional lives and in mid-career (and increasingly in mid-life), as senior

practitioners make the transition to strategic positions in organisations, or career life changes. But these spaces are likely to be squeezed as more emphasis and resources are devoted to the overseas market. This strategy will undoubtedly impact on those tutors whose academic authority, expertise and capacity for knowledge creation is informed or resides in the postgraduate professional context. It is the challenge and efficacy of theory and practice, as developed in relation to the real life challenges of professional practitioners and their organisations, that many business school tutors have developed a portfolio of consulting in and to organisations. This consultancy work frequently includes action research; however, it does not generally translate into academic publications, and as an activity does not count in the way that publications in refereed journals count for the research assessment exercise. Thus, knowledge production is defined exclusively in the written mode, in a form that traditionally separates theory and practice, and where the latter takes the high ground. This has certainly been my experience and one shared by many of my colleagues at Middlesex University.

In the foreword to *Gender and the Restructured University*, Oakley (2001:xi) asks the question "What is happening in higher education today?". She suggests that a set of associated concepts, including globalisation, privatisation, commodification and managerialism, to name but a few, are changing the culture in academia. This is how she describes their impact:

> "On the level of personal experience, these characterizations reduce to the perception among many people working in universities that their places of work are becoming more and more like factories; staff 'man' assembly lines in a tightly timetabled and controlled culture, supervised by managers and bosses whose prime concern is with discrete and easily quantifiable deliverables that roll off the assembly line: students are taught – whatever 'teaching' means; research is carried out – but valued for its financial, rather than intellectual contribution against 'overheads'; work is published – with the contribution of the publications noted to schema of assessment and 'performativity' rather than to knowledge" Oakley (2001:xi).

Oakley further argues that the institutionalisation of these practices compounds discrimination, and where they lead to an absence of justice and equity they result in the experience felt by many academics, who she suggests are "experiencing an increasing sense of alienation in their everyday working lives from the central goals that led many of us into universities in the first place" (ibid.).

Furthermore, her critique suggests that this is a moral issue and not solely a managerial one. I would agree. Commodification of education and academia is, I suggest, the biggest threat. First and foremost, the expansion of the international market changes the teaching and learning relationship in my discipline,[4] particularly at postgraduate level. My argument is that knowledge becomes a commodity to be 'taught' to students who are without experience of a professional or organisational context, rather than a process of education and critique negotiated by experienced practitioners in dialogue with peers and their tutors. Secondly, Hearn (2001:78) suggests that the influence of student voice is now reduced to "the ubiquitous feedback form". Whilst this is probably true in the main, I would argue that student influence and that of their sponsoring organisations find new ways of making their voice heard to academic managers in the guise of the customer.

Whilst concern for academic quality is considered to be a management issue, it is not only their concern. I would suggest that most academics are committed to the continuous enhancement of quality in the teaching and learning relationship. Taking the commercial perspective of the customer, for example, the espoused notion that 'the customer is always right' distorts the academic relationship between tutor and student, and with the wider academy. When

[4] Human resource management and development.

students and their sponsors perceive education as a commodity, this leads to unreasonable demands to accept work that does not meet the academic standard and leads to complaints against staff who are seen to stand in the way of this consumer activity. Like many of my colleagues, in recent years I have experienced complaints of this kind. Critical management theory suggests that management is not a "neutral activity" (Alveson and Willmott, 1996:15), and in the face of the student as customer/complainant, I would suggest that management sets itself in opposition to academic staff as it bends over backwards to please the customer. The consequence of such practice is that academic tutors are denied an equal voice amidst this transaction. Furthermore, academic tutors are treated without regard for their professional integrity, or recognised for the values that underpin their vocation to the educative endeavour itself.

Publications can also be viewed as a commodity. In the first instance, where recruitment and appointment to academic posts are subjugated to the purchase of a publications record; and secondly, for academics for whom writing and publishing is new territory, left to 'go it alone' without mentoring and support, creates an experience which is neither healthy nor developmental, and whereby individuals feel pressured to 'go public' before they are ready, with consequent health risks to those who experience the process as stressful.

Brooks (2001:18), writing on restructuring the knowledge base of universities, argues that universities are being repositioned as part of a global knowledge economy, the consequence of which leads to an emphasis on 'exchange value' rather than 'use value' (Willmott, cited in Brooks, 2001:19), a phenomenon caricatured as the "McUniversity" (Parker and Jary, 1995).

The Historical Context of my Journey in Academia

At the time writing this thesis I have been in an academic post for thirteen years, yet it is only now as I proceed to bring my Ph.D. to a conclusion that I am confidant to put pen to paper, trusting my gut feeling and the efficacy of my experience, spurred on by the knowledge that there is a range of literature that supports my perspective and critique, and yet knowing that even this new found confidence does not guarantee immunity from rejection or acceptance in academic circles, including some regarded as 'alternative'.

I joined Middlesex University Business School initially as a Senior Lecturer in 1989, then as a part-timer following the birth of my son and earlier, whilst on maternity leave, teaching on the part-time postgraduate Diploma in Personnel Management one evening a week (the same programme that I graduated from the year before). At the end of my maternity leave I returned to work full-time, working for a London local authority where I worked as a Human Resource Development Manager.

It was my experience of design and delivery of learning events, and my understanding of the processes and politics of management and organisational learning and change, along with proven ability to work with adults at all levels in the authority, that opened the door to academic life for me. At the end of that year, I was offered a full-time post as programme leader and course tutor to the HRM Diploma programme. I should point out that from a career perspective this was a sideways move, the salary at the time being similar to that of a Principal Officer (PO1/2) in local government (though nowadays the gap has widened considerably with similar responsibilities in local government being paid at a much higher level). However, the primary attraction at the time was the potential for flexible working that an academic post offered to me as the mother of a new-born child.

Hearn (2001:79) notes the "long-term decreasing relative pay for academics". Ironically, the key benefit associated with term-time work and associated holiday was bought out within a year or so of my employment in higher education. Indeed, the demands of the job and working arrangements have changed radically since I joined Middlesex University, such that work related stress and work life balance have become real issues for individuals and organisations. Let me digress on this issue for a moment before continuing with my historical journey in academia.

Work life balance

Work life balance is a contemporary employment issue, and one central government has felt it necessary to encourage employers to address. Indeed, in April 2003, the government launched a work life balance initiative. Coincidentally, I was speaking with a colleague at a European Business Ethics Conference at Cambridge about this very issue on the day of the government launch. Subsequently, we published our paper, Frame and Hartog (2003), setting out to explore the rhetoric and reality of implementing work life balance. We put forward the position that work life balance was not just a women's issue or an employment issue, but rather one that concerns us all, and as such it is a wider social issue. From this perspective we framed a communitarian argument and looked at three organisational case examples, one of which was a modern university in the London region. In this case we found ourselves looking behind the stories told in response to a questionnaire that had been used by the organisation to facilitate the implementation of a work life balance policy into practice. Let me give you an example of what we were grappling with in our analysis:

> "When asked 'to calculate hours worked', employees reported difficulty in answering this question. This caused us to speculate why this might be so, and we formulated the

following questions based on our experience and knowledge of similar organisations:

- Is it the case that people don't really know the number of hours worked. If so, what might account for this?
- Do people feel confused or overwhelmed about hours worked or unduly concerned that in trying to estimate them they may leave themselves open to requests to do more work?
- Do the formulae used for work programme planning blur and deny the real time and effort taken to do the job?
- Does the system contribute to inequity in distribution where work programmes may appear weighted in favour of some, and not others?" (Frame and Hartog, 2003:361-362).

By problematising this and other questions, we wanted to reveal the complexity of the situation. This strategy is, I suggest, crucial if we are to get any real debate in organisations as to the complexity of implementing such policies into practice, and if we are to expose the motivation and hidden agenda behind the implementation of some work life balance initiatives, as highlighted by our second case example, a modern university department in the Midlands, that being one of performance management presented in the guise of 'workload planning'.

Whilst some academic managers may think that academics can and should be more productive, the cost in terms of work-overload will ultimately be a disservice to those employees who are already giving their all, and to the educative function itself. That academic management may think in this way or that government shares this view (despite its rhetoric on work life balance) should be in no doubt. In November 2003, the Vice Chancellor at Middlesex University wrote to every academic, informing them that they were required to participate in a "Transparency Review in 2003/4", and complete a time allocation template. We were advised that this information was required for an annual return to analyse the organisation's expenditure between teaching, research and other activities. It would be used to put a case to the government that

highlighted the true costs of higher education and to support the organisation's case that higher education is currently under-funded.

Whilst I do not doubt the commitment of the Vice Chancellor to make a case for more funding, like the work life balance questionnaire previously mentioned, I have questions regarding the formulae that is being used to calculate the workload of academics in this exercise, as I do not believe it adequately accounts for the work being done. Additionally, I do not believe for a moment that increased funding will be on offer without strings attached; for example, the move towards a three semester year is already well underway and is being brought in by the back door via summer school programmes.

The Historical Context of my Journey in Academia - Continued

My appointment was supported by a woman labour economist who managed the new Masters programme in HRM, and who had spoken highly of my work as a student. Additionally, I was supported by the then Head of the School of Management, who also had a management learning and development background. He encouraged me in the early years and invited me to work with him on research contracts.[5] In addition, we worked together on many other consulting contracts, including the design and delivery of an in-company MBA by action learning. Indeed, he was passionate about action learning and its contribution to management learning, so much so that for a while he was the Revan's Professor for The International Foundation for Action Learning (a practitioner foundation with links to Lancaster University). It was with his blessing that I, with colleagues, took the MAPOD forward to validation in 1995.

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[5] Such as "Doctors into management", a national research project that was commissioned by the NHS steering group and led by the Middlesex University team during the early 1990s.

He was to retire shortly afterwards, and thereafter there was a power vacuum in the business school in respect of expertise in management learning, which has never been filled (despite several attempts to appoint a professor in this field). His co-director on the NHS research project went on to lead a research centre in my academic group around issues of management and quality, and working practices in the NHS. But despite funding and the creation of research posts, I was not included in his plans. Naturally, I was frustrated that my experience was being ignored, but I understood that I was not in his patronage since I had been appointed to my position over his preferred candidate by the now retired head of school.

As colleagues sought alternative alliances to support their careers and projects, I was to find myself increasingly isolated without a powerful ally or mentor. There was now increased pressure in the university to be research active and published. All courses were now modularised, which problematised the learning relationship for many staff and students, reducing the teaching and learning relationship to one of fragmented bite-sized chunks; though on MAPOD our response could be described as one of creative compliance by fashioning MAPOD modules into an open framework within the context of a holistic course programme, unconstrained by timetabling, allowing staff and students to enjoy the continuity of a course-based learning relationship.

Having completed a part-time Masters degree by action learning at Lancaster University in 1993 (whilst working at Middlesex University), I decided that I needed to embark on a Ph.D. I felt the 'writing was on the wall' for practitioner academics, and that job security would in time become an issue, particularly if I were not seen to be a 'real academic'. In 1996, I registered with the Centre For Action Research in Professional Practice at the University of Bath, to undertake their Ph.D. development programme. I wanted to do research that would draw on my experience, that had real meaning for me, and that would add value to

and understanding of my work. I did not know I was going to embrace 'first person research', and I knew nothing of educational action research, the approach I have taken here, but I knew that I did not want to do research 'out there'.

I had purposefully and carefully selected the University of Bath because of its humanistic and action research approach. I intuitively felt it would provide a supportive context for the work that I was engaged with. I had opted not to do a Ph.D. at Middlesex University primarily because there was no longer a professor of management learning, and thus there was not the expertise to support my research and development. I was at the time one of a handful of staff to get some financial support to study outside Middlesex University, though initially I was expected to recoup my fees by generating income through consultancy activities. Before long, colleagues were told that if they wanted to do a Ph.D. they had to do it in-house. Doctoral thesis supervision was part of the research assessment criteria, and naturally Middlesex University wanted to recoup their investment.

Very few full-time colleagues were pursuing a Ph.D. and, at that time, neither was any other woman in the business school. Many simply felt their work life balance would give if they took on such a commitment (something that I was only to appreciate in hindsight). Many of the Ph.D. students were young men drawn from postgraduate programmes, and increasingly vacancies were being reconstructed as research posts within academic groups, leaving more and more of the teaching to others. Getting support was not straightforward either. I was required to submit an annual research plan and justify my case. I felt that continued support for my thesis was increasingly in 'the lap of the gods', and it was only in recent years that some of the rationale of the opposition came to light, including the mistaken belief that I had previously registered for a Ph.D. at Lancaster University and was assumed to have failed. Of course, I had been to

Lancaster University, but to study for my M.A. in Management Learning between 1991 and 1993. My case was not helped by beliefs held by members of the research committee that action research did not count, and their irritation that I was not making adequate progress publishing. Hearn notes that:

> "the intensification of management and of academic work has included in the 1990s a reduced managerial tolerance for those staff, men and women, who were [assumed to be] less productive in research or less effective in other ways" (2001:81).

Combined with a lack of organisational competence in respect of developmental support for academics, what I believe I experienced was a form of institutional discrimination that particularly worked against women in the academy.

To cap it all, I was struggling to find voice at the University of Bath, having had my confidence shattered by a careless response toward my diploma paper submission, which continued to create anxiety up to and during the period I was writing my M.Phil.-Ph.D. transfer document. Boud (2002) framed his professorial inaugural lecture with the argument that 'assessment hurts'. The decision to fail the piece of work is not what I am contesting here, but the act of carelessness by which those responsible for the assessment process handled it, an act whereby 'the voice of authority' was to render me silent for a considerable period of time.

As a student, I experienced the contradiction of a centre that espouses humanistic action inquiry, yet failed to engage in the assessment process in an enquiring and reflective way. Had they done so, those in authority might have established why I had written the piece and presented the paper in the experimental form I had. In other words, what I needed from those in authority was an approach to assessment that worked with what was there, rather than what was missing. Therein lies the difference between what Belenky *et al.*

(1986) call separate and connected knowing. The former, a procedure and form of critical thinking which is characterised by what Elbow (cited in Belenky *et al.*, 1986:104) calls "the doubting game", involves "putting something on trial to see whether it is wanting or not" (ibid.). The latter "builds on the subjectivists' conviction that the most trustworthy knowledge comes from personal experience rather than the pronouncements of authorities" and where "connected knowers develop procedures for gaining access to other people's knowledge", primarily through "empathy" (Belenky *et al*., 1986:112).

Freire (1971) describes the critical educator as a 'midwife', who assists in the emergence of consciousness, encouraging the student to speak in their own active voice; in other words, someone who practises a strategy of power with, rather than power over.

The perturbation I experienced as a student has enabled me to appreciate how careful academics need to be in managing the learning and assessment process. Even where self and peer assessment is included in the process, as on MAPOD, the balance of power lies with the academic. Perhaps it is precisely because of my own perturbation that I have come to know myself as a "living contradiction" (Whitehead, 2000:93) in respect of my own practice, when I have failed to live up to my values in practice, the experience moving one to find a solution that improves one's practice. Whitehead argues that:

> "…the inclusion of I as a living contradiction in educational enquiries can lead to the creation of research methodologies that are distinctly 'educational' and cannot be reduced to social science methodologies" (2000:93).

In Middlesex University Business School (MUBS), those academics failing to meet the status of being deemed to be 'research active' were having the question asked "What contribution is so and so making to the university?". This was not being asked directly of the individual but to academic group

leaders and within the management team. At the same time, new formulae were being constructed to calculate teaching hours. Whilst there were those fortunate enough to have protected hours for academic research, the rest of us (deemed not to be research active) were to find ourselves with increased teaching workloads. Since MAPOD ran with small groups (between twelve and twenty students per cohort), I was soon to find myself in the spotlight and identified as someone who could make a bigger contribution by teaching larger groups. Hearn (2001:77) refers to this as "massification", which involves teaching more students with less financial resources per head.

Ironically, it was whilst writing my first ethics conference paper with a colleague in the university's HRM department (a colleague with whom I had previously taught and who had worked with me on a consulting and action research project for a multinational car manufacturer), that I discovered that I was one of those whose contribution was being questioned. Talking it through with her, I was to realise that I was not doing any less than other colleagues; indeed, I was probably doing more than some who were in the spotlight, but not for their lack of contribution, but precisely for their contribution. The major difference, apart from our gender, was that I was invisible. A position, I suggest, not uncommon for a woman in a man's world, particularly where fraternalistic patriarchy is the norm. Despite feeling pressure to concentrate on my Ph.D., I felt in a double bind, needing to prove myself to senior academics in MUBS. As a result, I volunteered to run the next HRM and Ethics Conference at Middlesex University in order to raise my profile, and to show that I was capable of making a contribution to the research agenda. This is what Oakley (2001) means by 'credentialism'.

By this stage, I had begun to identify a number of conferences relevant to my area of interest and expertise. However, given funding restrictions, attendance at conferences was limited to one or two a year, and it was increasingly the case

that attendance was predicated on the condition that you wrote and presented a paper. It was in the conference arena that I began to test out my ideas and writing in the public domain. I targeted conferences on ethics in HRM and business, reflective practice, and critical theory and management learning. Through doing so, I began to experience feedback and critique from academic peers and, importantly, I began to receive encouraging feedback from key individuals whose work I respected. It was really only at this stage that I began to take my Ph.D. supervisor's comments that "I had something to contribute" seriously. Lomax (1999), specifically talking about action learning, describes "a double dialectic of meaning making", in which the individual writes in the first instance to make sense and create meaning for one's self, and that the second and other side of the dialectical relationship is concerned with the representation of meaning to others.

Homeplaces

Speaking and writing from the margins enables and empowers one to 'tell it like it is'. This serves to break the silence that institutionalises oppression and discrimination. In evoking the senses to imagine and recall the experience of safety, security and nurture that her grandmother's house provided her as a young girl, crossing the tracks back to what had been the racially segregated area where black folks lived, hooks (1991:42) introduces us to the concept of 'homeplaces'. She ascribes the task of making a homeplace to the women, a place of affirmation and healing from domination, fashioned as a community of resistance. Her story resonated with me when I discovered it whilst writing a conference paper,[6] in which I described a journey to my grandmother's house that evoked for me similar sentiments of belonging and community. I was at that time preoccupied in creating a context for learning on MAPOD based on

[6] "Becoming a reflective practitioner". Unpublished paper presented to the First International Reflective Practice Conference, in Worcester, July 2000.

principles of community, belonging and inclusion, a place in which I could 'hold my students well', and develop myself as a reflective practitioner. hooks is not naïve in her nostalgia for home, since she acknowledges that she had to turn away from home to develop her critical voice.

> "Home is that place which enables and promotes varied and everchanging perspectives, a place where one discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference" (hooks, 1991:148).

The writing process is itself a place of struggle. Each paper that I have taken to a conference has been a part of my own struggle for articulation. On this issue, hooks says:

> "The oppressed struggle in language to recover ourselves, to reconcile, to renew. Our words are not without meaning, they are an action, a resistance. Language is a place of struggle" (1991:146).

Conferences are one source of homeplaces, but they are not immune from patriarchy as they are often dominated by what Hearn describes as the male intellectual gang. Hearn suggests that, notwithstanding resistance, knowledge creation and what counts as knowledge is still dominated by men.

> "What has counted and still counts as knowledge has been severely gendered, so that women's relationship to knowledge and its production and reproduction has been diminished and devalued. For the most part universities, dominated as they are by men as academics and managers, do not produce neutral, still less emancipatory knowledge" (Hearn, 2001:73-74).

The shadow side of this culture hides the logic of domination and this can be disguised in the form of well meaning but misplaced feedback that serves to keep intact the logic of domination inherent in a given form of procedural knowledge. I make this claim based on the quite different forms of opinion I have received on the same paper, where feedback reinforces the orthodoxy of a

particular position to the exclusion of an alternative point of view. Thus, in the development of self, voice and mind, the new academic, and specifically those writing in a different voice, might do well to reflect on the position and location in the academy that those who give feedback are coming from (assuming of course, you can work this out within the context of blind refereeing).

