

Chapter 1

The basic scheme

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The philosophical assumptions that underlie a ‘method’, and whether those assumptions are consistent with the researcher’s own view, seem to me to be at the necessary starting point of inquiry. (Koch 1995:827)

The basic scheme is quite simple – that people can learn through their everyday experiences to become who they want to be. This requires a vision and perhaps some guidance along the journey. The journey is written as narrative. The narrative might then be read or performed in public spaces for dialogue and social action.

What started as scribbling in a journal one evening becomes a performance in a public theatre. Such is the dramatic potential of such inquiry. Nothing can be more significant to a professional, no matter what discipline, than his or her own performance. When we are mindful enough, practice becomes a narrative unfolding. In this way self-inquiry research is something lived, unfolding moment by moment. It becomes a profound way of being in the world.

In the first edition of this book, I opened Chapter 1 with the words ‘Guided reflection is a process of self-inquiry to enable the practitioner to realise desirable and effective practice within a reflexive spiral of being and becoming’.

Since I wrote these words over eight years ago, the world has turned. The *reflective turn* has evolved into the *narrative turn*. As I gain greater insight into narrative construction and form, I appreciate that guided reflection is part of the process of narrative, albeit the most vital. Appreciating this turn, I have substituted *narrative* for *guided reflection*. I also prefer to talk of the research as a *journey* of being and becoming, not as a *process*, as if it were being manufactured.

I now describe *narrative as a journey of self-inquiry and transformation towards self-realisation*. The emphasis on *self-realisation* acknowledges that this journey is about being and becoming. It shifts from an outward focus on realising desirable practice to an inward focus on realising self.

Narrative

This is a book about narrative. Wikipedia informs that:

A narrative is a story that is created in a constructive format (written, spoken, poetry, prose, images, song, theater or dance) that describes a sequence of fictional or non-fictional events.

It derives from the Latin verb *narrare*, which means ‘to recount’ and is related to the adjective *gnarus*, meaning ‘knowing’ or ‘skilled’. (Ultimately derived from the Proto-Indo-European root *gn[oline]-*, ‘to know’.) The word ‘story’ may be used as a synonym of ‘narrative’, but can also be used to refer to the sequence of events described in a narrative. A narrative can also be told by a character within a larger narrative. An important part of narration is the narrative mode.

Ideas help to sense and shape meaning but as I shall reveal, narrative can be only known through living and reflecting on it. The idea of *living or being* narrative reflects an ontological perspective in contrast with an epistemological perspective concerned with ideas and *doing* narrative. The ontological is a higher level of consciousness.

Mattingly (1994:811) writes:

Narrative plays a central role in clinical work, not only as a retrospective account of past events, but as a form healers and patients actively seek to impose on clinical time.

Narrative, through reflection, nurtures mindfulness. Narrative is mindful practice, mindful research, mindful teaching. Hence the more I reflect on my experience, the more aware I become of those things in my practice. It is a spiral that feeds itself leading to higher level of consciousness, towards enlightenment.

Practice, whatever its nature, is always uncertain, unpredictable, a mystery unfolding simply because human encounter is unique. It has not been lived before. As experts, claiming knowledge, we may think we know but knowing can never be certain with human encounter (Johns 2009a). As such, we must hold our ideas and frameworks loosely for their value to inform each encounter. Research is like this, something lived, a mystery unfolding. An over-reliance on method – ‘this is how you should do this’ resists play, forcing things into a certain shape and in doing so distorting the truth. Truth needs to find its own expression. This is so obvious yet people cling to method as if their life hangs upon it.

There is no ‘correct’ method to guarantee true results (Lather 1986). Methodology is no longer bound by the prescribed rules and boundaries of positivist thinking. Instead, the current era of post positivism allows a multiplicity of methods in order to make sense of human experience (Bentz and Shapiro 1998).

My approach to narrative inquiry is informed by diverse influences woven into a coherent pattern. Since first formulating this research approach, I have continued to dialogue with diverse methodological influences – exploring and playing with these influences in terms of the ‘whole’ as if within a hermeneutic cycle where understanding of the whole deepens. Working on my own narratives, and more recently on performances, and working with students at both master’s and doctoral levels, has enabled me to dialogue with these diverse philosophical ideas from a practical level for, sensing and relishing the subtlety of their nature.