Working With Autobiography: Going Home

Going home has proved to be a strategy of liberation for me. I do not mean literally going home, but metaphorically speaking, revisiting my earliest experience of homeplaces in the context of autobiographical narrative, as a form of writing and inquiry which I have used in constructing this thesis, in conference papers, and with students in my teaching and learning strategies on the MAPOD programme. It is a strategy suggested by Goldberg if you want to learn to write. The idea is quite simple insofar as you can write about what you know, draw out your experience and, from an academic perspective, subject your experience to critical inquiry.

> "It is very important to go home if you want your work to be whole. You don't have to move in with your parents again and collect your weekly allowance, but you must claim where you come from and look deeply into it. Come to honor and embrace it, or at the least, accept it" (Goldberg, 1986:146).

Specifically, autobiographical writing has helped me explore my history and understanding of myself as a learner. It has enabled me to review my formative years and reflect on the values and experiences that shaped my development, and in more recent times it has empowered me to test out my ideas in the public domain and learn to live my values in my practice, in the context of my work in education.

Writing this chapter has been a form of autobiographical narrative. By bringing the personal experience of my professional life into the research text, I aim to illuminate the context of my enquiry and understanding of what it means to engage in a self-study of my own practice and history of development as a woman academic in a new university.

> "Although we usually think of writing as a mode of telling about the social world, writing up is not just a mopping up activity at the end of the research project. Writing is also a way of 'knowing' a method of discovery and analysis. By writing in different ways we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it. Form and content are inseparable" (Richardson, 1994:516).

Richardson (1994:517) describes writing as a "dynamic and creative" process, saying that in qualitative research "the writer is the instrument". She asks, "How do we put ourselves in our own texts, and with what consequences?". Her response centres on the deconstruction of metanarratives that figure in the postmodern stance.

> "In some ways, 'knowing' is easier, however, because post modernism recognizes the situational limitations of the knower. Qualitative writers are off the hook, so to speak. They don't have to try to play God, writing as disembodied omniscient narrators claiming universal, atemporal general knowledge; they can eschew the questionable metanarrative of scientific objectivity and still have plenty to say as situated speakers, subjectivities engaged in knowing/telling about the world as they perceive it" (Richardson, 1994:518).

As a form of postmodern thinking, Richardson recommends poststructuralism, which links language, subjectivity, social organisation and power. Furthermore, she argues that: "Language is not the result of one's individuality; rather, language constructs the individual's subjectivity in ways that are historically and locally specific" (ibid.).

By speaking and writing from the margins to the centre, it is precisely my subjectivity, located historically and specifically in the context of my local

university organisation, from which I have set out to critique my lived experience as a woman in a new university struggling to develop herself as an academic. A critique which explores my learning trajectory towards reclaiming self, voice and mind.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have constructed a critical account written from the margins, reflecting on and interrogating my journey of learning and development in my quest to become an academic. Drawing on relevant literature, I have argued that this journey and my inquiry is situated in a man's world, in which and despite resistance such as this critique, it is a struggle to be heard. Furthermore, I have argued that it is precisely by writing and critiquing one's lived experience from the margin to the centre that creates a space that empowers the 'other' to come to voice, and in so doing, arrive at a place where one can reclaim a sense of self, voice and mind.

CHAPTER SIX: MAPOD - THE EARLY DAYS (1995-1998): A REFLECTIVE REVIEW

Introduction

In this chapter I review the reflective process of my inquiry as an higher education tutor in the context of my educative relations on the MAPOD programme by reviewing the early days of the degree programme, spanning the life of the first two cohorts and covering the period from 1995 to 1998. I do this by telling three stories and by asking questions such as "How do I understand my practice?" and "What is going on here?". They are addressed by answers and analysed with reference to the espoused values and goals of my educational practice and relevant literature. I have chosen to include these particular stories because:

- They provide an insight into understanding my practice in the early days.
- They indicate the process of grappling involved in learning to place my 'I' at the centre of my inquiry.
- They provide examples of how I experienced the denial of my values in practice.
- They show how I came to know myself as a living contradiction.
- They show how I try to find a way forward to overcome contradictions and improve the rationality and justice of my practice in support of loving and life affirming educative relations.

Background

A self-study requires that the researcher is able to place their 'I' at the centre of their inquiry. However, when I began this research journey I did not understand

this. Much of my attention and awareness was drawn to the design and content of the MAPOD learning programme and learning relationships with colleagues.

I began my initial written account[7] by suggesting that first I needed to understand my practice before I could inquire into it. Citing Rowland, I stated:

> "Firstly I could only begin to improve my practice as a tutor once I had faced my own sense of failure. We all fail at times, and these occasions can become valuable points of growth in our development" (1993:5).

In this diploma transfer paper I suggested that the above quotation had resonated with me precisely because it spoke directly to my lived experience of not knowing how to begin a first person inquiry in my professional context. This perspective reflects my lived experience during the first year of MAPOD. By the time MAPOD 2 had begun, I had written a first account of my life story, the process of which I described in my diploma paper as being part of my emergent process of becoming an action researcher. Emergent because the learning curve involved in working with a life story necessitates a move from description to reflection, turning the mirror inwards to explore the history and experience that connects my personal and professional life. Though at this point my reflective critique scratched the surface, nonetheless I had begun to see links between my personal and professional narrative regarding the development of 'voice' and 'mind'.

Through writing my life story/learning history, I had come to recognise silence as a barrier to voice, and come to appreciate how the experience of silence left me feeling inadequate, reticent and unable to speak my mind in the face of authority; in other words, how silence was an impediment to learning. I was aware that my silence had been rendered by dominant voices of authority such

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[7] A Diploma Transfer Paper, May 1997, at the University of Bath.

as parents and teachers, and I believed that sharing this process with students might help them recognise similar experiences in their own stories. This was to influence my thinking about how to create a space for learning on MAPOD 2.

Goals for Learning on MAPOD

The primary goal of the MAPOD programme was for students to become autonomous learners. In particular, we believed that the goal of autonomy would enable students to learn how to think for themselves, develop the capacity for critique and be able to speak their mind. Silence and the notion that those in authority known best was antithetical to this goal. The primary strategy we employed to facilitate student autonomy in learning was 'Action Learning' (Revans, 1971), which we employed on MAPOD as a vehicle for managing assignments. Action learning is a social process involving the management of learning in small groups, known as 'action learning sets'. On MAPOD, these are tutor facilitated. The central tenet of the Revan's approach is that questioning insight is more valuable than traditional programmed knowledge. Students are given the freedom to choose projects relevant to them to pursue as their assignments (with a broad link to the module topic and purpose), thus self-directed learning is part of this strategy. Furthermore, to facilitate student autonomy in learning, we introduced peer assessment in a power-sharing exercise with the MAPOD students.

The second goal of MAPOD was to create an environment in which a community of learners might emerge. Linked to this was the idea that a person-centred learning environment would provide the conditions in which learning could be safe and learners thrive. The work of Harrison (1987) on organisation culture and his seminal paper[8] had specifically influenced my thinking in this

[8] Entitled "Putting love back into the organisation".

respect, particularly the notion of creating a 'safe haven' which would, in the context of loving and life-affirming relations, facilitate the time and space for reflection for learners in the face of organisational change and adversity.[9] Such a space recognised that it was important to support the emotional growth as well as the intellectual of the student. Linked to this goal was a co-operative approach to the design of the residential workshops in which students and tutors could share responsibility for learning, both contributing to the design and delivery of workshops.

Story 1: The First MAPOD Block Week

The MAPOD began in 1995 with a residential week at the Hendon Hall Hotel. We had eighteen students, three core tutors to facilitate the action learning sets and two additional tutors who would contribute to specific modules during the first year.

The purpose of the block week was to provide an induction to the programme and explain the co-operative strategy of learning and development, as well as providing a framework for the first module.[10] It was also intended that action learning sets would be formed during this block. I was one of the three core tutors, working alongside another tutor to facilitate this event. I was not residential, though my co-facilitator along with one of the other core tutors was.

We had met as a tutor team to plan our approach and contributions to this week. It was agreed that I would present a session on the philosophy of adult learning that reflected the values and beliefs of the tutor team, drawing on ideas from Rogers (1983) and Knowles (1984). In addition, I would lead a session later

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9 Many students were managing redundancy programmes and/or dealing with the emotional fallout of organisational change and survival interventions.

10 Entitled "Individual learning and support strategies".

in the week to introduce action learning, drawing on the thinking of Revans (1971) and the critique of action learning by Logan and Stuart (1987), who point out that activity and experience are not the same; drawing our attention to the limitations of action without reflection. My co-facilitator was to lead a Career Life-Planning Workshop. We anticipated that this session would lead individuals to explore and make explicit their purposes for joining the MAPOD programme and provide them with the opportunity to reflect upon their career development and life plans. In addition, we hoped it would provide a vehicle for engaging with the first assignment, which would be determined by each student as perceived relevant to their experience whilst broadly related to the theme of module.

Day One: Getting Started

The programme began with all members of the tutor team present. After introductions, we pointed to individual statements about our values and beliefs that we had posted on the walls. These were to be the focus of the evening session, when everyone would be asked to share and reflect on their values and beliefs about learning. To tease out student beliefs we had set aside time in the afternoon to engage in a reflective exercise at the individual and group level, asking the question "How do I learn best?". We were curious as to what expectations students had about the learning relationship, and what these expectations might mean for developing a learning culture based on student autonomy and self-direction on MAPOD.

In the course of the day we had also posted 'offers and wants'. These were workshops to be offered and led either by tutors or students, and expressions of interest that could be responded to during the week.

Day Two: Are We Safe?

Day One had got off to a good start. Day Two was timetabled to deal with enrolment in the morning and a career life-planning workshop in the afternoon. Before the career life-planning workshop began, my co-facilitator introduced the idea of buddies as a learning support strategy and I introduced the concept of co-counselling as another vehicle for providing support. As tutors, we were also applying these strategies to own learning relationships, as well as working with the principles of the 'reflecting team' (Anderson and Goolishian, 1992) to review our practice. In my diploma paper I highlight my intervention as signalling the first signs of anxiety.

> "Rather than quell anxiety, the very term co-counselling just seemed to raise fears, and I recall having to smooth over this concern by explaining that we just intended to draw on the general idea rather than suggest that people could be fully fledged co-counsellors by reading the handout provided. This explanation seemed to be acceptable and by the tea break the workshop appeared to be running smoothly" (Hartog, 1997).

How do I understand my practice – what is going on here?

I want to stop for a moment just to reflect on the above. Whilst I am aware of a degree of anxiety emerging, I observe that my strategy attempts to dissipate it by 'smoothing it over'. My focus of attention seems to be on moving the programme forward to begin the career life-planning workshop, rather than exploring the underlying current of anxiety in the emergent process. I now wonder if in my desire to avoid a 'derailment' of the programme I was unaware of my own anxieties?

After tea, my colleague begins the career life-planning workshop. She had made it clear to me that when she was leading a session 'she was in charge'. She had said that she did not want any 'chipping in' or 'interference' by any member of

the team. Though I was uncomfortable with her style, because it did not fit with my approach to co-facilitating, I decided to let it go, as I imagined that she might be feeling undervalued as she was not going to be one of the action learning set tutors and by taking the lead on this workshop she could demonstrate to the students that she had a lot to offer. Meanwhile, I sorted out some photocopying, agreeing to return at the next break.

When I got back there appeared to be 'a storm brewing'. My colleague was in the process of breaking the group into pairs to go off and work on past life-lines. Two people had already left the room and the others were getting up out of their seats when one student announced that she was uneasy about proceeding, because in her experience they could be dangerous and should be given a health warning. This announcement served to stop the workshop in its tracks. The group agreed to discuss this. I describe what happened next and my feelings in my diploma paper in the following way:

> "My colleague sat calmly listening to the feedback and I sat on the edge of my seat. I don't know who it was, but someone suggested I should go and get the two people who had already left the room to give them the opportunity to join in. I remember the bemused look on the faces of the two men when I told them that there was some concern and an eagerness to talk about this exercise. Their response suggested that they had not anticipated any danger. They were just beginning to share their life stories. Back in the room the atmosphere was sombre. I sensed a collective unease at the situation. Two things were running through my mind. The first was that we would lose the confidence of the students if we did not handle this. The second was a sense of *déjà vu*, having witnessed a similar scenario running the same workshop with another group. I knew that my colleague would remain clam and listen to the feedback and be responsive to the issues and questions raised. She flagged up the matter of personal and collective responsibility for one's learning and reminded everyone that no-one was being forced to do anything that they did not want to do" (Hartog, 1997).

My feelings at the time were that my colleague and I needed to 'take on board' the anxiety being expressed, and show in our behaviour more sensitivity and

awareness toward the possible anxiety or distress that the exercise might bring forth. It seemed that what students wanted was reassurance that tutors would be there to listen or counsel them if they got stuck or needed support whilst doing this work. The public airing of their anxiety cleared the air, and after a few tense moments, some tears and reassurance of tutor availability, some of the students got up and went on to work with the exercise whilst others sat together to review the process itself.

How do I understand my practice – what is going on here?

In my diploma transfer paper I suggest that:

- "I didn't know what to do with myself."
- "I felt defensive for the consequences of the programme."
- "I was relieved that the angst was directed at some-one else rather than me."
- "That my loyalty was to my colleague rather than the students."
- "That I like them was struggling to make sense of what was going on."

Why was there so much apparent anxiety and where did it come from?

By the time of writing my diploma transfer paper in May 1997, I realised that anxiety in the process of personal inquiry often came from the baggage that each of us carry with us about our personal life histories. This belief was based on my own experience of working with life history material and feedback given in student assignments at the end of year one, in the reflective essays. This is a view shared by Reason and Marshall (1987). It was an awareness of the potential for distress felt by the student who spoke up and recognised by others which generated resistance to engage with the career life-planning exercise. It was very early in the programme (Day Two). The students had not

had much time to form a working alliance with one-another, or to develop relationships that were sufficiently intimate and supportive to warrant the trust and confidence in each other that they anticipated they might need. Perhaps, more importantly, we had not established a safe enough environment for this kind of learning. Were we expecting too much too soon? We were not unaware that to begin a programme with 'individual (personal) learning' was potentially problematic and that the self-reflective process meant there was less opportunity to hide behind the comfort of content associated with more traditional programmes. We had, however, made our rationale explicit at interview and in the handbook stating that "in order to facilitate the learning of others we believed that first we must pay attention to our own learning process". I also felt that this was a 'chicken and egg' dilemma.

Looking back at my reactions to the emergent anxiety, did I need to act on my gut instincts and challenge my colleague? In other words, did I let her 'position' that she was 'in charge' get in the way of me doing my job and of developing with her an effective co-tutor working alliance? On the other hand, I wondered if I was too willing to take on the responsibility of holding or containing the anxiety attached to this session? I note that my language at the time of reflecting on this event in my diploma transfer paper was that " my colleague and I needed to *take on board* the anxiety being expressed" (Hartog, 1997). Was this the most appropriate response to student needs or was I responding to an inappropriate projection of authority reinforcing the parent/child relationship in the teaching and learning alliance? Certainly, I felt at the time that it might be and like my colleague I believed that students needed to play their part and take responsibility for their learning.

Day Three

The situation seemed to settle down on Day Three. I had not been privy to the informal reflections held over dinner or in the bar on the previous evening. I

was aware that my co-facilitator had spoken with several students individually, but I was not given any detail about these conversations; rather I was told that things had been worked through. A number of student-led sessions were offered on Day Three, including one that asked the question "How do we make learning safe?". It seemed that at least one student was taking responsibility for her learning and the learning of others seriously in framing this question and facilitating a learning event around it.

Day Four

On Day Four we continued to work with a variety of sessions being offered by students and tutors. The afternoon was set aside to focus on action learning, starting with a lecture presentation on its underpinning theory and philosophy, which I would lead. This was to be followed by 'set formation'. As action was the principal learning strategy for managing assignments, this had been timetabled as a key session during the block.

It was 3:45 pm and I was getting ready to begin my presentation, adjusting the overhead projector and sorting out my slides in response to the issues and questions that I had heard being raised earlier in the day and throughout the week. Everyone else was having a tea break, including my co-facilitator and the other two core tutors who would facilitate the action learning sets. I was unaware that they had retired to a syndicate room and were engaged in a discussion to scrap the presentation and go straight into set formation in order that sets be formed before dinner that evening. The rationale for this was to contain any outbreak of anxiety if the set formation was not resolved. A colleague was dispatched to fetch me.

When my colleague informed me that we were having a staff meeting and that I should come I resisted, as the session was due to begin in less than a minute.

But she grabbed me by the hand and dragging me out of the room, repeating "We are having a staff meeting now!". Once in the syndicate room she started to explain, but was cut off by my co-facilitator who said " I move we scrap the lecture and go straight for set formation". "But - but" I replied, trying to get a word in edgeways, "It is precisely because they want to know the theory behind our philosophy and learning design that we are running late." My co-facilitator was not listening to me and I was annoyed with my other colleagues for not holding the process. Words were exchanged and in the event a colleague suggested a compromise, limiting the presentation to a few key points and the discussion to a fixed timeframe, leaving the remainder of the time before dinner to set formation. With agreement on this strategy I returned to the room to lead the session, the students seemingly unaware of what had just occurred between the tutor team.

How do I understand my practice- what is going on here?

What does this tell us about the working alliance within the staff team? This scenario would seem to have marked a turning point or breakdown in the working alliance with my co-facilitator, who I experienced as not co-facilitating or listening. My reading of what the students were asking for at that moment was being ignored. Though her proposal to complete the task of set formation before dinner made sense, what I found problematic was the manner in which the decision was taken. However, I wondered what was driving her motivation to action? Was it what might be good for the students or was it her anxiety to stay in control of the process? As a tutor team we espoused modelling the process. Dialogic process involves listening, reflecting and paying attention to our own process. But this did not reflect the reality of our practice.

Following the presentation, the students formed into three groups and informed the tutors that they wished to interview the three core tutors who would

facilitate the action learning sets, their aim being to select the tutor they felt most appropriate to work with them. Each group met and drew up criteria for selection, which they did not share with us, and then proceeded to interview us. Whilst the students deliberated, the three core tutors exchanged notes on the questions asked and impressions formed of the interview experience. We could not fathom the logic of some of the questions and we were puzzled and bemused by the process. It emerged that we had all formed a preference for one particular set and shared some concerns about another. Our impressions were based on how challenging or otherwise we anticipated the sets to be, the general consensus being that the more challenging the set, the more potentially satisfying for us. As we did not wish to undermine the confidence of students we had expressed concerns about, we decided to say nothing about our impressions. In the event, I got the set that everyone shared a preference for.

Day Five

The end of the first week moved to a close. On Friday morning I facilitated a process review and dialogue that revisited some of the anxiety that had been attached to the career life-planning workshop earlier in the week. Using a technique of circular questioning, I drew out a multiplicity of perspectives from the group. This was deemed helpful in processing 'unfinished business', helping everyone to understand what had happened. The final session to evaluate the week also proved positive, declaring the week to be a success.

Once the students had gone the tutor team stayed on to review the week from our perspective. We employed the use of a talking stick.[11] In my diploma transfer paper I noted " a sense of exhaustion and quietness in the team", nonetheless, we talked for three hours. We talked about where we thought the

[11] Which gives one person the floor at a time and demands that the others listen.

students had got to and how autonomous we perceived them to be as learners, and what our expectations were for the future. We also used the time to build some bridges between us, attending to the rift we had experienced the day before. However, I sensed we parted with unfinished business around the nature of our working alliance.

How do I understand my practice, what is going on here?

Although able to reflect on the progress of the students, as a tutor team we were less able to step back and reflect on our own processes, both collective and personal. Vince (1996:111) identifies a lack of analysis in the field of experiential management education of the social and political context of that experience, and notes a difficulty in working with and managing emotions involved in learning and change. We had espoused the belief that tutors are learners too. To what extent this was true was debatable. I experienced a tension in the tutor team between rhetoric and reality, in that we lacked the necessary reflection on our actions and missed the opportunity of learning from our experience.

However, our ideal was to promote a community of learners, students and tutors in which no one party could hold authority or claim unconditional expertise over the other. Vince tells us:

> "The need to feel competent, consistent, in control and comfortable for ourselves and with others sets a boundary around our capacity to learn and change. This boundary is a protection against anxiety and uncertainty, a protection against the unfamiliar" (1996:113).

Anxiety had played a part in shaping the events of Day Two around the career life-planning exercise and on Day Four prior to set formation. I would suggest that the underlying theme of control was what was at issue here. Vince

suggests that "Anxiety can be seen as a starting point of individual and group defenses against learning and change" (1996:114). Powerful emotions can consciously or otherwise promote or discourage learning and change. What I am suggesting here is that anxiety was a barrier to reflection, learning and change for the tutor team, paradoxically contradicting our espoused learning beliefs. Unable to reflect on our own process we were, I suggested, blinded by our anxieties. Vince further suggests "that experience is conditioned by, and an exercise of power" (1996:115). Was our inability to reflect on our experience symptomatic of the paradox we found ourselves in, simultaneously embarking on a power-sharing process of education with students, whilst retaining a degree of power over them, both in terms of our authority as tutors and for the overarching design for learning?

Revisiting my written accounts of the first year of the MAPOD programme, the issue of control features again and again. Were some of the tutor-led offers (whilst offered with enthusiasm and espoused usefulness) more concerned to satisfy individual egos rather than meet student needs? Were we more content, rather than process driven, than we realised? There was a living contradiction between what Freire (1972) describes as the 'banking model of education' in which tutors deposit knowledge into the heads of the students, which was taking place in the workshops under the guise of some tutor-led offers, and what he describes as 'the problem posing model' that we were working with in the action learning sets. Describing these two approaches to learning, Vince says:

> "The banking model relies on the individual authority of the teacher and the individual passivity of the student. To maintain this relationship, power must be excluded as an issue within learning. In the problem-posing model, experiential learning is not about an individualised experience. Rather, it concerns related experience, involving the individual, the group and the system. Power is thereby acknowledged as an ever-present and dynamic force, helping to define and redefine the experience of learning" (1996:116).

The contradictions did not stop there. A significant difference that emerged between the core tutors was the degree to which they would allow the students to write in the first person. From my perspective, I could not conceive of writing about personal learning using the third person, i.e. 'the author'. Neither did I accept the argument made by a colleague that "inappropriate use of the I would be regarded as un-academic". As far as I was concerned the third person convention in academic writing was the product of a belief in objectivity of rational scientific thinking that was out of place in the context of the MAPOD programme.

In this regard, I experienced a profound denial of my values in practice. These differences were reflected in the learning relationships the three core tutors had with their action learning sets. My students, for example, were particularly assertive in exercising their 'right' to write in the first person. In the face of this resistance, like hooks (1991:153), I took up a place in the 'margins' as a site of oppositional resistance to the felt denial of my values. I would suggest that the resistance of my colleague in disallowing students to write in the first person was a reflection of his anxiety and fears about whether he would be regarded as having let academic standards slip. He was concerned about how he was seen by those in power, which I suggest may help to explain why he could not conceive of challenging this convention. Although I was the programme leader, his academic status was known to be senior to mine and I began to wonder if his status reflected the 'reality' of power situated in the organisation. Whilst this issue had been the source of much anxiety amongst the tutors and students, it did not arise as an issue at the examination board and thus the ensuing controversy that had been anticipated did not happen.

Story 2: The Second Time Around

Several changes took place before the second cohort began. The two tutors who had not facilitated an action learning set withdrew and my colleague who

had been resistant to allowing students to write in the first person decided at this stage not to take on the work of another cohort. A new member of staff, experienced in counselling psychology, joined the team. It was agreed that she and the other action learning set tutor would work with the next cohort. As part of her induction, it was agreed that I would work with them during the first module and support her in facilitating the work of an action learning set for the first assignment, as she had no experience of facilitating this type of learning group.

We met as a new team sharing with our new colleague our experience of the first week with cohort one. This time we determined to do more with less and make the timetable more flexible and responsive to student needs and readiness to learn. Next we reflected on how we would work to create a safe space for learning (our primary goal for this learning event) and help students meet each other first as people, rather than as organisational positions and roles. Comments in student feedback from Cohort One such as "I can't talk to him, he's an oil executive" led us to find a way forward that would circumvent this fantasy that had served to create barriers to the formation of learning relationships between participants on the first cohort. Then we considered how we would begin the module. We tested out with each other several icebreakers but none seemed to appeal. As we grappled with our goal to create a safe space for learning and find a suitable icebreaker, I suggested that we might share this process with the students, inviting them to help us find a way forward. My colleagues were enthusiastic. One suggested that we should ask the students what they would do and how they would do it. With this initial preparation we began the first session of MAPOD 2 using Torbert's (1991) inquiry tool (frame, illustrate, advocate and inquire) to facilitate this process.

Day One

We began by asking the students if they would help us start the process in a way that would help to create a safe space. I suggested they might like to

discuss in groups of three and I asked each group if they might come up with an icebreaker that they personally felt comfortable with. As the tutor team were working together for the first time we also worked on this task. At the end of the exercise each group fed back their inquiry process and the icebreakers that were offered were scheduled to begin each morning during the block week.

The next session began with an exercise called "What's in a name?". This involved each person telling a story about how they got their name. Everyone had a story to tell, some were light-hearted and some heartbreaking. The exercise, though simple, had begun to lay the foundations for an emotional climate conducive to the creation of a safe space for learning.

At the evening review the tutor team wondered how we might build on this theme of story telling. Although we were taking the lead, facilitating the direction of learning, we were now explicitly working with the learning process with the intention of community building, as opposed to filling the space with content. We were beginning to learn how to address learning as a consultative process and this felt good.

Day Two

The following morning the tutor team shared our reflections with the students. I began by telling a story about my experience of writing my life story as part of my own inquiry at the University of Bath. I shared with the students the theoretical references I had used that legitimated the use of life story work in the academic context, and I shared with them some aspects of the process, such as the power of naming and speaking about undiscussibles on the page. I did not feel it was appropriate to tell them the details of my life story - that did not seem to be appropriate, but sharing the process did. Additionally, I shared with them my writing process, using Goldberg's (1986) exercise of 'writing down the

bones', in which you keep the pen on the page and continue writing out the words, without censorship and as they come for a period of 45 minutes. This process was offered as an alternative to the career life-planning workshop that we had run the previous year. This was taken up by several students, and those who felt they were not ready to work in this way worked together with our new colleague in a small group exploring their own issues and preferences for engaging with the work of individual - personal and professional learning.

Days Three to Five

Day Three consisted of a variety of offer sessions and continued dialogue in the large group. On Day Four, much attention was given to the formation of action learning sets and drawing up criteria that the groups would work with in the production of their assignments. Day Five was taken up with feedback and evaluation. This was very positive. There had been no anxiety of the kind that had attached itself to the programme in the previous year. All in all, it felt a very powerful beginning.

How do I understand my practice?

The second time around I was working with my experience and inquiring of it both with my colleagues and with our new cohort of students. I was clear about what the primary goal was for this learning event. My focus from the outset was to lay a solid foundation for the creation of a safe space for learning. In sharing my experience of writing my life story, I had experienced myself in the learning relationship as being authentic. I had demonstrated that I was prepared to trust the students in sharing and containing this story. This was, I suggest, significant in moving towards my primary goal. I shared my story not as a teacher talking to a group of students, but as one human being to another.

Working in this way, the learning experience felt more powerful than it had when working with the career life-planning exercise the year before.

As a tutor team we were more skilful in our reflective capacity and with the learning process than had been the case previously. We were, I suggest, using our reflective process in the service of strategic planning and action. We were testing out our ideas with each other and the students before we acted on them. This approach is one way, I suggest, of how reflection can become living inquiry. I had shared with my colleagues that the quality of reflection we were engaging in as a tutor team was of the kind that I had hoped we might have engaged in previously. Quite spontaneously, our new colleague replied: "We are the reflecting team". I had not used this phrase to her before.

Anderson and Goolishian (1992) suggest that the primary purpose of a reflecting team is to generate more ideas that can help the clients consider their position, by way of increasing the range of perspectives open to them. Furthermore, they suggest that the conversation of a reflecting team is a linguistic event in which new meanings are continually evolving toward the dissolution of problems.

Discussing the different use of reflecting teams, Reed (1993:216) describes the work of White (1991) who draws on Foucault to describe how systems of knowledge are inseparable from power relationships. White asks his reflecting team to explain their feedback in the context of their own experiences and intentions, the aim being to deconstruct their professional power in a way that their knowledge making becomes more transparent to their clients. This, I believe, is what we did. Though our primary objective was to facilitate the learning relationship at the human level, our strategy was also contributing to the construction of power relationships with our students rather than over them. This was a significant turn in our practice from the previous year.

Through a process of reflection and dialogue with colleagues, I had come to better understand my practice and find a way forward to improve it, a process resulting in a 'learning conversation'. Anderson and Swim describe this process:

> "Learning, then, is the generation of new knowledge through conversation. By conversation, we mean a generative conversation, a dialogue in which there is a 'talking with', a co-exploration that leads to the co-development of alternative views, new learning, and solutions"(1993:146).

Citing Habermas, they describe conversation and dialogue as a form of "communicative action". In using the reflecting team, learning can emerge as a collaborative conversation, highlighting the importance of dialogue in the creation of a learning community.

Story 3: Who Is Spartacus?

Introduction

I had a dream of creating a liberating and educative space for my students, a learning community working alongside a reflecting tutor team. At the end of the first week of the second cohort, one of the students shared a poem called *Ithaka* by Constantine Cavafy with the group. Let me take a moment to share with you the words of the first verse:

> "As you set out for Ithaka
> Hope your road is a long one,
> Full of adventure, full of discovery
> Laistrygonions, Cyclops,
> Angry Poseidon – don't be afraid of them:
> As long as you keep your thoughts raised high,
> As long as rare excitement fills your body
> Laistrygonions, Cyclops,
> Wild Poseidon – you won't encounter them
> Unless you bring them inside you soul,
> Unless your soul sets them up in front of you."

This poem was to become a touchstone for MAPOD 2 and for me. It was to prove a source of sustenance in what was to become an unexpected period of difficulty for me in this inquiry in respect of my relationships with the students and tutors working with this cohort. From the adventure and discovery experienced working with this cohort in the first week, I was to encounter Laistrygonions, Cyclops and Wild Poseidon in my subsequent learning relationship with them.

Let me explain. The plan was that I would withdraw from the core tutor role following the first module and work with the tutor team during the workshops as and when it was felt I could contribute.[12]

As programme leader, I saw my role as providing a link between the cohorts and the wider academy and, in particular, a link with the external examiner. When the work of the first cohort went to the examination board, I passed on the general feedback to the students and tutors in the second cohort, so that they might be aware of it in the context of writing their assignments. A comment made by the external examiner suggested that we needed to be cautious about revealing personal issues in our writing in case they became a source of voyeurism. MAPOD 2 reacted badly to this feedback, suggesting that it undermined the control they believed they should have over their learning. They further suggested that their assignments should be confidential and challenged the right of the examination board to review or pass judgment on their work. What I had not appreciated was how oppositional this group was becoming in relation to the conventions of the academy. They had defined themselves as 'us' and the academy as 'them'.

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[12] I was still working with my action learning set in Cohort 1, now in their second year of the course and recruiting for MAPOD 3.

Unbeknown to me, I too was cast as part of the opposition. I was told by my new colleague that I should only come to the workshops on a prearranged basis, and this was to fulfil my administrative function of course leadership, and she informed me that I was not welcome to pop in for lunch 'to see how things were going' as this was in her view disruptive to the group process, which she was now holding. Consequently, I was allocated an hour at the following block to fulfil administrative matters. The warmth and the sense of learning relationship that I had experienced with this group during their first week had evaporated. The culture that this group had evolved was now firmly closed to outsiders, unless invited 'in' by the group. I now experienced myself as an unwelcome outsider. After this reception I did not go back. Things came to a head in the second year.

The critical incident

A portfolio of work had been completed during the 'options' module and, on behalf of the students, the tutors proposed to submit it to the external examiner. The portfolio represented a collective effort. However, the expectation based on the work submitted by the previous cohort was that the students would provide individual reflective pieces of work. The contributions in the MAPOD 2 portfolio were anonymous. The tutors argued that the collective effort was in keeping with the learning experience of the group, whereas I believed that anonymity would be problematic and lead to difficulties at the examination board. I anticipated that the external examiners would be unhappy if it could not be shown that each student in the cohort had equally contributed to the work in this portfolio. Additionally, the portfolio was handwritten, making it difficult to read and follow. I pointed this out to the tutors.

Since this was a practical module and the examiner had not asked to see the reflective accounts of the students in the previous cohort, I advised my

colleagues against sending her the portfolio and suggested that instead they give her an account of what they had done during the residential workshop. But the tutors decided to ignore my advice and sent it anyway.

The decision to present the portfolio anonymously had been taken by the students to symbolise and represent their union as a true 'learning community'. The tutors understood this and supported their decision. They appeared keen to 'show off' their achievements to the external examiner. They could not see that others might not appreciate it in the way they did.

In the event, the external examiner asked the question that I anticipated: "Will the university allow you to break the rules like this?". Had they prepared themselves for this perspective they might have been able to articulate their case, and furthermore they might have questioned the interpretation of the rules.

As course leader, I experienced this moment in the examination board as nothing short of an own goal. I was annoyed with the tutors and it showed. I felt that they had behaved irresponsibly, putting the external examiner in a difficult and contentious position, with potentially dire consequences for the programme as a whole. They, on the other hand, were furious with me for not defending them, and for challenging their integrity when they felt they were acting in the 'developmental' interests of 'the learning community'.

Following this public debacle, we were called to account. As course leader, I received communication from the chair of the examination board that a post-mortem would be held. I then wrote to my colleagues in my role as course leader, calling them to account for themselves, posing the following questions:

1. What authority did you exercise to ensure that the assessment requirements for the module were met?
2. Did you make clear to the students what the expectations/requirements for assessment were, as per the LUN.[13]
3. What role did the tutors play in the assessment of this work?
4. What form did the assessment take and where is the evidence for this?
5. What criteria were used to assess this work?
6. What was the tutor role in assessing it and using it in the assessment process?

In their response, they emphasised that the students had sought to show how individual and organisational learning had become one. Cautioning me on any unravelling, I was asked by one of my colleagues:

> "…Do you remember the film 'Spartacus' when the slaves were asked to reveal their leader and each says 'I am Spartacus' – that's what I feel the Options Module portfolio was trying to convey" (Memo of 24 June 1998).

This colleague sets out a re-evaluation of his relationship with 'me, us and them, to him', in which he states his intention to withdraw from the core tutor team. He says that he is "deeply hurt" by my comments and takes the inference that he may have brought the course and group into disrepute personally. In his memo, he makes a point of shifting his response to me - from Mary the colleague, to Mary the programme leader. He further suggests that part of his rationale is fuelled by a tension between the 'academic' and the 'developmental', quoting at length from the portfolio in support of this assertion, concluding with the following quotation from one of the students:

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[13] LUNs are 'learning unit narratives' - a statement of the teaching, learning and assessment strategy for the module.

> "Of interest is the ongoing tension between MA (POD) and the established academic perspective. MA (POD) is on the edge of learning, providing a real platform from which to spring into the future. The question, I believe, is about how MA (POD) can remain on the edge, in order to facilitate the challenge of learning while also bringing the benefits of the approach of the other Masters programmes which currently offer greater predictability, tighter framework and specific outcomes without the energy, confidence, excitement to make change happen for the organisations of the future. To do this without losing the vibrancy and opportunities that MA (POD) offers is the challenge for the university and academia generally" (personal communication from MAPOD student, 1998).

In setting out his case he says:

> "I have tried to make transparent dilemmas that I have which I also see/reflected amongst students [names supplied]. I have written out this account to try and put on the record why I believe the portfolio that resulted from this options module was a legitimate expression of the group's level of learning at the end of POD which was 'acknowledged' and recognised by us all. If you look at each assignment you will see emerging from individual pieces of works the same strands as apparent in the community weave. 'Weaving' has been a key symbol for POD2 – one of the group describes what they have achieved 'as a rich web of interconnectivity'. If you choose to unravel the web, so be it" (Memo of 24 June 1998).

How do I Understand my Practice?

In my M.Phil. transfer paper,[14] as I reflected on this event, I noted that I experienced myself for the first time as a 'living contradiction' on the MAPOD programme. On the one hand, I wanted to create a learning community, and on the other I had been unable to sustain the kind of learning relationships necessary to keep a dialogue going between my colleagues, the students and the academy. Experiencing myself in this way led me to reflect more deeply on this issue. In my M.Phil. transfer paper I described how I used this memo from my colleague to further my inquiry, composing a letter to him in my journal as

[14] Written in September 2000. See Hartog (2000b).

though it were a reply, in order that I could reflect and better understand what had happened in our relationship.

My reflective process

I describe how "I feel his hurt and acknowledge that he feels deeply let down by me" and I ask myself "Why do things get in a muddle?". Could one of the problems have been that I was too busy being the manager in my learning relationships with these colleagues, rather than inquiring into my practice and our learning relationship? Looking back at my journal entry of 25 June 1998, I note that I resolve to construct my reply with compassion and write:

> "I would hope that I can show you that even though I am not supporting you on this one, I am not standing against you either! I would hope to show you that I have consistently tried to stand by you (not by-stand, although, clearly you think I was by-standing when I didn't stop you sending the portfolio to the external) and I continue to do so, even though it may feel very uncomfortable for you and difficult for you to see at the moment".

I tried to imagine the difficulty he may have experienced getting the students to listen to any request to respond to the requirements of the academy, and I imagine that under such pressure a compromise in the form of the collective portfolio was reached. I write:

> "Your reference to Spartacus suggests that you really do believe that the academy seeks to enslave them [the students, as learners] and with that in mind I can see how you could only support them and as the 'dutiful parent' taking steps to protect your 'offspring' [the students had likened their group to the Walton's a television family, where the two tutors were the 'parents' and I was cast as 'the grandmother']. I want to acknowledge your loyalty to this group, which remains steadfast in the face of external threats".

By contrast I imagined that I was perceived to be disloyal both to my colleague and the student group. In the following pages of my journal I grappled with the

question “Why have the students set themselves up in opposition to the academy?”. Could it not have been possible to come up with a creative solution that satisfied the needs of ‘them’ (the academy) and ‘us’ (the MAPOD 2-group)?

I am particularly puzzled by their oppositional stance that infers an ‘either/or’ relationship, since I had introduced the concept of systemic thinking to this group and I knew they were familiar with the use of the ‘both and’ position.

Feeling irritated by the pluralistic position that has been adopted, my empathy wanes and I slip back into my role as manager and adopt the voice of the ‘critical parent’, ticking them off for placing themselves and the students at risk and in so doing, failing in their responsibilities to the academy. I say that I am trying to hold my neutrality - trying to understand what has happened and to stand by them in the face of a backlash, but I claim a responsibility to other stakeholders, particularly the MAPOD 3 students who had just begun and future cohorts, as well as a responsibility to take on board the what the external examiner had said.

What is going on here?

This reflective inquiry is difficult as I experience myself in different roles, speaking first as colleague then as a manager. The different nature of these relationships and the power in the latter make the inquiry process more complex.

Vince and Martin (1993) argue that it is relevant to see social power relations as ‘political’ at both the individual and institutional level. They point out that people are positioned unequally in their relationships and that the relationship between power and process constantly shapes the agendas and practice of learning groups. Furthermore, they point out that if these power relationships

are not acknowledged, they are often 'acted out' in the form of fear, hatred and contempt. I wondered if the injunction to keep me on the outside of MAPOD 2 had more to do with the relationship between my new colleague and the students in terms of her needs and anxiety concerning the establishment of her authority and expertise than the management of process *per se*. By contrast, it was suggested that I had acted not to defend them precisely because I was jealous of their success with this cohort.