Perhaps as a defensive gesture I adhere to the idea that narrative inquiry is *always* experiential. It is *never* certain. However, philosophical and theoretical ideas do help shape the path and guide the steps along it. They have a utility – what is their value to inform me? So whilst there is no formula to construct narrative, guidelines are helpful, notably the idea that self-inquiry narrative is always reflexive and coherent. Mighty words indeed. Perhaps other people’s approaches to narrative do not make this demand. Hence when we talk of narrative we must be clear what we are talking about given the diverse usage of this word.

To reiterate – there is no formula. Like a mountaineer feeling his way along the edge of a crevice, the narrator pays attention to each step along the way with care because the terrain is unknown, a mystery unfolding. Ideas can be like crevices where you plunge and lose your way. We can get lost in method or what Janesick (2003:65) describes as *methodolatry*:

a combination of the words method and idolatry to describe traditional researcher's preoccupation with selecting and defending methods to the exclusion of the actual substance of the story being told.

We hold a vision of self and practice, and each step is mindfully taken along the narrative path towards realising the vision as something lived. It is called 'the plot'.

Weinsheimer (1985:6–7) citing Gadamer (1974) writes:

Everywhere where one has to come across something which cannot be found by learning and methodical alone – that is, everywhere where invention emerges, where something is owing to inspiration and not methodical calculation – there it depends on ingenuity, on genius (TM:50).¹ Thus it is clear why Gadamer avows any attempt in TM to 'develop a system of regulations that could describe or even direct methodical procedures of human science' (TM:xvi) Such an endeavour would be futile, for there is no art or technique onto things/ there is no method of stumbling.

Stumbling seems to me the perfect descriptor for inventing my approach to narrative inquiry. No doubt if I was to retrace my journey I would do it differently. I would have found other influences that would have been equally persuasive. Hence, those practitioners whom I guide are urged to find their own paths, even as they are informed by my own. I emphasise to hold all ideas lightly because the footsteps of others can lead into blind alleys if you are not mindful enough.

Consider the following description of narrative by Art Bochner (2001:134–135):

I see narrative inquiry as a turn away from as well as a turn towards ... the narrative turn moves away from a singular, monolithic conception of social science toward a pluralism that promotes multiple forms of representation and research; away from facts and toward meanings; away from master narratives and towards local stories; away from idolizing categorical thought and abstracted theory and toward embracing the values of irony, emotionality, and activism; away from assuming the stance of the disinterested spectator and toward assuming the posture of feeling, embodied and vulnerable observer; away from the writing essays and toward telling stories.

Bochner inspires and fuels revolution to break out of conformity that chokes the imagination and stifles creative work. He opens the possibility that research is legitimately art not science (and the intellectual and political crisis of legitimacy!). He sets up narrative as a movement away from a *monolithic conception of social science towards a pluralism*. Of course, he also sets up the problematic of pluralism notably – well these words are all well and good but how does it all fit together and work in coherent ways? The challenge is to move from reflections on experience to telling stories, to constructing narratives and then perhaps to performing them within an agenda of social change.

¹TM is 'truth and method' (see references).

Table 1.1 Methodological framework, version 1 (c. 2002)

Critical social theory	Hermeneutics	Phenomenology
Evolutionary consciousness	Guided reflection: A co-developmental and collaborative research process	Literature
Dialogue		Ancient and spiritual wisdom
Empowerment theory	Reflective and supervision theory	Feminism

Hermeneutic cycle/Kosmos/Gestalt

Table 1.2 Methodological framework, version 2 (c. 2006)

Critical social science and empowerment	Hermeneutics and dialogue	Narrative inquiry
The feminist slant	Guided reflection as a journey of self-inquiry and transformation	Ancient and spiritual wisdom
Auto-ethnography (autobiography)	Reflective theory	Chaos theory

Table 1.3 Methodological framework, version 3 (c. 2009)