I wondered too if the story which I had created of MAPOD as an alternative site for learning had taken on a life of its own? Had the tutors gone 'native' as they worked with this cohort, feeding the message of opposition and challenge to the academy back to me? It certainly seemed possible.

If the portfolio and the subsequent 'ballyhoo' that followed was fuelled by an underlying cycle of emotions and anxieties around these issues, was this anxiety being denied and displaced as a defensive routine presented as 'fight' or form of resistance to the academy? Whilst the tutors had facilitated the students to speak with one voice, was there another level at which their learning relationship fostered a cycle of emotions that discouraged learning? In an effort to celebrate their achievements and challenge the conventions of the academy in the presentation of an anonymous portfolio, were they not in danger of creating an unnecessary risk to the very autonomy that they craved?

At the post-mortem, the discourse between the MAPOD tutors was adversarial. It was easier to blame one-another for the fallout rather than listen. I, no more than anyone else, seemed able to practice what I preach. The group professor chairing this meeting said "It is clear that valuable creative work is going on in the student group but not in the tutor group". I sensed that I had denied my educational values in practice and I knew myself as 'a living contradiction' (Whitehead, 1993).

Finding a way forward

The fallout from this critical incident left me feeling at an all time low. This forced me to confront the question: "How do I live my values more fully in my practice?"

The final verse of the poem, *Ithaka*, reinforces the importance of 'the journey', giving me the courage and emotional succour to pick myself up by my bootstraps and continue the journey of my inquiry.

> "Keep Ithaka always in your mind.
> Arriving there is what you are destined for.
> But don't hurry the journey at all.
> Better if it lasts for years,
> So you are old by the time you reach the island,
> Wealthy with all you've gained on the way,
> Not expecting Ithaka to make you rich.
> Ithaka gave you the marvellous journey.
> Without her you wouldn't have set out
> She has nothing left to give you now.
>
> And if you find her poor, Ithaka won't have fooled you.
> Wise as you will have become, so full of experience,
> You'll have understood by then what these Ithakans mean."
>
> Constantine Cavafy

So distraught was I at failing to live my values in my practice, I comforted myself with the thought that "as long as I could hold my thoughts high" I could resolve my failings as a 'living contradiction'. I was becoming full of experience, though I felt far from being wise. As the poem suggests, it is better if the journey lasts for years. I realised that my inquiry as an educational practitioner had barely begun. In my M.Phil. transfer paper, I wrote that my belief in the journey would make me wise and provide me with a form of comfort at this time of intense emotional perturbation in my inquiry.

The challenge

As I tried to come to terms with the implications of placing my 'I' at the centre of my inquiry, I had to grapple with my instinct to respond to dilemmas in a classic Catholic manner. It was easy to move into the *mia culpa* mode, beat my breast and take on blame as well as responsibility when I experienced contradictions between my espoused values and practice. This instinctive guilt-ridden approach is assuaged by the confessional nature of writing one's 'I' into accounts of my inquiry. In reflecting on my own process, I had to take a more critical eye to my own assessment and try to tease out more carefully what I could reasonably expect to address and improve, and what I could not change or influence. Understanding the underlying process of anxiety was an important part of this process and coming to terms with the limitations of my own and my colleagues' capacity to be reflective in the midst of our own process was another.

The displacement of anxiety between the tutors was similar to the 'parallel process' (Kaberry, 2000) taking place between the MAPOD 2 tutors and the student group. As Kaberry points out, "This is likely to concern issues which involve conflict and anxiety and as such remains unconscious" (2000:58).

The question "who manages your practice?" was put to me by both students from my first action learning set and my new colleague, whose background was in counselling psychology. So would a supervisory reflective relationship of this kind have been a useful aid to my practice?

In the field of counselling and psychotherapy, this kind of reflective practice is managed by supervision, by an expert and experienced fellow professional. Clinical supervision, as it is known, is not common to the field of management education. Though it is now a compulsory part of the British Association for

Counselling's *Code of Ethics for Practice* and seen as good practice for the ongoing development of the skills, awareness and knowledge of practitioners, there is, according to Feltham (2000), no hard evidence to attest to its efficacy in making a difference to the experience and work of the client (who is after all, always present in the centre of the supervisory relationship). This is despite the potential benefits that supervision may offer the professional practitioner in respect of off-loading anxiety and stress. Supervision is intended to address the professional development of the practitioner, not his or her inner affective world.

Though supervision, along with personal therapy, is standard practice for those counselling practitioners working from a psychoanalytic perspective, there is according to Feltham (ibid.) a conflict between an ethic based on faith and one based on empiricism. In the field of systemic family therapy (in which I had some training), personal therapy is not conditional. Rather the process of this approach is itself highly reflexive and the role of 'the reflecting team' that I introduced to MAPOD has the specific task of generating a range of perspectives and insights to facilitate the understanding of both the practitioner and the client. The culture in higher education would, I suggest, not be receptive to the model of supervision unless it were disassociated from personal therapy; whereas I believe it would be more receptive to the systemic approach, which has been developed and employed to facilitate the organisational and consulting contexts, and the reason why I promoted this approach on the MAPOD programme. Our failure to sustain this reflective practice in the tutor team was I believe partly responsible for why things got in such a muddle in the case of MAPOD 2.

My zone of attention

The goals of student autonomy in learning and community building were not questioned at this stage in my inquiry. The latter appeared to be a realistic goal

endorsed by students at the recruitment stage and forged in the initial learning contracts that were formed in the sets. Community building was assumed to be a good thing. What I had discovered from reflecting on my experience with the first cohort and my experience of working with the tutor teams on both cohorts was that community building was complex. It was easy to be fooled into celebrating a superficial community. True community had to be worked at.

Scott Peck (1987:86) offers a four-stage model of community building. The first stage he calls 'psuedo community' and likens the relationships in such a community to a cocktail party. This resonates with the tutor team relationships on MAPOD 1, where we frequently met over lunch and there was initially a lot of bonhomie. The second stage he calls 'chaos'. He argues that it is human nature to want community and that we are driven by our frustrations with the superficial relationships of the cocktail party to search for more meaningful relationships with others. However, in making this move we are unprepared for the differences we discover and finding them difficult to tolerate we lurch into chaos. Because working with the pain involved at this stage is almost unbearable, Scott Peck suggests that most organisations revert back to the cocktail party when the going gets tough. This resonates with my experience of the tutor teams in both cohorts. The third stage toward community building is 'emptiness'. Here, individuals must be willing to put aside their assumptions, to notice and hold them in suspense. It is a place for dialogue, both with others and with the self. It may involve letting go of your position or moving beyond it. 'Community' is the fourth and final stage of Scott Pecks's model.

In the early days of MAPOD, the tutor teams were unable to model the practice of community building as we imagined we would, except for a brief moment when we began MAPOD 2. Whilst the cohesiveness of the MAPOD 2 cohort of tutors and students would suggest that they were able to move through these

stages more effectively to create a powerful learning community, this was insular and unreflective, resulting in separating the wider academic community.

Conclusions

Learning to place my 'I' at the centre of my inquiry in the context of educational action research has proved to be the principal vehicle that has helped me learn how to reflect on my practice during the early days of MAPOD, without which I would not have been able to recognise myself as a living contradiction.

This approach to the inquiry and development of my practice has been enhanced by the production of written accounts which, as Lomax (1999) points out, facilitate a 'double dialectic of meaning making', enabling me in the first instance to create meaning for myself, and secondly to share and test out my understanding in the public domain with an audience of critical friends.

As I develop the skills of a reflective practitioner, I have acknowledged in conference papers and in Hartog (2002)[15] my continuing process of development, and my awareness of the importance of ego maturity in developing my capacity to be less ego defensive in the management and containment of my own anxiety. This being key to reflection and the inquiry process.

In this chapter, I have provided an account of my practice during the early years of MAPOD between 1995 and 1998, reviewing my inquiry during the life of the first two MAPOD cohorts. This chapter indicates the challenges I faced in learning to place my 'I' at the centre of inquiry, and through a process of accounting has sought to unravel my reflective process during this period as I

[15] In the article "Becoming a reflective practitioner: a continuing professional development strategy through humanistic action research".

ask questions of the kind “How do I understand my practice?” and make sense of it by asking “what is going on here?”. I have sought to answer these questions by analysing the stories and critical incidents contained therein, benchmarking them against the educational values and goals espoused for MAPOD. I have also drawn on relevant literature to illuminate my understanding of these events in my inquiry.

CHAPTER SEVEN: WORKING WITH MARGARET: HOW DOES MY 'LIVING THEORY' CONSTITUTE A DISCIPLINE OF EDUCATIONAL ACTION RESEARCH?

Introduction

In this chapter I want to share with you my storied account of 'Working with Margaret', a student on MAPOD Cohort 4. This chapter draws on my inquiry as I reflect on the nature and development of my teaching and learning relationship with Margaret during the period from 1998 to 2001 when Margaret graduated. This phase of my inquiry marks a shift in my attention from the general to the particular. That is, from the general focus of how to create a learning environment that is supportive of the goals of the programme to the creation of a safe space for learning and the creation of a loving and life affirming relationship with a particular student.

I present three short stories of working with Margaret, based around three assignments where I worked with Margaret as the tutor facilitator of the action learning set that Margaret was in. Each of the three assignments present distinct spirals in a cycle of action research in which I plan to facilitate my students' learning. The structure of the course enables me to systematically review, reflect and evaluate my practice in line with my espoused professional values and the goals of the programme. This provides for a continuous and iterative process of hypothesising and sense making, facilitating answers to the questions of "What is going on here?" and "How can I improve my practice?".

One aim of this account is to provide an example of what it has meant for me to work with a student in mid-life transition. In particular, I aim to throw light on the emergent process of a teaching and learning relationship that is concerned with facilitating the process of personal development, as well as the more

traditional academic-supervisory function of professional and organisational research. It charts the emergent history of my inquiry in the learning relationship as I seek to respond to this student's learning and development needs, as she reveals and pursues her quest for the construction of self-identity. Through my descriptions and explanations, I aim to show what it means for a tutor to take the meaning of a life seriously, and what it means to be guided by life issues in the conduct of facilitation of the student's development process.

In constructing this account my aim is to show how my 'living theory' constitutes a discipline of educational action research. The idea of a living theory (Whitehead, 1989) begins with questions such as "How do I improve my practice?". It is principally a reflective question that frames the conduct of my practice, enabling me to test out whether and to what extent I am living out my values in practice. I refer to values such as a claim to care for my students, a respect for the integrity of their tacit knowing, placing value on the experience they bring, and a belief in the emancipatory purpose of the educational endeavour.

Furthermore, I experience myself as a living contradiction "in those moments when I am conscious of holding certain values, whilst at the same time denying them in my practice" (Whitehead, 1999:78). In confronting the truth of my experience, I am both perturbed and motivated to find a way forward to better meet and respond to the needs of my student and to bridge the gap between my values as espoused and lived. My descriptions and explanations are an attempt to capture the dialectical nature of reality as lived and experienced in this teaching and learning relationship. As a self-study of my own practice, I am accepting that my 'I' is both subject and object of this inquiry, and that such an account, though specific to the teaching and learning relationship with one

student, can offer resonance and insight to others interested in the formation of a teaching and learning relationship guided by living theory.

The account is substantial as it relies on 'thick description' of the learning relationship over a two-year period, described as one which "gives the context of an experience, states the intentions and meanings that organised the experience, and reveals the experience as a process" (Denzin, 1994:505). Furthermore, he suggests that "out of this process arises a text's claims for truth". This form of accounting aims to provide descriptions and explanations that are rich in detail and that speak for themselves. However, it should be noted that embodied knowledge cannot be so easily captured in words; their representation as narrative account, no matter how detailed and rich, can never quite capture all the truth of experiencing. It is what Lather (1994) coined 'ironic validity'.

Therefore, in addition to my reflections on these three occasions of working with Margaret, I will draw on sources of data to illuminate my account. This will include Margaret's assignments and dissertation, and the feedback given by me. I will also draw on an audiotape of the second assignment, and two videotapes taken during the dissertation period. An extract from one of these videotapes is contained in a CD-R file,[16] offering an image-based representation of a moment in the teaching and learning relationship.

In order to facilitate the reading of this account, following the introduction and background, it is framed in three sections: 'Assignment One', 'Assignment Two' and 'Dissertation', which serve to foreground and differentiate the task context of the teaching and learning relationship. This is followed by a return to the question that frames this chapter: "How does my living theory constitute a

[16] See CD-R attached to back board of this thesis binding.

discipline of educational action research?" This is followed by a discussion that aims to answer this question and further explain the nature of my living theory and my engagement with propositional theories (that are internalised) and which together inform and guide my teaching and learning relationship.

Background to Working with Margaret and the MAPOD Context

Margaret was a student on the MAPOD programme and a member of the fourth cohort (MAPOD 4). The MAPOD programme was designed for experienced practitioners working with people and organisations in a learning and development context. Margaret joined the programme as a mature student, a women in her fifties with a life-time of experience and, as a specialist in the field of technical systems support, working within health care services. Like many mature and experienced practitioners attracted to the MAPOD course, Margaret saw herself moving into a self-employed consulting role and viewed the programme as a vehicle in support of that goal. Whilst Margaret saw her area of expertise giving her a particular foothold into organisation consulting, she was also concerned not just to be seen as "the computer lady" (her words). Margaret saw herself as a 'people person', concerned with supporting and improving health care, and she hoped that MAPOD with its emphasis on personal and organisational development might give her a more holistic perspective and legitimacy as a development practitioner and thus widen the scope of her professional identity. For the majority of the MAPOD programme (a part-time two year course), Margaret worked on average three days a week on a project style contract with a major London hospital, in support of clinical audits and excellence with a variety of clinical practitioners and health care teams.

During the programme I had the opportunity to work with Margaret on three occasions in the context of action learning sets. Action learning was one of the

main learning strategies employed on MAPOD to facilitate self-directed learning. As such, the students worked upon individual projects on issues of their choice that they deemed relevant to their professional and working lives within the context and framework of a broad assignment area. They worked with and alongside others in small groups known as action learning sets, the aim of the set being to provide each person with support and challenge in the production of a coherent and critical account. Each set was facilitated by a tutor and met on average three times to plan, work through and assess the assignment(s). The MAPOD programme included a process of self, peer and tutor assessment, which we believed to be an important and enriching extension of the learning process itself, supporting values for the development of 'autonomous learners' whose learning was facilitated by engagement with 'meaningful' assignments. These were often specifically through the process of critical reflection on action, a sense of responsibility for the learning of self and others through the action learning process, through which learning was situated as a social process. With autonomous learners, we were concerned to support the development of people who could think for themselves. For example, people who could act with conviction and integrity, and were capable of constructing and taking a critical stance, where rhetoric and reality of practice belied truth to power. We believed that the MAPOD process would help students clarify and take up a 'position' guided by a sense of 'purpose' and in relation to their practice, which we saw culminating in the final dissertation.

We also believed that that the focus of the programme needed to incorporate both the personal and the organisational 'context'. In short, we espoused the belief that unless you engaged in development and inquiry as a personal process, you would be less equipped to appreciate and support the learning of others and/or the processes of organisational learning. Thus, the ability to explore one's own learning process and history, and develop a critique of that

experience was, we believed, essential to facilitate healthy and learningful practice interventions.

The first two occasions when I worked with Margaret were at the start of MAPOD 4, where Margaret worked on producing first an individual learning history assignment, and secondly an action research account. The third opportunity came in the second year of the programme, when Margaret opted to work with others in the action learning set that I would facilitate for the production of the dissertation. By this stage I was familiar with Margaret's learning journey, insofar as she had explored issues of voice and subjective knowledge through her own learning history. Subsequently, with the participation of her action learning set, Margaret had initiated and facilitated a collaborative enquiry that sought to reveal issues of authority and power in academic relations.

I was less familiar with what she had been engaged with in her other assignments, though I had some contact with her during the residential block which preceded the production of the 'change agent' assignment, where she had contributed to a workshop on facilitation and drawing on the work of Roger Harrison. I was pleased that Margaret chose to join my action learning set for the dissertation, as I had experienced her as a committed and challenging student. Indeed, this set had formed around a stated desire to engage in a 'deep' learning journey. Biggs (1989) identifies three learning strategies that a student can take, the first a surface strategy, characterised by the strategy of cramming to pass an exam or test, thus committing to short-term memory the essential facts needed to pass which quickly evaporate after they have been regurgitated in the exam; the second, a strategic strategy, where the student identifies what has to be done to get a good enough pass; and the third, a deep learning strategy which engages the student with meaningful learning experiences, which become deeply internalised in the process.

The course began late in the autumn term and many students were keen to graduate in the July of the second year, thus taking approximately eighteen months to complete the programme. The group that formed my action learning set for the dissertation specifically wanted to have the benefit of the full two years (in common with other MUBS programmes). They felt that by doing so they would purposefully engage in a deep learning process as opposed to a more strategic one. The set described itself as being 'in for the long haul'.

Although some members of the set had worked together before, not all had, and I had worked with some individuals though not everyone. With the exception of two younger practitioners who were at the peak of their early careers and who enjoyed the common experience of getting married for the first time at the end of the first year, the four other set members were coming towards the end of their primary careers, and were variously single, divorced, widowed or with a second partner, and in mid-life transition.

Of the six members of the dissertation set, four completed their dissertations in November 2000, the fifth set member completed in January 2001 and Margaret completed in March of the same year. During the dissertation period Margaret faced bereavement with the loss of her mother and then shortly after, her father. This was to bring to the surface life issues that influenced both the content and process of Margaret's dissertation.

Assignment One

The framework for the first assignment is the theme of individual learning and support strategies. Within this module students often review aspects of their learning history, consider how they learn best, and reflect on their understanding of themselves as learners. Such learning reviews can be situated

in the context of formal educational experiences, work or professional life, or contained within autobiographical and life history narratives.

In her assignment dated February 1999, Margaret introduces the reader to her life course, drawing on experiences of the previous year, both professional and personal. Margaret frames this with the title "Weaving my past into the future", doing this by 'telling a story' of the past year and by charting a life-line of her perceived well-being, in which she notes the highs and lows of the year, guided by events and her gut reactions.

In her introduction, she tells us that she moved into the corporate strategy arena five years ago as an Information Manager, working for an organisation that was fighting for survival, and that by the third year she had begun to physically collapse, was suffering from chronic insomnia, repeated laryngitis, sinusitis and hormone fluctuation. We learn that this period culminates with a broken ankle when she decides to take six weeks unpaid leave to recuperate and go the U.S. for the birth of her grandson.[17] She states three purposes in writing the paper. The first is "to find my own voice"; the second to "use my knowledge to make a difference to other people"; and the third "to share understanding and insights with others".

We learn that whilst Margaret is away, the letter for outsourcing her department is signed, and on her return Margaret reduces her working hours to three days a week, leaving her with two days which she uses initially to recuperate and achieve physical well-being through attending exercise classes, and for a planned career change of which MAPOD is a part. She states:

> "At the outset my objective seemed clear: I was to use the time to carry out the career change which I had been

[17] Margaret is from Virginia in the U.S. and has lived in England for the past eleven years.

> muttering about for years, a move into working freelance with a focus on organisational change rather than merely getting people to use computer systems".

For Margaret this is a significant life change, as she says "For 25 years I had been driven by the tight structure of commuting and workplace." This "goal of professional change" as described by Margaret, is accompanied by the decision to purchase a larger house, which she describes as "the first move" with her (second) husband, big enough to accommodate grandchildren and provide study space.

Margaret describes these life changes as not without difficulty. Her house move experienced as a source of "constant anxiety" and the workplace she describes as "tense". In the light of the changes taking place there, she says "I hated feeling unwanted and helpless, not in control of my own path". She describes her colleagues as "beleaguered", a number of whom were faced with redundancy. "I felt upset and angry along with the whole department at the crude macho antics of the new management and the betrayal of past promises", and she adds "What a welcome from a new employer". Both of these events are described as "losses". Namely, a loss of colleagues whom Margaret describes as "comrades" coupled with a felt sense of "homesickness" for her old home. Additionally, Margaret describes a third loss, one of an opportunity to study at Surrey University, where she experiences a rejection to her application for their Change Agent programme, a rejection based on their judgment that "she was insufficiently developed for the rigours of their course".

Though clearly painful, this academic rejection causes Margaret to think about what personal development might mean for her. She says:

> "The challenges raised in those 45 minutes eventually caused me to decide to cease being a dilettante at personal development, to dig into real development and self change, and to move myself onto an upward spiral instead of an endless loop."

It is at this point that Margaret seeks voluntary redundancy and accepts the MAPOD course offer. Evaluating these changes as she writes her first assignment, Margaret says:

> "with the new year there is a sense of fruition, of balance. I dare not say it aloud for fear it would become undone; life is no longer a nightmare; it is going to be okay. Life is becoming inner directed rather than outer judged."

In her assignment she describes attending a "Shamanism" weekend, where she learns about "the medicine wheel", and tells us that she has taken up Tai Chi in order to improve her well-being. We also get a first inkling that Margaret is interested in Celtic rituals, as she mentions celebrating the summer solstice, one of several practices which she names as "spiritual" and which feature later on in her dissertation process. Margaret also describes her experience of the first MAPOD block, contrasting it to the Shamanism weekend.

> "It too was an emotional group experience. I experienced 'ordinary' British professionals (not strange New Agers) struggling to talk and listen in a real way. This was more than an academic programme."

Margaret then seeks to "reflect back: drawing out lessons and theories" from her experience. She asks "what do I know?" and tells us that she is "wrestling with theory in general, asking 'what is it?' and 'how can it serve me, not me serve it?'" The following paragraphs are illuminating, as they provide clues to Margaret's way of knowing and sense of self and mind, at that point in time.

> "At this stage of my life at this point in my professional experience, it feels very important to articulate my own conceptual understanding and to construct my own theories. I need to establish for myself an 'inside-out' knowledge, a guidance from my own internal concepts and authority. Often this manifests itself as crude rejection of any authority other than myself: I can no longer abide being told what to think and do - a deep midlife rebellion.

> The writings of others, especially those presented as authorities, are a particular dilemma for me now. I was a good student, an academic obedient, taking authorities at face value and applying theories literally. During the past five years, I have swung to the opposite extreme of rejecting all received wisdom and adamantly striving to create my own".

Margaret contrasts the processes' growth, adaptation, change and development, and what surface and deep learning mean to her citing external practices and internal insights, such as knowing "how the world works" and "how I work", and identifying her own framework of knowing as:

- internal and external frames of reference;
- recurring cycles or loops; and
- cycles and spirals.

Furthermore, she identifies as important to her: "self direction, purposes, values and integrity, the spiritual, action and reflection, care of self and energy flow [of which she says] …my critical resource now is energy not time". From these characteristics, Margaret identifies how she learns best, citing with examples the processes of self-direction, action and struggle, social learning, and in particular, support, reflection and challenge. She further acknowledges the importance of her own state of mind for learning, especially the effect of negative spirals caused by feeling threatened or vulnerable.

Having established her 'inside out' knowing, Margaret offers a brief sketch of the ideas of others that resonate with her, including Belenky *et al*., Rogers, Scott Peck and Clarkson whose four stage model of moving from "conscious incompetence to conscious competence" she cites as reflective of the personal development process which she has begun by writing this first paper. She concludes by saying:

> "The goal is not to become a good learner, nor, indeed to become a good changer. The goal is to live an effective life. But in order to do that one needs to change, and in order to change one needs to be a good learner. That is the reason for learning about learning."

At the end of her assignment, Margaret cites a Buddhist aphorism: "You have come here to find what you already have".

How Do I Respond? (February 1999)

As I engage with Margaret as a reader of her paper, I am drawn into her metaphorical frame of weaving past and present. I am sensitive to the language she chooses and the meanings that words convey, such as her use of the word "beleaguered" to describe the managers who ran the department for four years, managers she described as "comrades". I note my response by marking the lines in the margins and writing words of acknowledgement and questions where her comments have stirred my curiosity, so that I will remember to ask her about these things in the action learning set meeting. The word 'more' appears against several points where they could be expanded and developed. Through her words, I am stepping into her shoes to get a sense of the context of her experience. I note that I am curious to know more about what 'spirituality' means for her, and wonder how Shamanism and Tai Chi play a part. I wonder too, what she thinks is going on in the MAPOD programme, which she described as "more than an academic programme" and I reflect on the emotionality of listening and talking that her words convey. I am also mindful of Harrison's (1995:33) work and the concepts of the 'castle'[18] and 'battlefield'.[19] Harrison believed that both processes (not to be confused with places) were needed for learning. I had been working with these ideas on MAPOD, believing

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[18] The castle is the experience of having allies, support and where one might hold on to one's defences and even resist change.

[19] Where people may disagree, where one's expectations are disconfirmed and where authority figures may behave in unpredictable ways.

that the MAPOD community might provide a safe haven for the restoration of self, away from the organisational battleground which seems to be characteristic of organisational change, mergers, acquisitions and redundancies.

During the first block week I introduced to the MAPOD participants the story of the 'Fifth Province' (Stroier, 1993:314). In Irish mythology, the Fifth Province was where ancient kings and chieftains came to meet every other year to talk and find a way forward to hold the peace for the coming years. The rule of engagement was that before they could enter the Fifth Province they must take off their weapons and leave them outside. Only when the gathering was over could they put back on their defensive shields to return to their own lands. This was the ideal space I believed we could create in the MAPOD community, with participants putting their 'armour' back on to return to their workplaces.

I write down Roger Harrison's name in the margin, as a point of reference to pass on to Margaret. Similarly, in response to her rich use of metaphor closely associated with the cycle of the seasons, I scribble "Heron (1992:20)" to remind me to show her his version of the learning hierarchy, where 'imaginal knowing' expresses the tacit knowing of experience through imagery, before the language of conceptual knowing, traditionally associated with academic discourse. I am particularly struck by her questions of knowing, her expressed search for her own emergent theory of learning. The phrases "At this stage in my life" and "I can no longer abide being told what to think and do", and her comments of "being a good student" and "academic obedient" resonate, ringing familiar bells, and lead me to write in the margins "we need to talk about this". Additionally, I write "Belenky *et al*. (1986)", whose work Margaret refers to briefly, and "balance" meaning to suggest that she might aim for a balance in her writing between the subjectivity or experience of one's own knowing and the work of others.

These points punctuate and shape my initial feedback, where I thank her for sharing her story and say "I was drawn into your struggle and felt your pain, full of resonance and connected knowing." I acknowledge her analysis of "finding voice" and the struggle against authority, yet encourage her to engage with and make more use of Belenky *et al.*'s work, suggesting that she may also be interested to look at Heron and Harrison, and provide her with these references. I am concerned to phrase my feedback with care and to this end I write:

> "Appreciating why you have been reluctant to engage with the theories of others, I would now encourage you to engage with and even embrace a number of authors [you have identified] and contrast and critique their work in relation to you own 'living theory' and model of learning".

In framing my feedback in this way, I am not trying to lead Margaret anywhere she herself has not already gone, albeit in some cases somewhat tentatively.

I presented my feedback in the context of the action learning process, where each set member gets an hour to present their paper and personal assessment, and invite feedback and discussion. My feedback seemed to be well received. However, just as we were about to break for coffee, I was asked to give my opinion on the rank order of merit of the various papers presented by the set members. I ranked Margaret's paper behind that of another student, who I suggested had achieved a better balance of theory (scholarship) and practice (experientially based learning). Though intended to be helpful (educative) and explicit about the way I was applying criteria in respect of constructing an academic judgment, I realised that I had unwittingly introduced an element of competition with this comparative rank ordering, which triggered for Margaret and another mature student a mixture of anger and anxiety about the judgments of academia and what gets valued, in relation to their lived experience.

Rather than creating an alternative site for learning on the MAPOD as I have previously espoused, in that moment I reinforced the learning conventions of the academic system, which tend to promote the 'other' world of academic judgment and denies the authenticity of learning as perceived by Margaret to be 'good enough' and personally significant. I experienced myself, not for the first time, as a 'living contradiction' (Whitehead, 1999).

The anxiety of the set members was directed at the student whose work I suggested had got the right balance. By comparison, she was the youngest in the set, having completed her first degree in recent years. This suggested her peers gave her an edge in terms of knowing what was expected. In attempting to recover the situation and heal the learning dynamics-relationships within the set, I was trying to craft a way forward. However, it was not something I was able to do in an instant - the damage had been done and it would take a greater effort than the apology I was able to muster at that time to remedy the damage done in this learning relationship. It was, however, a lesson in learning to bite my tongue and to think before I speak. To ask myself when confronted with such questions as "Which assignment is the best?" and "What is the purpose and whose interests will it serve?". Moreover, it was a lesson in the inequality (or rather enormity) of power held by tutors and those regarded as academic authority figures.

Selvini (1980) suggests that the systemic practitioner has to develop a neutrality of practice, such that she is aligned to everyone and no-one at the same time. The systemic process was first developed as part of the systemic Milan approach to family therapy, now applied more generally to a systemic approach to people and organisations. Along with the principles of the reflecting team, I had been trying to apply this approach as a guide to my practice on the MAPOD. I realised that I had been careless in the moment and needed to take much more care to be neutral if I were to develop reflexivity in

reflective practice and if I were to improve the rationality and justice of my practice.

Even after all this time, I find myself wondering how best to get the balance right between the opportunities for shared learning for all and the needs of individuals to feel secure in their own integrity. I am reminded of the anxiety that assessment seems to provoke for many a learner, and the emotional fragility that many mature practitioners bring with them to the learning relationship. I am also reminded that no matter how clearly a student might express knowledge of their own learning history, I can never truly know how they feel, as I only ever see glimpses of what their experience might mean to them, and that if I am to practice with 'care' I must be mindful of this.

Margaret's Self Assessment Statement (10 March 1999)

Margaret says "It has been a breakthrough to articulate my own life theory… such that I need not be overwhelmed by academic theory". One of the goals she sets for the next assignment is to "find ways to use more effectively the theory of others while building my own theoretical synthesis". Her following statement is particularly revealing.

> "Clearly the weakest aspect of the paper is its use of theory. However I maintain that striving to create my own theory and minimally using established theory is a vital stage in the spiral of developing real theoretical engagement. Rather than obediently quoting theorists, as I have for decades, I have been stubbornly struggling to formulate my own concepts. - I also feel more ready to take up the concepts of others, now that I have established my own foundation - but I must always be aware of my tendency to be over-awed by theory. I would continue to argue that questioning and skepticism of theory is an important step in deeper learning".

Margaret concludes her assessment in a postscript where she makes the following points and asks a question which is to lead her to a topic of research in her next assignment.

> - "External assessment is quite threatening, setting off panic attacks.
> - What makes a piece of work academically acceptable or though provoking?
> - The only assessment I am qualified to make is whether this paper is a significant learning accomplishment for me [which she does].
> - The rare opportunity MAPOD provides through the action learning set and tutor to get feedback, and to assess whether one's writing was understood or whether it resonated with others."

The external examiner

Margaret's was among the work sent to the external examiner for year one of Cohort 4. I quote her feedback in respect of Margaret's first assignment in its entirety. The external examiner was from a university which ran a Ph.D. programme using action research and was interested in the new forms of knowledge creation that this type of academic work spawns. She was herself working with mature students, some of whom were in consultancy, and she saw her role as an external examiner as a facilitative and educative one. From my perspective, and that of other MAPOD tutors, this was much appreciated.

The external examiner's feedback

> "Good, a fascinating account and a great 'starting point'. It takes time to explore the different levels of reflection and the same living examples can be developed, with the use of further reflection linked to ideas and parallels in the literature which may serve to increase levels of understanding re future consultancy work.
>
> It is important to note that an 'analytical' approach should not be seen as solely the territory of the impersonal and terse. The 'personal wordy and rambling' is only fine as a starting point. For learning to occur there needs to be movement towards understanding, connections, even patterns which, although emerging from within and grounded

> in experience, can withstand analysis and add to existing, newly developing knowledge around the development of such new forms of methodology and theory. (Such knowledge is different in kind from what is viewed as established academic knowledge.) This assignment shows that the first steps have been taken".

These comments were made available to the students with the intention of providing further educative feedback, and to enable them to navigate the expectations of the academy and draw on the opportunities the MAPOD approach to teaching and learning created for developing new forms of knowledge. The sharing of the external examiner's feedback is an important part of my practice to lessen the contradiction, because the contradiction of what the academy may want and what the individual may judge to be 'good enough' will remain until and unless the student can make sense of where they are in their learning and development in relation to where the academy wants them to be.

Reading the external examiner's comments, I felt that she had reached the same conclusions as I had in respect of the balance between the experiential account and exploration of the relevant literature. Furthermore, she had raised useful points concerning the analysis of experiential knowing, and the critique of it as essential to the process of academic rigour.

Assignment Two

The second assignment requires the students to engage in a research activity relevant to them that would afford them the opportunity to try out an approach and/or method and review, and then reflect and report on that process. Margaret defines her project around the issue of assessment on MAPOD. In her assignment (24 May 1999) she frames the 'problem context' in the first instance with reference to the programme handbook, about which she identifies the following characteristics:

> - "A joint assessment with tutors and peers.
> - A learner centred approach.
> - The requirement to provide evidence of your learning.
> - Action learning sets offer tutorial support - helping formulate projects for assessment and subjecting them to continuous review."

Margaret argues that the handbook does not acknowledge the subjective, emotional or social process of assessment sufficiently and, more specifically, fails to define assessment as a function of cycles of learning. Furthermore, Margaret states anxiety about assessment as her personal motivation, triggered by the rating of the individual assignments during the previous process (the 'living contradiction' described in the previous story). Drawing on an extract from her reflective diary, Margaret reveals:

> "Could I have acknowledged at that opening moment how dreadful the assessment experience had been for me? I was being childish, distracting attention from my real fear of being judged, compounded by not knowing the rules of the game".

As part of Margaret's research activity she does three things:

1. Compares the criteria used by another MAPOD set (concluding that it is very similar to those drawn up by our set).
2. Spends an afternoon talking with me to explore the history of thinking behind the MAPOD approach to assessment and learning (which Margaret calls an interview, and which I would describe as a conversation with a purpose).
3. Invites the set to engage in a collaborative enquiry to explore the assessment, framing the purpose as improving assessment within the MAPOD set

What did it mean for me to work with Margaret in this instant?

First of all I wanted to show Margaret that I was responsive to her anxiety and to her desire to explore this issue further. This meant being willing to invest time with Margaret to review and explore the assessment process with her, sharing my understanding of what the tutor team saw as the teaching, learning and assessment strategy for this programme. Although this was the fourth cohort, the assessment process and quality of the teaching, learning and assessment experience was continuously being shaped and improved by our individual and collective experiences. I welcomed Margaret's enthusiasm to take this issue as a research question forward, both for her personally and for the set. I felt it was a timely intervention that would add to everyone's learning, and I felt it was significant that this was being driven by Margaret and not by me.

My commitment to Margaret was to give her support and encouragement to invite the other set members (her peers) to come on board and explore this issue in a collaborative way. I want to suggest that my openness to this enquiry was a critical step in developing a trusting relationship with Margaret in the longer term, as well as being an important response at that time for the learning of that set, and not just a cynical attempt to curry favour for my earlier lapse in judgment.

Furthermore, I want to show by way of this example how I 'hold' the learning as a social process working with the issues and dynamics of individuals and the set, and in doing so, facilitate the exploration of issues of power in the teaching, learning and assessment process. I want to suggest that this is an important aspect of my theory in use; in other words, in my practice, helping me pursue the question "how do I improve my practice?" in a reflective and active manner.

I believe it would be helpful to give a glimpse of the learning that this intervention nurtured, by sharing my recollection of the process that took place at the next set meeting which both Margaret and I taped with the agreement of

the set (on 7 May 1999). It is thus with the aid of the tape that I recall the events of that meeting.

The set consists of five students and the tutor (me). This is the same set that worked together during the life of the first assignment. It is our second meeting of this cycle. Each student has approximately one hour in the set to progress their work, which they can use as they wish. In preparation, Margaret has e-mailed set members with her proposal, inviting them to participate in a collaborative enquiry. This is Margaret's hour and she frames the session and begins checking out the process of buy-in.

The MAPOD sets are tutor facilitated and I envisage my role to be, on the one hand, like that of another set member and learner (in other words a participant), and on the other hand wearing my tutor hat, being ready to support Margaret as an individual and/or the group as a whole as needs be and, where appropriate in the process, to intervene with educative contributions. Thus my facilitative style allows for a good deal of autonomy and emergence, and seeks to be educative rather than directive, and is made where connections emerge in the dialogic process.

My initial intervention is to help clarify where people are in the process of buy-in. There is an initial uncertainty about this as one member expresses not feeling collaborative, which opens up a broader conversation about ownership, suggesting that true collaboration depends on ownership by all, and an acknowledgement of the difficulty for collaborative enquiry when one person has done the thinking, or appears to own the problem. However, all the members agree to explore the issue but state a preference for a more fluid process than Margaret had proposed. What emerges is a dialogue about assessment, which leads to greater understanding and shared meaning about

how we might proceed (individually and collectively) to improve and enhance the next assessment experience in the set.

Margaret opens the dialogue by describing her own feelings about assessment. She tells us that she was dissatisfied with the last assessment day and of her unhappiness in writing the self-assessment statement, and that she found the experience confusing, befuddling and angst ridden. Her perception was that assessment was an issue on people's minds from the time the set first formed at Hunton Park, and she described assessment as "a dragon I needed to turn around and face". It was not an experience she felt that helped her to grow, feeling more disruptive than constructive.

A set member offers a continuum of assessment, asking the question "think of something you have achieved and how you know you achieved it". This prompted the response "feedback", and so it was suggested that feedback and judgment were the two ends of this continuum, of which she says MAPOD was high on feedback compared to judgment.

Another student suggests that we were being assessed all the time, especially in the work context, and that it was both a subjective process and one that is hard and rigid with judgments; prompting another student to comment on the way feedback is given as either 'constructive' or 'judgmental'. The question of criteria was also introduced. My contribution was to say that my intention was to create an opportunity in the action learning circle for assessment that was rich in feedback, and acknowledging there was a paradox; since there has to be a judgment on an MA course which asks "is this a pass?". I further suggest that the validity of criteria is influenced by the context, raising the question of standards of judgment in relation to the criteria we might determine as valid in the MAPOD context, asking "what is important here?". I acknowledge that perhaps the worst fear that everyone brings within them to assessment is being

told “you are not good enough”. This prompts a set member to suggest that members have a responsibility to be psychologically prepared, suggesting that the state in which you approach assessment influences your performance, and she frames this as the psychological process of learning.

I chip in, sharing the Biggs (1989) model on the three approaches to learning, surface, strategic and deep, the latter being the aim of the MAPOD learning strategy. The question is asked “Can you hold your awareness of your approach when you come to assessment?”. It is also suggested “that all that ‘good stuff’ gets forgotten with anxiety”. A set member builds on this to reflect on the practice of the group at the last meeting, saying:

> “It was our first time, we were all tuned into each others anxiety, we gave lots of positive feedback ‘you’re doing well’, ‘you’re ok’, there was a lot of reassurance.”

Another suggests that positive experience acknowledges what you are doing well and suggests you keep doing it, and constructive feedback suggests what you could do better, avoiding the negative terms. “Part of the assessment process is [she suggests] learning to give the feedback in a manner that is appreciative and constructive”. “Carefulness [says another] is a two way process, both in the giving and the receiving”, emphasising in her words “the balance of responsibility in feedback”.

Margaret declares this to be a new way of thinking about feedback for her, and she describes her experience of workplace feedback as “given by someone in power and with authority - taking it and saying ‘yes, I will do better’”. Margaret states that the ideal purpose of the programme for her is to feel “clear and right about her own purposes, criteria and assessment of self”, which prompts the response from a peer to suggest “no-one can give you that, it must come from within”.