Hermeneutics	Performance studies and performance ethnography	Buddhist psychology
Critical social science Empowerment theory Collaborative theory	Narrative is a journey of self- inquiry and transformation towards self-realisation	Guided reflection and narrative theory
Auto-ethnography and autobiography	Feminist slant	Chaos theory

So, in constructing narrative I put on my pluralistic hat (well I think it is a pluralistic hat – would I know one if I saw one?) and begin to weave diverse influences into a methodological pattern that shifts as I come to better understand these influences in themselves and their synergy as a pattern. I then attempt to weave these ideas within a patterned whole. My understanding of this pattern continues to evolve as I engage the ideas in practice and read more widely (see Tables 1.1–1.3). Bourdieu's *Sketch for a self-analysis* (2007) lies invitingly on my desk, as yet unread.

Understanding of ideas must always be tentative because of their deep philosophical nature and the inevitable partiality of interpretation as I engage with these ideas within my own experience of narrative, assimilating and simmering such ideas within my narrative knowing. A slow cook to get full flavour.

Collaborative research

Narrative as self-inquiry resonates with collaborative research theory (Reason 1988). Collaborative inquiry exists when all participants contribute to the design and management of the research as a mutual process of co-inquiry, negotiated social action and personal development. It intends a harmonising of power within the relationship in order for dialogue to flourish. Nice idea, yet easier said than done. People's shared backgrounds do not necessarily lend themselves to collaborative work within prevailing bureaucratic health care service cultures characterised by an emphasis on a tradition of authority that has imposed subordination and dependency.

In writing my narrative as a complementary therapist, I am telling my own story in relationship with those with whom I practice. I am not telling their story, even though I show an empathic detail about their lives. I obscure identity and even write fiction to protect the identity of those I relate with in my stories. Using my judgement I inform people that I reflect on my practice as routine and construct narrative that may at some time be published or performed. It is an extension of the caring relationship. Practice becomes narrative, empowering and healing for practitioners and patients (Colyer 1996; Kralik *et al.* 2001).

Beginnings

Let me turn the clock back to the beginning. In 1989, in my role as lead nurse at Burford Community Hospital, I commenced a project to facilitate practitioners to realise holistic practice as set out in the hospital vision (Johns 1998, 2009b). I entered into guided reflection relationships with practitioners whereby I would guide their learning through the experiences they disclosed in the sessions. These sessions were about an hour long and held every two to three weeks. My agenda was to fulfil my assumed leadership role to enable practitioners to become effective practitioners. Through the project we came to appreciate deeper the nature of holism, the holistic practitioner role, those things that constrained its realisation – either embodied within the practitioner or embedded in organisational systems and patterns of relationships, and guided reflection as collaborative inquiry.

On moving to university in 1991 I developed curriculum grounded in reflective practice that fundamentally shifted the relationship between practice and theory. Now we learnt through stories informed by theory as appropriate. Practice was a hook to hang the theory hat on. Theory became more meaningful and more easily assimilated within personal knowing. Assignments were narratives of transformation.² The first guided reflection dissertations were constructed.³ In 2004 I commenced the MSc in Leadership in Healthcare Practice programme whereby students constructed narratives of being and becoming the leader they desired to be.⁴ The programme itself became a community of inquiry to guide this work. In this way teaching and research became one.

In 2003, in my role as visiting professor at City University I started working with Louise Jarrett, guiding her PhD narrative of being a spasticity nurse (Jarrett 2008). In 2005 I created the School of Guided Reflection and Narrative Inquiry at the University of Bedfordshire, recruiting Lei Foster and Maria Fordham (see Chapters 16

²Several of these narratives are published in the third edition of *Becoming a reflective practitioner* (Johns 2009b).

³Jane Groom and Yvonne Latchford's narratives are examples of this work (Chapters 12 and 7, respectively).

⁴John-Marc's narrative is an example of the leadership narratives (Chapter 11).

and 8, respectively). In 2007, I began working with Amanda Price, April Nunes and Antje Diedrich, dance and drama teachers at the University of Bedfordshire, as co-supervisors expanding the community of inquiry into an inter-disciplinary approach, and most significantly fuelling the performance turn. The Community of Inquiry meets for four hours every four weeks throughout the year, supplemented by two three-day intensives. The intensives were created primarily for overseas students to join the community. A Google group enables continuous dialogue within the community. In 2009 I launched the Reflective Practice Forum website⁵ to open dialogue with a wider world.