The dialogue then moves to a lengthy exploration of how we use the criteria we establish, whether it is 'chicken or egg' in both the composition of one's work or in the assessment of a piece of work, how loosely or otherwise we apply it, and how tightly or otherwise we frame it. Several people speak of their intuitive reading (and writing) of a piece, finding its coherence and resonance before looking to the criteria to see how they might judge whether it fits the criteria or not, in contrast with using the criteria in tick box fashion or writing to it. One member suggests that assessment can be reductionist, if the reading takes a process of deconstruction. Acknowledging this, I add that there is often a tendency to read a piece of work noticing that XY and Z is missing, rather than appreciating what is there.

As the dialogue unfolded, it becomes clear that Margaret is asking for more structure, and is asked by a peer "could you not give yourself that framework?". Margaret ponders this question and then indicates that she can with verification from the group. This opens up a subsequent conversation about the audiences we write for, and an exploration of the academic audience. Again, I chip in with Reason and Marshall's (1987) framework,[20] in which they identify three audiences, 'me, us and them', which I suggest could be applied to any academic piece.

The set then proceeds to explore how satisfied or not they are with the criteria they had set previously, with Margaret suggesting that we need to develop an "assessment commitment to each other", which she says is "difficult to put on paper" and that we might build on that, developing or clarifying what we mean by specific headings, and agree how we would set up the next assessment day. There was some tension here between Margaret's expressed need for more

[20] From "Research as a personal process".

structure and the desire of others to keep the assessment criteria broadly framed, most set members being satisfied with the headings we had previously identified as criteria. This is later acknowledged in Margaret's assignment.

Margaret submits and passes her assignment and is asked by the group to write a reflective letter as a way of consolidating her learning, facilitating her to put some space between the process, the writing of the account and her reflections and learning from it. In her letter (dated 25 June 1999) she says "I feel that the paper is 'premature', born too soon within the research spiral, without enough cycles of feedback, reflection and refinement within the research process", stating that the paper itself was the first opportunity to feedback to the set the data drawn from the dialogue. Margaret suggests that in an ideal world the process and basis for drawing out the themes would have been agreed between them, if it was to be a truly collaborative enquiry, and she expresses her discomfort at doing this herself.

Commenting on what she describes as the "linear nature" of her proposal and "the mechanistic attempt at facilitation of the dialogue session", Margaret's reflective letter further reveals how she believed "the voice of authority" had influenced her thinking:

> "I feel that my 'positivist' tendencies are based in my desire to control situations and people and, underneath, the underlying desire for rules. This probably stems from my judgmental, authoritarian father but was also reinforced by the frightened 1950s world of my childhood, where the overriding message was to obey, conform, and stay within the rules".

As the reflective letter was submitted after the last meeting of the set, the contents and their potential for learning and further reflection lay primarily with Margaret, though I made a mental note of them before consigning them to my subconscious as a difficulty common to students who are grappling with the

contradictions of different research paradigms. Although at this stage I did not know if I would work with Margaret again, exchange of this type of information might well take place between myself and the other MAPOD tutors if the student has a difficulty in the future, or as a means of informing our design of a future MAPOD module.

The external examiner's comments include the following feedback, which echo the perspective of Margaret and the set recognising the need for space in the action research process and time for reflection:

> "Interesting one on assessment. Research focused on experimenting with a full/learning research cycle. Chose the type of action research associated with professional practice. Another thought provoking assignment. Shows clearly why there is a need for 'space' around the assessment process, to give it a chance to grow and develop in appropriate ways."

For me, this opportunity to work with Margaret had proved to be positive, one that seemed to serve her immediate learning needs, as well as offer an organic opportunity to draw out learning from the MAPOD process for the members of the action learning set as a whole. The cycle of action research, the use of dialogue in the inquiry process, the participation of set members as subjects and objects of their own inquiry, the role of the learning set providing support and challenge and bringing questioning insights, their reflection on action, their role as critical friends facilitating a critique to practice, and my facilitative style, all wove into the teaching, learning and assessment activity which created a positive emotional and social learning experience. But most significant of all was that my inquiry had brought home to me, in collaboration with Margaret and the other students in the set, the importance of developing an ethic of care in the teaching and learning relationship, and one that was sufficiently sensitive to the anxieties that assessment, feedback and academic judgment could provoke.

At the next residential block, the MAPOD participants decided to make changes to the action learning sets, reforming their membership. Margaret moved on to a different set and I did not work with her directly again until the learning sets for the dissertation were formed in the following year.

The Dissertation

In this section I propose to introduce the territory of inquiry Margaret covered, to give a sense of the journey that she undertook. Afterwards, I will give a glimpse of how I held the learning space with Margaret during her inquiry by drawing from videotaped evidence of two action learning set sessions.

As a result of family bereavement, the loss of her mother and then her father within weeks of one another, Margaret was the last to complete her dissertation from this action learning set, submitting it in May 2001. The title of her dissertation is "The butterfly emerges: a personal action inquiry", and it is an inquiry of the self that begins with the question "Who am I?" (Updike, 2001:2).

The period between December 2000 and May 2001 was a difficult time for Margaret, in which she struggled to pursue her inquiry and compose her account. For me, and I believe other set members, this was a challenging time too, not least because Margaret's struggle in her inquiry tested us beyond our normal levels of competence in holding a space which supported her personal and academic development.

In my view, Margaret's dissertation tests academic convention by excavating her inquiry in part through archetypal psychology. Furthermore, it provides a good example of how a student working with life issues through the dissertation process recognises and constructs that enquiry and how the tutor and set play a crucial role in supporting that process.

Margaret employs the Native American 'medicine wheel' to present a framework for the stages of her inquiry, describing the performance as "an act of self healing". There is a marked shift in her form of representation from what she calls the path of explanation to the path of expression (Reason and Hawkins, citing Hillman, 1975), describing archetypal knowing in the path of expression as "the deepest patterns of psychic functioning, the roots of the soul governing the perspectives we have of ourselves and the world" (1988:83-84).

Margaret describes her inquiry as a "vision quest". She uses the language of metaphor, symbolism and ritual in her presentation, saying "This presentation is not solely a report of action inquiry it is a performance" (Updike, 2001:1). Margaret locates her inquiry within the context of life as inquiry: "my deeper question was revealed a question of life purpose. 'What am I here for?'" (Updike, 2001:2).

The first position on the 'medicine wheel' is a place to get in touch with feelings, discipline the emotions and let go of images others hold of us (Updike, 2001:40). Margaret began with a life history inquiry, explored with the help of a friend who interviewed her using McAdam's method, which in the event did not provide her with the answers or insights she was looking for. In her dissertation, Margaret argues that the McAdam method is far too positivistic and linear to account for a life. However, throughout her dissertation Margaret provides us with stories of events in her life that have clearly influenced her, offering an explanation of the roots of "the voice of authority" and the influence of "the scientific method" in shaping her world-view. One concerns the humiliation of having an essay read aloud at a school science fair, as an example of how not to write. Another, called "clockwise", describes her delight in telling her father (an engineering professor) that she has learned to ride her bike, and the feelings generated by his response which, rather than celebrating

her achievement, was focused on getting her to articulate how the pedals worked, a task that Margaret struggled with and which took the pleasure out of her felt excitement and achievement. Another, called "The Smelly Cheese", concerns an incident where Margaret, a child in her high chair, refuses to eat some cheese, only to find it presented again at the next meal, because "the rules" demanded this (Updike, 2001:14, 80-82).

A further story is provided of her life as a young woman, a radical student of the 1960s, and subsequently with her first husband (ibid: 62-63) whom she describes as "a co-dependent of purpose". It is this story, written in poetic form, that marks her shift from a path of explanation to expression. In her disenchantment with McAdam, Margaret does not abandon her search for life story. Rather, she abandons his method for capturing her life story.

When the set first learned of this disenchantment, we asked "if you are not doing life story, what are you doing?". Margaret tells us (page 93) that we met her with "polite puzzlement" and she suggests "we were not discussing my process of inquiry; we were concentrating on how to produce a product". This comment throws light on a real tension that exists between facilitating and supervising the dissertation process, and on my power as a facilitator to influence the focus of attention in either of these domains. It is another potential area for contradiction.

The second position on the medicine wheel is a place of "deep introspection" (Updike, 2001:56). Margaret turned to archetypal psychology, drawing out powerful images, which she later named as the "elf child" ('eternal girl') and the "Crone-hag" (Updike, 2001:66-67). When Margaret first introduced her encounter with these archetypes, I and other members of the set were concerned enough to explore with Margaret her psychological well-being, and to enquire with her whether counselling would be a good idea.

This is important in terms of my educative values as a practitioner, because given that I support the use of methods such as working with life story as critical to the process of personal and professional development (and I believe in the inclusion of the emotional in the learning process as well as the cognitive), I nonetheless believe and have always espoused on MAPOD the need to have in mind a boundary between that which is concerned with education and development of the person and that which is concerned with personal therapy. From an ethical point of view, I have always distinguished MAPOD as an educational programme designed as a Masters degree and not as an alternative to therapy. Whilst boundaries are not absolute when working with personal and professional development, I believe I have a responsibility as an educator to help individuals navigate this terrain, and this may include asking them to consider whether they need to consider personal therapy. In working this way, I believe that I am facilitating a safe space for learning and one within the competence of all concerned. Furthermore, I believe that this approach can sit comfortably alongside my belief in the need to create a safe haven that enables students to reclaim their integrity, boost their batteries and heal emotional scars of labouring in the world today.

For Margaret's account of the set's reaction see pages 70 and 93, where she says:

> "The turning point feels like the session at Hunton Park in mid-November, on the second day of the assessment [for the other set members] when I had two hours of full attention from the entire set and we discussed my actual inquiry not my latest draft".

I had a deep sense of confidence in Margaret's own integrity and accepted her decision not to pursue the option of counselling, though I continued to

encourage her to reflect carefully on the direction this inquiry was taking and her capacity to manage it alone, so as to prevent it being a source of harm.

Drawing on Anderson's account of the Celtic Oracles, Updike (2001:71) tells us that the 'hag' is testing her readiness for change, and that the symbolism of the child is concerned with hope and trust in the future, in other words, suggesting a talent to be nurtured.

The third position on the medicine wheel is the place of mind, knowledge and spiritual awakening (Updike, 2001:75). During a celebration of the Celtic feast of All Hallow's Eve (to mark the beginning of winter) Margaret discovers, in grieving for her mother, her own role as 'ancestor'. For Margaret, this signifies 'continuity' and life purpose, which later appears in the dissertation in the form of the archetype of great mother earth. Spurred on by Hillman's (1996) belief in the uniqueness of the person, Margaret is searching for her purpose, which she later clarifies as "life purpose", the fourth stage of the medicine wheel being "New Vision and Purpose" (Updike, 2001:86). Now Margaret describes "looking to the future, learning to trust her own voice" (ibid., 2001:86) and "attending to the complexities of life and her growing internal authority" (ibid., 2001:92).

Reflecting on her dissertation process, Margaret discusses the common tendency to model others and acknowledges that her initial exploration of life story work was modelled to an extent on my doing it, and she provides a caution for students and tutors of copying the direction of another without serious consideration of the individual's motives and needs. Recounting this she says:

> "Why did she let me set out in this simplistic way? Did she not see that I was suffering from crippling emotion, was looking for simplicity and a formula, for comfort upon a risky path? In the autumn, she realised I was in trouble and rose to my aid. By the second draft she became concerned. She tried to outline something for me, to extract some

> sense, some argument for what I was wrestling with. More importantly, she expressed concern: 'are you alright'? It was when I admitted that I needed help that she came forth. The key responsibility was mine that I should acknowledge when I need help. And the key question is, does the teacher/counsellor/healer then rise to the request and give what is needed. Mary gave permission, gave space, gave an ear, gave concerned but sensible responses, judged me positively, as serious, as sensible, that I was not failing, I was only struggling" (Updike, 2001:97).

Margaret says that what started out as feedback to me proved to be something about her as she realised her shift in relation to "authority figures", a shift from "imitation to independence" (ibid., 2001:99).

The final act of Margaret's presentation was to step into the centre of the medicine wheel, an act which she describes as "stepping into power", a turning point and transformation.

The videotapes

I have two videotapes of sessions working with Margaret in January and February 2001. These were made towards the end of the dissertation period, the first when Margaret returned to MAPOD shortly after the death of her father, to attend a session to provide a fellow set member with feedback on her draft dissertation, and the second, when Margaret came to see me for a one-to-one session to get her own dissertation writing back on track.

You can view Margaret's check-in for the first session by loading the CD-R and clicking onto the file.[21] The check-in is designed to create a space and point of connection in the learning relationship, in which we (students and tutor) can meet each other first, and more fully, as human beings. It is part of the process

[21] File on CD-R, named Louise Part 1. At the end of Part 1 Margaret's check-in begins, and proceeds to parts 2 and 3, or you can wait to view this later when I return to this process in Appendix 2.

of community building and one of the MAPOD rituals used at the beginning of action learning sets and residential sessions. It serves to set the emotional tone and provide a container for what may emerge in the process.

Although Margaret is not presenting her work on this occasion, her check-in is an important part of her process that she acknowledges and which lays a foundation for our subsequent meeting. It provides both an opportunity to re-engage with set members present and the tutor, as well as enabling us to acknowledge Margaret's grieving process in the context of our learning relationship.

The second tape is a continuity of this process. As there are only the two of us present, the session takes the form of a kitchen table conversation that meanders from one topic to the other. An outsider might wonder what work is being achieved here, as I follow the natural flow of the conversation as Margaret discusses the experience of community present at her father's funeral and her process of writing his obituary. It is in these moments of reflection that Margaret's relationship to stories of her relationship with her father as "an authority figure" dissolve, freeing her up to subsequently compose her dissertation, constructing an account of her inquiry into self-identity, and enabling her to reclaim her voice and mind.

In both tapes *I do not do anything*; suffice to be present, witnessing and affirming and inwardly clarifying her process, and in the latter, sharing a reference to Hartill's (1998) work that draws explicitly on Hillman's work on archetypes and his belief in the 'soul making' qualities drawn from the archetypal image. The work is in a book on creative writing in personal development that I have had in mind to show to Margaret for a while. It is, I hope, a gesture that affirms Margaret's knowing and shows that I have taken her approach seriously.

How Does My Living Theory Constitute a Discipline of Educational Action Research?

Let me reiterate my position: Firstly, my living theory is guided by beliefs and values that I bring to my professional practice as an educator working with adult learners in higher education; secondly, let me suggest that each of the three assignments present distinct spirals in a cycle of action research, in which I *plan* to facilitate my students' learning with care in ways that respond to their learning and development needs and afford opportunities for emancipation. The structure of the course allows me to *review, reflect on* and *evaluate* my practice in respect of my professional values and educative purposes in a systematic way at the end of each assignment. Implicit in the learning relationship is a continuous and iterative process of hypothesising and sense making, asking the question in the context of the students' written accounts "What is going on here?".

The values that I bring to my professional life are in part contained in the design of the curricula as well as embodied within my practice. The design of the first assignment provides students with an opportunity to reflect on their learning history and life course. In doing so, the possibility of a critique emerges with regard to the interaction between system and life-world, which students variously draw out. The system (social and cultural) includes functions and roles, for example, family roles, roles of men and women in society. Thus, the process of individuation and socialisation are integrally entwined; one cannot exist without the other.

In Margaret's case, her first assignment raises her concern to 'find voice' which she presents as a struggle, striving to articulate what she knows. She is explicit about what she describes as "a crude rejection of any authority other than

myself" manifest in her assignment as a reluctance to engage with propositional knowledge. It is what Belenky *et al.* (1986) term an expression of the 'subjectivist' position. Furthermore, Margaret tells us her stance is one of mid-life rebellion, having previously been a "good student", by which she means her hitherto obedience and conformity to the 'rules' of the academy. Additionally, she tells us that her learning is impeded when she experiences threats or feels vulnerable.

The best I can do at this stage in our learning relationship is to affirm her story, and attempt to show her that I resonate with the experience of 'silence' in relation to voices of authority and to nudge her gently towards those whose writing speaks to her experience.

My understanding of the perspective of silence as a way of knowing is informed primarily by my own experience, which I have discussed earlier in this thesis. Rogers (1983:121) emphasises empathetic understanding, the ability to understand the student's reactions from the inside as integral to effective interpersonal relations in the facilitation of learning. Secondly, my understanding has been informed by the work of Belenky *et al.* (1986), whose perspectives on women's ways of knowing offer resonance.

Through the emergence of subjectivism women become their own authorities. Belenky *et al.* (1986:55) tell us that the move into subjectivism is not tied to a specific age, cutting across age, class and educational boundaries. Unlike the advantaged males in Perry's (1970) study of middleclass male students at Harvard, Belenky *et al.* (1986:64) discovered that the process of "wresting power away from authorities" was not the same for women. The "good student" is rewarded for her obedience and conformity, and rather than asserting their own view as the males in Perry's study, Belenky *et al.* (1986:65) notice that the ethic of the 'hidden multiplist' (Perry's term for the subjectivist process) is that

of the spectator, to watch and listen but not to act. Margaret was now determinedly rejecting the mantle of 'good student':

> "As we listened to subjectivist women describe their attitudes about truth and knowing, we heard them argue against and stereotype those experts and remote authorities whom social institutions often promote as holding keys to truth-teachers, doctors, scientists, men in general. It was as if, by turning inward for answers, they had to deny strategies for knowing that they perceived as belonging to the masculine world" (Belenky *et al.*, 1986:71).

My reading of Margaret's assignment was informed by the concept of 'connected knowing' (ibid.), a term I first encountered in Belenky *et al.* (1986). This involves reading from a position of empathy, with the intent of appreciating what was presented and not judging the text by what was absent or missing, which is characteristic of 'separate knowing' and, I would suggest, more common in academic judgment.

The paradox, of course, is that I too represent 'authority' in my role in the academy. I am thus concerned to build a teaching and learning relationship of trust with Margaret, as with other students, which includes creating an awareness of authors and alternative academic practices that do not perpetuate the myth of the student as 'the empty vessel', a term employed by Freire (1985:21) to describe the banking model of education, where the tutor sees education as a means of depositing knowledge into the head of the student.

Up until the moment when I experienced myself as a living contradiction, I felt I was doing 'ok', in that I had been living my values in practice. It is, as Lather (cited by Maguire, 2001:65) suggests, that despite good and "liberating intentions" we still manage to "contribute to dominance", and she calls for the development of self-reflexivity that supports practice improvement and empowerment. As a reflective practitioner, I am aware that I have blundered into ranking by comparison of the students' papers, causing a great deal of

unnecessary anxiety and undermining the very learning relationship which I have otherwise been intent on creating as a positive, supportive and nurturing experience, and in so doing, I have potentially usurped the social goals of collaborative learning with competitive learning. Since some of the students, including Margaret, did not find my intervention to be either positive or nurturing, I experienced a negation of my values despite my momentary impulse to rank order the assignments in an attempt to educate and make explicit the application of criteria in my judgment.

The opportunity for continuity of the learning relationship afforded by the holistic design of the MAPOD programme enables me to redeem myself with this student as she takes forward her issues of authority and assessment as a basis for her research assignment. In a programme where student contact and the learning relationship is confined to a modular basis, the learning relationship may have ended with these issues remaining as unfinished business for the student, and for the tutor, leaving a sense of failure toward that particular student or students.

Zeichner and Liston (1996:9-11) suggest that Dewey identifies three attitudes integral to reflective action, these being open-mindedness, responsibility and wholeheartedness, and they suggest that Dewey regards the process of reflective practice not as a series of steps but as "a way of being as a teacher", as "a holistic way of meeting and responding to problems". I suggested in my account that my openness to Margaret's inquiry was a critical step in building trust in the teaching and learning relationship, both for Margaret and other set members. In accepting the error of my judgment and the consequences of that action for learning, I was moved to take responsibility to facilitate the learning within the set, by variously adopting role as clarifier, participant and learner, and educator; listening and working with the students toward a shared meaning of what constructive and empowering assessment and feedback may involve. In

this respect I employed my role as an authority within the academy wholeheartedly with the attitude that I too could learn something new, committed both to the education of my students and to my own development as a teacher.

The third assignment serves to test my open-mindedness even further, when Margaret presents an archetypal account of her inquiry/search for self-identity. At the same time. I am moved to respond to her life issues (the loss of both her parents) and to demonstrate care and concern for her well-being as a person.

When Margaret first presented her images of the 'elf child' and the 'hag', I found them somewhat disturbing and they caused me to feel concern for Margaret and her well-being. The reaction of other set members was similar and it was in this process that I asked Margaret the question "Are you all right?". Her answer was positive and so I reflected again on whether the felt anxiety was to do with my and other set members' lack of understanding about what these images meant. At the same time Roger's (1983) proposition "the locus of evaluation resides within the person" came to the forefront of my mind, reminding me of the importance of trusting the integrity of Margaret to know what was best for her and within her capability, even when her inquiry with the use of archetypes seemed to be not without some difficulty.

> "The locus of evaluation we might say, resides definitely in the learner *its essence is meaning*. When such learning takes place, the element of meaning to the learner is built into the whole experience". Rogers (1983:20).

Having said that, I do not want to underestimate the ethical tension that this created, as I was concerned for Margaret that she did not pursue this process of exploration if it were harmful, and I made that clear. Care and counselling (the latter with a small c) is part and parcel of an educator's role, but in higher education this entails finding a balance between respecting the autonomy of

the adult learner and the responsibility on the part of the educator to facilitate an ethic of care.[22]

Zeichner and Liston (1996:12) remind us that "reflective teachers are fallible teachers", and this is evidenced by Margaret experiencing my focus attention and that of the set's, being on the product and not initially on her process at the November meeting. Again, experiencing the negation of my values in practice, I was moved wholeheartedly to commit myself to work with Margaret and be mindful of her process, over and above the product, for the remainder of her time on MAPOD. The video file offers some evidence of this in the check-in process as we engaged with Margaret to acknowledge her grieving process when she returned to the set shortly after the funeral of her father.

Through the work of Marshall and Reason (1987),[23] I was aware that past distress could emerge as an underlying issue in the research and learning process. This knowledge enabled me to see the link between Margaret's struggle to find voice, her earlier resistance to voices of authority and her relationship with her father as a key authority figure in her past. I was particularly sensitive to this during our last one-to-one meeting as she discussed the writing of his obituary, how this process enabled her to see him in a different light, and in turn, how it helped her realise that she could change her relationship toward him. Though it was not the grieving process itself that re-stimulated old patterns of distress for Margaret,[24] the grieving process inevitably brought them to a head. In writing the obituary, Margaret began to see how her stories had helped keep her attached to this restrictive pattern/relationship toward her father. Good research, according Reason and Marshall (2001:415), "is an expression of a need to learn and change, to shift

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22 Preferably with the student by encouraging them to take care of themselves and to seek appropriate help from professional counselling services if appropriate.

23 In "Research as a personal process".

24 This had been brewing from the outset of her MAPOD journey.

some aspect of oneself". Marshall and Reason describe the process of working past distresses in the research project as:

> "a natural tendency or drive towards the full realisation of the self; we suggest that, in the choice of research topic and inquiry process, the researcher moves into the anxiety of the old distress, and that this is (intentionally or unintentionally) a bid for personal development" (2001:414).

In writing her dissertation, Margaret was able to show us the journey that she had taken whilst working through this distress, at the end of which she was able to see the wisdom of her authority and experience.

Reason and Marshall (2001:415) suggest autobiographical and creative writing, such as Goldberg's (1986) methods to facilitate life story work as one way to address this distress. It was an approach that I was familiar with, having worked with my own life stories and which I was enthusiastic about and encouraged students, who like Margaret expressed an interest in this work, to try. As we now know, this method did not suit Margaret and she rejected this approach, pursuing her inquiry through the use of archetypal psychology.

I wonder now, in the light of my experience of working with Margaret, whether I could have been more careful about my enthusiasm, employing what Langer (1977 and 1989, cited in Rhem), in her work on 'mindful learning', calls "teaching conditionally", which is to "infuse all you know with a healthy uncertainty". Once I understood Margaret's need to follow a path of expression and extend the path of explanation that a narrative account offers, I took responsibility to support Margaret in her use of archetypes by 'keeping her in mind' when I read suitable books.[25]

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[25] Such as *The Self on the Page*, Hunt and Sampson (1998), in which I discovered and later passed on the reference to Graham Hartill's contribution.

Winters (1998:370) in asking "where does 'theory' come from in action research", describes a process of "improvisation as we draw on different aspects of our prior professional and general knowledge in the course of our inquiry". The account I have given of working with Margaret is, I suggest, an example of this.

Conclusion

What does it mean to facilitate a personal development 'project' and to support a student in mid-life transition? These questions framed the teaching and learning relationship in the course of my living inquiry of 'working with Margaret'.

The journey described in the assignments sets the context for Margaret's MAPOD 'project', that of a life inquiry, in which her search is articulated as a search-quest for self-identity (through her dissertation) and culminates with her reclaiming her voice and mind.

I want to suggest that my living theory of educative relations has largely been in support of this quest, facilitating Margaret's personal development process at key points in the course of MAPOD, punctuated by experiencing myself as a 'living contradiction'. In turn, these contradictions have caused me to reflect on my practice and consider how I might improve this practice. The dialectical nature of reality and the internalisation of propositional knowledge that has resonance for me, and my students, combines to create a theory of my action research.

I began this cycle of action inquiry with a desire to facilitate with care. The learning relationship on MAPOD and the conversations that mark the relationship between student and tutor is a sacred encounter, because students

like Margaret confront their distress and share in the process their story. For the tutor, this entails honouring the story; listening for the story and helping its articulation of events, paying attention to the meaning given to these events and helping individuals see where these stories might be problematic. It is a dialectical process that requires an appreciative understanding of that which is socially and historically embedded in our ways of knowing, that help me work with and address cultural and gendered implications and inequities of the system. Witherell and Noddings suggest that:

> "we are obliged to devise a method of receiving stories that mediates the space between the self that is told, and the self that listens: a method that returns a story to the teller that is both hers and not hers, that contains herself in good company" (1991:70).

It is this containment of Margaret in good company that is evidenced in the educative relations in MAPOD, captured on the video clip check-in when she returns from her father's funeral, supporting the transformation of Margaret's story, and facilitating its return to her anew. Belonging, identity and care for the soul and emancipation are interdependent elements of this MAPOD community that support the wholeness that Margaret seeks. These values are similar to those expressed by Waldegrave and Tamasese (1994:191-208), who describe a systemic approach to "Just Therapy, one that promotes care for the soul".

What does it mean to feel the necessities of another to educate with care? For me, this has involved listening to stories like Margaret's, to see in such stories the humanity they contain, and to encourage the silenced meanings to emerge and to educate us. The education system denies emotion in the learning process and privileges a masculine-rational epistemology of practice that leaves us with an educative process that is cold, that does not care for the soul. Waldegrave and Tamasese (ibid.) tell us that the "soul is associated with one's roots and liberation".

In the last conversation/meeting I had with Margaret before she wrote up her dissertation, we were engaged in a process of soul searching as we wove between talk of meaning and aspirations of the MAPOD community and the Presbyterian community of Margaret's origins that she re-experienced at the funerals of her parents. For many of us, our sense of belonging is lost or fractured as we struggle to live and survive in the global context of modernisation. Educative spaces like that created on MAPOD are essential to the re-integration of our wholeness, helping us reclaim voice, mind and soul. Like Waldegrave and Tamasese (1994:200-201), I am drawn to the words of the song "Irish Heartbeat" by Van Morrison, who proclaims "this whole world is so cold, don't care nothing for your soul" and invokes you to "talk a while with your own ones". It is that deep sense of belonging and identity that the values of the teaching and learning relationships within the MAPOD community serve to nurture.

The fundamental purpose of educational action research is to improve the rationality and justice of my practice. I am suggesting that this case study 'working with Margaret' offers an exemplar of that process, in that it supports the highest aspirations of our humanity in supporting a humane and liberating form of education. My educative relations through working with Margaret have helped me address the rationality and justice of my practice, and with her support and that of the other action learning set members, I have been moved to inquire purposefully toward the facilitation of an ethic of care in my teaching and learning relationships.

CHAPTER EIGHT: MATERNAL THINKING - A TRANSFORMATIVE DISCOURSE FOR EDUCATIVE RELATIONS

In this chapter, I introduce the idea of 'maternal thinking' (Ruddick, 1989) as a transformative discourse for my educative practice in higher education. I explain how this idea resonated with me and how I have used it as a heuristic device in the service of reflecting on and improving my practice. I do this by narrative accounting and by drawing on artefacts from my practice, including a tape-recorded session of an action learning set meeting, as a vehicle for reflection. The tape captures a routine convention of my practice, namely a 'check-in' process which I use at the beginning of learning sessions, to enable individuals in the group to touch base with one another, and which I use to identify attitudes, emotions and issues that are influencing the learning climate and which may hinder the learning of individuals or the group, and the teaching and learning relationship itself. I seek to show how this approach to my inquiry enables me to reflect on my practice and create more care-full educative relations with my students. This story represents the next cycle of inquiry in my research.

Introduction: Maternal Thinking

Maternal thinking resonated with me in that it seemed to speak to me and *name* an ethic of practice that I was working towards and a way of being in educative relations with my students. It spoke to me of a way of knowing that I understood, as one caring and being cared for. In part, 'the voice of the mother' (Noddings, cited in Belenky *et al.*, 1986) reflected my concern to create a space in the academy to educate the whole person, acknowledging the emotional process of learning alongside the pursuit of reason and logic, the former being generally overlooked if not ignored in the androcentric order of the academy.

> "Maternal practice begins in a response to the reality of a biological child in a particular social world. To be a 'mother' is to take upon oneself the responsibility of child care, making its work a regular and substantial part of one's working life" (Ruddick, 1989:17).

Whilst a tutor does not share the biological bonds of a birth mother, nor the lifelong responsibility of care for the student, and whilst the role is different insofar as the higher education tutor is working with adult learners and not children, there is I suggest, for most educators, a commitment to life affirming and loving educative relations that are characteristic of maternal thinking and practice. Like children, I suggest that it is not uncommon for students to demand that a degree of preservation and growth be nurtured in their educative relations.

I first encountered the term 'maternal thinking' in the final chapter of Belenky *et al*. (1986:214),[26] which is framed with the following quotation: "It is time for the voice of the mother to be heard in education" (Noddings, cited in Belenky *et al.*, 1986). Drawing on Freire's (1971) critique of the 'banking' model' of education, Belenky *et al.* speak of the midwife teacher who, like Freire, partners their students to draw out their own knowing and speak in their own active voices, thus facilitating an emergence of consciousness about the very production of knowledge itself and their active role as knowers and creators of knowledge.

The banking model of education is problematic because the practice of presenting pre-packaged ideas to students, for example in the form of lectures and handouts prepared by the tutor, means that the tutor has done all the thinking for the students. Such methods prevent students from grappling with the subject and the sense-making process that leads to understanding and the reconfiguration of knowledge production. Indeed, they conceal from the

[26] In *Women's Ways of Knowing*, the title of this chapter being "Connected Teaching".

student the very process of learning itself. This perspective reflected the values and goals for the development of student autonomy in learning that had inspired the MAPOD programme.

Citing Ruddick, Belenky *et al*. (1986) introduce the term 'maternal thinking', linking it to their image of the midwife teacher. They identify three components of maternal thinking, preservation, support and nurturance, which the midwife teacher draws on in the service of her students. Through preservation, maternal thinking seeks to preserve the vulnerability of the child in assisting it to be 'born with its own truth intact'. The midwife-teacher helps the student both hold on to and not lose sight of their own ideas and thinking. Secondly, maternal thinking supports the evolution of the student's thinking, enabling them to build on what they know rather than abandoning it for the ideas/thinking of others. Thirdly, maternal thinking serves to nurture and shape the student, so that in time the student may take their own ideas and thinking into the outside world and be accepted in doing so. This type of strategy seemed to capture the way in which I had been working with Margaret (as discussed in the previous chapter) and it appeared to offer an insight as to how I could judge more effectively whether and to what degree I was creating the loving and life affirming educative relations that I espoused.

Taking Ruddick's conception of maternal thinking as a practice, I want to suggest that by attending to student demands for preservation and growth, through a self critical reflexive inquiry, it is possible to highlight and benchmark a strategy for improving one's practice. Ruddick (1989:13) defines practices as "collective human activities distinguished by the aims that identify them and by the consequent demands made on practitioners committed to those aims". She identifies goals as constitutive of practice and suggests that the pursuance and evaluation of the pursuit of goals is a conscious act that involves thinking and judging. In other words, what I believe she is pointing to is a reflective process.

McMahon distinguishes between reflective practice and action research. By suggesting that the latter is distinguished by strategic action, which he defines as "a deliberate and planned attempt to solve a particular problem or set of problems using a coherent, systematic and rigorous methodology" (1999:163), whilst the former, though a useful precursor to strategic action, does not necessarily result in improvement or change. Though the outcome of reflective practice and action research may both be transformative, McMahon distinguishes between the internal process of a change in attitude and knowledge, as conceived in Kolb's (1984) learning cycle, and the explicit nature of strategic action that changes practice itself, as conceived by the action research cycle. It was through such strategic action and change that I was looking toward the continuous improvement of my practice.

Ruddick recognises maternal thinking as a dialectical process. This is how she describes it:

> "To say that thinking depends on practice means that thought is social in at least two senses. First, concepts are defined by shared aims and by rules or means for achieving those aims… Individuals nonetheless make sense of their activities to themselves by means of concepts and values that are developed socially. Thinking itself is often a solitary activity; its cooperative forms are the dialogue or conversation, not the chorus. Yet the language of solitary thinking is necessarily public in the sense that it is governed by public criteria of meaning and truth" (Ruddick, 1989:15).

It is the dialogic process of testing out one's thinking in practice and the responses and feedback given by others that indicate whether there is shared meaning and mutual understanding of action.

What Evidence Can I Offer of What Maternal Thinking Means to Me in My Practice?

The account that follows concerns the creation of a working alliance with a group of students on MAPOD 5, which began in the autumn of 1999. Unexpectedly, I find myself working with these students as their action learning set tutor, following the departure of their action learning set tutor from the programme. I provide a narrative account of my first meeting with them, after which I draw on an audiotape which captures the second meeting in February 2000.

Watson and Wilcox (2001:65) suggest a methodology for employing artefacts that "represent routine day-to-day aspects of one's professional life". They suggest that practitioners have "Things they do which they are so comfortable with that they have become part of their daily/weekly routine". The 'check-in' is a routine that I employ at the beginning of a learning session. In this case, at the start of an action learning set meeting, before the focus of the meeting becomes task driven. With the agreement of the action learning set, I tape record these sessions as an aid to ongoing reflection and as a way of benchmarking improvements and change to my practice. In writing this piece I have also drawn on the course handbook, e-mail correspondence with students and journal writing produced at the time.

As an artefact, the tape serves to remind me of the purpose of the check-in and the values underlying this routine convention, these being to nurture a community of learners and to create what Harrison (1987) describes as 'a safe haven' and what hooks (1991:41) describes as "a home place and site of resistance". She suggests that a home place is where we can be affirmed both in heart and mind, and where we can restore to ourselves the dignities denied us in the outside world.

I had been part of the tutor team for this cohort during their first residential week, leading the opening of the first dialogue for community building and introducing sessions on working with learning history and life story. These sessions are vehicles for engaging with the first assignment and are, I suggest, life-affirming methods.

> "Stories and narrative, whether personal or fictional, provide meaning and belonging in our lives. They attach us to others and to our own histories by providing a tapestry rich with threads of time, place, character, and even advice on what we might do with our lives" (Witherell and Noddings, 1991).

Knowing ourselves as learners is one of the purposes of the first module.[27] The assignment requirements outlined in the course handbook state:

> "To prepare and present in action learning sets, a critical review of a personal learning experience or activity, and a analysis of the associate learning support strategies. This is to be presented in the form of a seminar paper, circa 3,000 to 5,000 words".

The format for set meetings to produce such an assignment is usually three sessions. The first being to explore a proposed issue for reflection or research and identify some criteria as a basis for assessment; the second, to present and critique work in progress; and the third, to review the finished piece and present it for assessment, which is self, peer and tutor moderated. Whilst I was not a stranger to this set, I had not developed a personal working relationship with them, and as a result of the sudden and unexpected departure of their tutor there had not been time to be briefed in detail about the students, their proposed assignments, their process or the relationships and dynamics within the set.

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27 Entitled "Individual learning and support strategies".

Background to the Second Meeting: My First Encounter With the Set in December

Revisiting my journal, written a day or so after this initial meeting with this set, I recall the following details. The meeting was to be held at the home of one of the students in the set, so I telephoned Marcia the evening before to let her know that their tutor was unable to come and that I was stepping in. I explained that she had been forced to withdraw due to ill health and increased pressures of work. I acknowledged that this was unfortunate, but that these circumstances had not been foreseen and that I would explain more fully to everyone tomorrow. Marcia was very understanding, expressed concern for the tutor and offered to telephone the other set members to let them know what was happening in advance of the meeting. The meeting was scheduled between 10am and 3pm, whilst Marcia's children were at school.

The set consisted of three women and one man. The man and one of the women were a couple both working for the same bank, the woman in a management development role and the man in a senior management post. Marcia was working as a health visitor and the other woman worked for a health authority in an organisation development role. Marcia had coffee waiting for us and had prepared a lunch.

They had all come prepared, having done some writing as I had been briefed to expect. But what I did not expect, and which became apparent very quickly, was that rather than bringing their writing as work in progress to be shared with the set, open to critique and revision/development, it was being presented to me as a finished draft. The expectation of the set members was that I (the tutor) would read and comment on each piece of work and indicate whether it was good enough to pass.

There is an air of anxiety that I conform to this expectation and so I do. I experience a sense of perturbation as I proceed to read each piece of work. Without having any prior sense of what to expect, I find it impossible to skim read, something I know my colleague, their former tutor, is good at. I feel obliged to read each piece closely to get a sense of what they have written. This is time consuming. As I read I clarify in my own mind that I am looking for coherence of a story that in some way addresses their experience as learner and shows evidence of engagement with relevant literature that informs or illuminates their storied account and insights of themselves as learner and knower. I share this with them. Not everyone has brought a copy of their assignment for other set members to read, and two people have only brought copies for me. My unease is exacerbated as I realise that there is a high degree of tutor dependency and expectation.

As we address each piece in the order agreed, I invite the author to 'talk us in' to their story/account in order to create a more vivid picture of the issues and questions that have been drawn out by their reflections and writing. I try to encourage their peers into conversation about the qualities of each piece of work, asking what struck them about the piece and what resonated with their experience and thinking. The responses are minimal and reflect the fact that not all members of the set have read the piece or had time to engage with it. At this stage, there is no mention of any set criteria, or suggestion that my reading contradicts any expectation they might have.

By lunch-time we were behind schedule. Time was running short when we turned our attention to Nigel's work. He had written over 40 pages, spanning the last 25 years from the point of leaving school, beginning with his first job in the bank machine room to his current role in senior management, and the use of a 360 degree feedback appraisal system in use at the bank. Its length overwhelmed me. I noted that although the storied account was fulsome, there

was very little use of literature and no clear analysis or critique of his experience. I felt that he still had work to do before it would be ready for submission and assessment.

I suggested he do two things: 1) cut back on the overall length, reducing the scope of his piece (so he could do more with less) and 2) engage with some relevant literature. I made some suggestions about what texts he might consider that seemed relevant to his account. Similar feedback was echoed by Marcia. Nigel however, seemed surprised and unhappy about this feedback and suggested that as far as he was concerned he had completed the task. He indicated that in his opinion it was good enough and believed it should warrant a pass. He raised several objections to doing any more work on the grounds of lack of time and not yet having a library card. Whilst two of the set members rummaged for books to give him, I reminded him gently that we had given out a number of handouts during the residential that he could also look at.

I recognised this scenario as one that I had encountered previously with mature students without prior higher education qualifications, so I said something about a balance of theory and practice in writing and how we can use literature to throw light on and extend our understanding of our experience. Marcia's children had come home from school and it was time to go.

We said our goodbyes. As I made my way to my car I was aware that the other three students were gathered around one their cars in what looked like a post-mortem. I resisted the temptation to go over and engage them in discussion. I had a splitting headache. I walked to my car and drove home.

The Second Meeting (February)

The date for the assessment meeting had already been fixed by the set. Unfortunately, I was only available for the morning as I had a hospital appointment that afternoon and given diary commitments other set members indicated that there was no possibility of an alternative date. This was far from ideal but the assessment needed to be completed by the next residential, so we agreed to work with it.

The assignments arrived at the end of January, the weekend prior to the meeting. I read them and prepared two statements of feedback for each student. The first addressing the qualities of their work, focusing on what they had written and the other focused on developing their writing and engagement with the literature in the future. This was purposeful in that I was trying to do what a 'connected teacher' would do, that is firstly, focus on a appreciative response to an individual's writing and only thereafter offer formative feedback for their future development.

Nonetheless, from my perspective, Nigel's work remained a problem. There was still little evidence of engagement with literature, and the changes he had made to his account were minimal. It was not yet a pass. I was worried about how he would deal with this. I was aware that I had ultimate responsibility as the tutor for ensuring that standards which constitute Masters level work were met. I was curious to see what his peers would say, and if they had found merit in his work that I had missed. I was willing to change my mind if persuasive evidence were produced. I was conscious that I was trying to balance the need to uphold standards of a Masters degree and at the same time support Nigel's personal development. This did not feel comfortable.

Despite the holistic learning and development opportunities that the MAPOD programme aimed to provide, our efforts were constrained by the organisation of the modular framework, where students had to produce each assignment at Masters level before moving on to the next module. This seemed to get in the way of the natural process of learning and development for some students causing much anxiety, and which created in some cases an approach to learning described by Biggs (1989) as an 'achieving approach'. This is where the motivation is to make the grade and the learning strategy is to optimise the organisation of time and study skills. This is in contrast to the 'deep' approach to learning that we were aiming for on MAPOD. N's approach seemed to me to be characteristic of an achieving strategy.

The tape captures the assessment meeting for this assignment

The students provide their own alternative to the koosh (a talking stick) in the form of a cuddly toy, which causes much amusement, and we open the meeting with a check-in. I am composing myself, honing my attention toward the needs of the students, before we begin the apparent 'business' – the educative task of the day.

Nigel was the first to take the koosh. He outlines his concern about how the last session ended and describes feeling "left up in the air and disappointed". He asks how I saw the day going, and he says for him it is important to establish what I expected from them since they had been "set up to work one way with the other tutor". He also wanted to know if my expectations would be different from hers. He announced that "we have had a conversation" (referring to two of his peers) and acknowledged that he had not yet spoken to Marcia, the other set member. I was then asked if I had seen the learning set contract, to which I replied "no". He continues with how that disappoints him and suggests that we might have wasted some time. He suggests a degree of uncertainty and poses

the question of how I want to be involved with the group. He then asks for clarification about the situation regarding the other tutor.

I sensed an alliance of three, and his choice of language seemed to place me on the outside of the set.

Y (Nigel's partner) then takes the koosh and begins by saying that she is feeling positive about her assignment and wants to move on to the next assignment. However, she too appears to be disappointed that I have not seen their learning contract. She refers to the assessment criteria they have seemingly established in the set and states that she has used it as the basis for giving feedback. She also wonders whether there are differences with the way I "administer a set" compared with the way the other tutor. I feel more uncomfortable when I hear the word 'administer' and wonder what is understood by the facilitation of learning. She continues by describing how she felt for Nigel and says that if she had been him she would have gone away and seriously considered not completing the course.

Returning to her own assignment, she comments on how she saw the assignment as a learning process and that it was for her an emotional time, writing it. Now she wanted to put it behind her and look forward.

Marcia then takes the koosh. She says that at the moment she is feeling positive and sees today as a small part of the process. She says that she had felt the need to telephone Nigel after the last meeting and check out how he was feeling. Personally, she feels she got a lot out of that meeting, but suggests we think about how to structure and run this meeting. She elaborates that she has also gained a lot out of this assignment and that it has helped put behind her a very damaging experience in her previous role.

Z then takes the koosh. She describes frustration and anger, saying that she did not get too much out of it, that we ran out of time and we should address the structure of the meeting. Turning to her own assignment she says she views it as the foundation without which she could not imagine doing the rest of the course. She reiterates her apprehension. She believes that the group has achieved a lot, having rallied in response to Nigel's feedback.

The koosh is then passed to me. I begin by acknowledging that we only have until 1.30. I say that feedback is often difficult for everybody, that it can be difficult to 'hear' feedback and I suggest that feedback about the piece of work is not the same as feedback or criticism about the person. I flag feedback as one of the concerns that I want to work with today.

I make two additional points regarding feedback, the first being it is not only my responsibility, and the second that there are two aspects to feedback, the developmental and the academic. I confess that I am feeling a little anxious too, but say that I want to use that anxiety constructively with the set so that it can positively enhance their learning experience.

I offer to clarify the situation regarding the other tutor. I return to the suggestion of implied difference between the way I am working and their experience of the other tutor, framing the question "what are you hearing that is different from me that the other tutor has said?".

The first thing we address is the situation with the other tutor. The set have heard another story of why she left and seek clarification. Whilst what they have heard is true, I feel that it is inappropriate for me to discuss the detail of it with them. The explanation I had given them was true but neither was it the whole story. I had agreed with the tutor and our line manager that the students on this cohort did not need to know the whole story, as it did not directly affect

them. There was, however, a tension between this need to know approach and their espoused expectations to be told the full story and in their words "be treated as adults". I tell them that I see no reason to spoil what appeared to have been a positive working relationship with the other tutor by revealing to them an unpleasant incident that had occurred with another cohort. I suggest that we handle this situation no differently from how their organisations would handle a similar scenario, and I add that not everything is thrown open to the public domain. They nod but I can feel that there is unease.

I suggest we move on to look at the assessment criteria, framing again the question "what could be so different between the way I work and the way the other tutor worked with you?". Nigel responds, "when we started to build a learning relationship with *X* she said: 'there is nothing I will not do personally to help you get through this M.A., my commitment to you is total, I will do everything I possibly can to get you through this'". Nigel reveals that for him this was positive. Now, he did not know what the future held, he comments on the lack of time he had in his session and concludes by saying: "Personally I didn't feel that your commitment was the same from you to me".

Silence.

I acknowledge that what he has said is important and I write down time and commitment. Nigel is poised to continue. He says: "If I had delivered the message you had given to me… I walked away and was in two minds whether to carry on… I can take feedback, I've had loads of feedback, some positive, some negative in my career but I've used it to my advantage. What I was disappointed about there was no follow up, whether that's your style you want to develop."

I ask if he wants to say any more about what he means by "no follow up". Returning to *X*'s commitment to him of "I'll get you through", he says he did not feel able to pick up the phone to me as he would have done with her. He said he felt that he had been on the right lines with her, which was not the message he subsequently got from me. He then made it clear that he had expected me to call him, to check whether there was anything he wanted clarification on and to talk about it.

I respond, saying "I am still struggling with what it is that's different about what *X* and I say about what is expected". Nigel says it's not the content of what we are saying but the fact that he feels he has not had a "steer" from me.

Surprised by this, I suggest that I thought I had given a very clear steer. Several members of the set join in, suggesting that there is a difference between hearing the message and testing it out. I apologise that the message was heard and felt to have nothing in it that was constructive, reiterating the two points (cutting down and literature work) that I had given as a steer.

Y says that she heard some of the positives in the message and also recognised that he had got hung up on the word 'rewrite'. She describes how she discussed this with him, persuading him not to leave.

I sense that now is a good time to clarify expectations about writing at Masters level. *Y* outlines the detail of the assessment criteria they had agreed with the other tutor, and there does not appear to be major differences in our approach. I sense that we have almost completed the first stage of the meeting, airing and resolving unfinished business.

It is now 10.30 and I suggest we clarify "where we are now as a set" and use the koosh to conduct a 'round robin' to check out how each person feels and

whether we are ready to move on. The consensus is that everyone is feeling happier that we have invested time to reflect on our experience of working together, and are agreed that we are now ready to move on.

The Assessment

We allocate the remainder of the morning to the assessment process, giving everyone an equal chunk of time and I frame how we might do this, starting with self presentation, followed by peer and tutor feedback. When Nigel's turn comes, I am not persuaded that I have overlooked anything of substantial merit to change my perspective. Nigel is asked to do some additional literature work. Following the meeting there is much e-mail correspondence between us clarifying the role and use of literature in relation to his narrative account.

So, what is going on here? How can I/we make sense of my practice and, more importantly, of my claims of maternal thinking in the teaching-learning relationship? What I hear on the tape suggests that the students do not see or experience me as one caring. This is particularly so for Nigel. Yet I am trying to convince you, that I am caring and engaged in a process of maternal thinking with these students.

Reciprocity

Noddings (1984) suggests that an ethic of care is the "aspiration or ideal" of one caring and one cared for. Caring is, she suggests, a process of reciprocity. I wonder if Nigel's comments and stated expectations of me are reflective of his ideals, in other words what he understand to be the aspiration of one caring and one cared for. This casts his 'criticism' of me in a different light; rather than taking it personally, I can see that I do not live up to his ideal.

Noddings describes the non-rational nature of caring and argues that, for example, a child needs enduring, irrational involvement with adults, the 'irrational' being tantamount to being 'crazy' about that child! There is some similarity here to Roger's (1967) notion of 'unconditional positive regard'.

Attitude

I am sure that Nigel has not experienced me as feeling 'crazy' about him. There is a world of difference about how I feel toward Nigel and how I feel toward my son, who I am crazy about. Recognising this, I wonder what it means to care enough; in other words, to be a 'good enough mother' in my educative relations?

Receptivity

Reflecting on my action/practice, I can see and appreciate both points of view, mine and Nigel's.

Awareness

Noddings describes a process of awareness of the construction and acceptance of one's constrained ideal. This, I suggest, is similar to Whitehead's theory of knowing oneself as a living contradiction, which involves sensing a gap between one's espoused theory and theory in use:

> "All I am meaning by 'I' as a living contradiction is the experience of holding together two mutually exclusive opposite values" (Whitehead, 2000:93).

Noddings suggests that the contradiction may manifest itself as a 'both and' position: "a turning toward and a turning away" at the same time. Antagonism,

for example, defies receptivity and responsiveness, and I had experienced Nigel as antagonistic.

In explaining the constraints that may undermine one's ideal of care, Noddings suggests that burnout may be one of the causes. Whatever the reason, there has been a failure in my receptivity toward Nigel. Noddings suggests that the tension between constraints and attainment that get in the way of one caring cause the one caring to look inside herself as she relates to the other in an acceptance of one's constrained ideal. This is similar to Whitehead's idea that when we experience ourselves as living contradictions we imagine a way forward to improve our practice. The 'both and' position helps me hold at one and the same time our different perspectives, whilst turning my attention toward Nigel, listening to what he has to say, and adjusting my stance as one caring closer toward his ideal. Listening and dialogue play, according to Noddings, a key role in nurturing the ethical ideal of care.

Enhancement of the ethical ideal involves dialogue, practice and confirmation. The check-in provides an opportunity for dialogue (facilitating a free flow of meaning between us). The 'round robin' provides an opportunity to check understanding, also whether there has been a change in knowledge or attitude by or between all members (students and tutor) of the set. Additionally, it serves to gauge the possibility of enhancing the ethical ideal.

Noddings examines what it means to care and be cared for, how care for another person relates to the larger moral picture and how caring ultimately functions in an educational context. Noddings builds a compelling argument for ethics based on natural caring, a feminine view constituted in maternal thinking and rooted in receptivity, relatedness and responsiveness.

Though I acknowledge the constraints of the modular system and the tension it can create between a deep and achieving approach to learning, hindering the development of some and resulting in 'the tail wagging the dog', my approach has been to work with these constraints on the basis that students have opted to do the MAPOD programme principally because it offers them a Masters level qualification. Furthermore, I believe that their sponsors would be unlikely to pay for the course if it were merely seen to be a personal development experience. Consequently, when it has been suggested that I have been hard on the students or insensitive to their feelings, I have justified my approach as one caring, in the sense of 'being cruel to be kind'. But I argue that they would not thank me, if at the end of the year they were assessed by the examination board as having developed only to postgraduate diploma standard when they thought they were heading for a Masters level award. This approach as one caring is akin to Ruddick's (1989:21) conception of the mother "shaping the child's natural growth". As well as demands for preservation and growth, Ruddick tells us that maternal work (and by implication maternal thinking) also demands social acceptability:

> "A mother's group is that set of people with whom she identifies to the degree that she would count failure to meet their criteria of acceptability as her failure" (Ruddick, 1989:21).

What I am suggesting I am doing as one caring, is to facilitate the learning and development of these students in a way that ultimately achieves the social acceptance of what being a Masters level student accords.

I accept that to conform to the social conventions of the academy in this regard may not be the position that others would choose to take, or that everyone will see it as 'one caring', but it has been my position regarding this matter on MAPOD, and one that I have adopted following several reflective conversations I have had with colleagues and examiners regarding this dilemma.

Had we not agreed to design the programme broadly within the modular framework, we were told that the political will was such that the course would not have been validated.

Ashcroft and Foreman-Peck emphasise that a critical stance towards reflective practice goes beyond reflection and critique of one's own practice but includes "the social, moral, and political context for that practice" (1994:3). Whilst I have been critical of what I have called the androcentric order of the academy and have been prepared to push for changes such as allowing students to write in the first person, and have pushed the educational reasons for this, I have done so not only because they support my underlying educational values but also because I felt that the path of resistance, though problematic, has not been so entrenched as the attachment to the current modular frameworks seems to be.

Modular frameworks and their associated credit accumulation are essentially a product of the commodification of higher education. A module packages the learning into bite size chunks and may demand that learning outcomes be specified in advance. Whilst this approach may make pre-packaged tutor directed learning more efficient, it narrows the scope for self-directed learning, although there may well be ways of working with these tensions that are more creative and provide more scope for the natural development of the learning process than the way in which we have designed the MAPOD programme. I have wondered whether a portfolio of work assessed at the end of the first and second year of the programme might be a better way, but this would involve separating the credit points from the module and attaching them to an award, with a specified number of credits for postgraduate certificate, diploma and Masters levels. This is a bigger issue than my practice improvement, as it is conditional on educating and changing the social formation.

Boud (2002)[28] took the theme that assessment hurts. He has a point. Although I have tried to live by the maxim 'do no harm', this example shows that Nigel and the other students did not experience me as one caring. Good intent to care was not enough. So what was missing in the learning relationship? Perhaps my attitude failed to convey my intent, or perhaps reciprocity was absent? Perhaps to be judged as one caring can only be recognised where commitment to loving and life affirming educative relations is experienced over time? But I also wonder if the students concerned expected a more formative process than the modular system allows? It was perhaps no coincidence that the students who formed an alliance of three all joined the programme as mature students without prior higher education qualifications. Perhaps the system itself has inherent contradictions where on the one hand there is a policy of open access, supported by a commitment to equal opportunities and the management of student intake in a highly competitive higher education market and, on the other hand, the demands of a modular system that require the student to attain a given standard at 'M' level before progressing to the next module. Prior to the modular system, students may have benefited from the flexibility of the integrated programme that allowed more time over the life of the programme for them to attain the level required. It is in this latter context of an educative programme that formative assessment can make a difference. Perhaps more fundamentally, as Kegan (1994:286) has suggested, we need to problematise what we mean by self-directed learning. He argues that we need to be more cautious about legislating for student autonomy in learning, pointing out that students may not have the skills to be self-directing (this would include emotional and social skills, as well as intellectual skills).

> "Intellectual disciplines or fields of study are neither repositories of discovered facts or families of related opinions. They are each-be they in the sciences, social sciences, or humanities - systematic procedures for

[28] David Boud, in his Professorial inaugural lecture at the School of Life Long Learning, at Middlesex University, January 2002.

> generating and evaluating ideas, hypothesis, and 'sincere opinions'. They are public procedures for relating to third order constructions. Taking charge of a discipline, as higher education asks its students to do, requires of them more than just the 'personal' sophistication of 'self-direction'. It requires the cognitive sophistication to construct complex systems, the structure of the fourth order" (Kegan, 1994:286).

In terms of the perspectives of Belenky *et al*. (1986), this involves a shift in mind from subjective knowing and procedural knowing to constructed knowing, if students are to truly develop the skills of self-direction as demanded by the academy, rather than just on their own terms.

Taking on board Kegan's criticisms, I am led to conclude that any attempt to benchmark the skills of maternal thinking and judging, in other words what it means to be a 'good enough' mother (Winnicott, 1971) is itself problematic. Clearly it is not a formulaic heuristic. Winnicott suggested that the 'good enough' mother is able to hold the paradox inherent in the use of a transitional object, one example being a dummy in replacement for the breast. By doing this she manages to neither confirm nor refute the child's reality as gradually she introduces an external reality to the child, by way of weaning him or her onto solids. This gradual introduction of an external reality enables the child to deal better with the disappointment of its needs not being met. Bolingbroke (2000), in her MAPOD dissertation entitled "From POD Child to Adult Academy", suggests that:

> "Extending the analogy to the context of assessment, the 'good enough' tutor or peer assessors similarly hold the paradox between feedback and judgment and do not challenge the learner's conception of the inner and outer realities of their developing intellectual paradigm" (2000:66).

Furthermore, Bolingbroke suggests that the 'good enough' tutor will not only know when to challenge the 'reality' of the learner, but that she will be skilful in this regard.

> "Just as the mother learns with the child, the optimum pace of this illusion/disillusionment, the tutor/ peers have to get to know the student over time to successfully hold this paradox so that students can learn from assessment and not see assessment as a barrier to learning" (2000:67).

Conclusion

In conclusion, I suggest that if we are to utilise heuristic maternal thinking as a vehicle for facilitating loving and life-affirming educative relations, we (the tutors) must first understand the complexities of what we in academia mean by self-directed learning and the mental demands this places on the student. Only then can maternal thinking provide a viable heuristic for the reflective practitioner and educational action researcher helping support effective teaching and learning relationships over time. It requires that tutors think through and judge their educative strategies and choices in a manner that is critically reflexive of both one's own practice and the social and political context of the educative environment. This is crucial if we are to realise the ethical ideal of care in the teaching and learning relationship.

In this chapter, I have introduced the idea of maternal thinking as a transformative discourse for educative relations, which can support the practice of a tutor whose goals are to facilitate life affirming and loving educative relations. But I have to conclude that this is subject to the tutor appreciating the complexities that self-directed learning demands. I have explained how I adopted the idea of maternal thinking into my practice by drawing on an artefact of my practice: the routine use of a 'check-in' in the teaching and learning process as a tool for reflecting on and gauging the learning climate of individuals and the group, and of the teaching and learning relationship itself. Subsequently, I have given a critical account of myself as one caring, accounting for my thinking and judgment in respect of practice and I have explored my practice within the dialogic relationships of tutor and student, and

the political context of the modular framework identifying the constraints this places on my practice and goals for learning.

The ideas presented in this chapter were tested out in the form of a conference paper (Hartog, 2002).[29] Feedback from conference participants who expressed an interest in my paper have been incorporated into this account. In particular, Professor Jona Rosenfeld[30] wrote to me encouraging me to think beyond seeing my failure to achieve my ethical ideal in my learning relationship with Nigel as a living contradiction. Rather, he pointed me toward seeing the complexities of the relationship, which I now see inherent in the components of maternal thinking which hitherto I had missed.

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29 Paper also presented at the Second Carfax International Conference on Reflective Practice in July 2000.

30 One of the authors of *Artisans of Democracy*, which I have already described in Chapter Two (page 85).