Reflection

At the core of narrative inquiry is reflective practice. Intellectually I describe it as:

Being mindful of self, either within or after experience, as if a mirror in which the practitioner can view and focus self within the context of a particular experience, in order to confront, understand and move toward resolving contradiction between one's vision and actual practice. Through the conflict of contradiction, the commitment to realise one's vision, and understanding why things are as they are, the practitioner can gain new insight into self and be empowered to respond more congruently in future situations within a reflexive spiral towards self-realisation. The practitioner may require guidance to overcome resistance or to be empowered to act on understanding. (Adapted from Johns 2009b)

I write *within a reflexive spiral towards self-realisation* in contrast with earlier descriptions where I stated *within a reflexive spiral towards developing practical wisdom and realising one's vision as praxis* (Johns 2006). This adaptation reflects the idea that reflection is more about 'who I am' and less about 'what I do', although the two are intrinsically linked – as 'what I do' is reflected in 'who I am'.

Whilst I have written extensively elsewhere on the nature and method of reflective practice (Johns 2009b), I would emphasise a number of key points:

- Reflection is essentially concerned with being in the world (ontological) rather than doing (epistemological);
- Becoming mindful of self is the quintessential quality of reflective practice as something lived, more than merely a technique to learn through experience;
- Reflection is always being mindful in practice or on practice, i.e. that the act of reflection on experience is an experience in itself;
- The reflective outcome is insights that enable people to live more effective, more desirable, and more satisfactory lives;
- Reflective practice is energy work – nurturing commitment, dissipating anxiety, realising power, finding meaning, becoming vision, enabling healing, knowing self;
- Guidance (in guided reflection) is collaborative dialogue towards creating better worlds.

Personal knowing

Knowing through reflection is subjective and contextual. Such knowing is the very stuff of professional practice, the knowing that practitioners use in everyday practice in

⁵ www.beds.ac.uk/rpf

response to the complex and indeterminate issues that practitioners face (Schön 1987). Schön described professional practice as the swampy lowlands where there are no prescribed answers to the situations of human–human encounter. Schön claimed a new epistemology of professional practice, which gave primacy to personal knowing in contrast with the high hard ground of technical rationality that was of limited use to practitioners. Personal knowing is largely tacit. Being tacit is not easily expressed in words. Practitioners know more than they can say (Schön 1983). Reflection taps the tacit, lifting it to the surface so to speak. Such learning is subliminal, cultivating personal knowing and the intuitive response within future experiences. It is only by looking back over reflected-on experiences that the practitioner becomes aware of the insights she has gained.

Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986), in their model of skill acquisition appropriated by Patricia Benner (1984) in her work on expert practice, suggest that people do move along a continuum from novice to expert without consciously being aware of being reflective. In becoming an expert the practitioner shifts from a reliance on linear models of decision making to intuition based on prior experience, suggesting that reflection occurs naturally on a subliminal level because people do seem to learn through experience. I assume that reflection speeds this natural learning process. Intuition is seeing and responding to a situation as a whole as if the self is part of that whole rather than outside it.

Through reflection I may come to understand some things rationally, but applying that into practice is another matter as embodied responses shape my response.

Pinar (1981:180–181) asserts that:

All knowing begins in intuition. It is the medium through which the qualities of situation become discerned, conceptualised and articulated. Intuition is the representation and meditation of situation and self. Thus, it behoves us to be interested in knowing how to cultivate the intuitive capacity, and to begin to utilise language to render our intuitions sensitively, hence more accurately.

The work of Ken Wilber is grounded in an integrated model of evolutionary consciousness that seeks to integrate partial and seemingly contradictory views of the nature of consciousness and knowing. Wilber (1998) set out four quadrants of knowing (Figure 1.1). Each quadrant or paradigm has its own rules for generating knowing and its own rules for deciding whether such knowing is valid. In health care, the right hand paths

	Interior (left hand paths)	Exterior (right hand paths)
Individual	Upper left Subjective knowing Personal (I)	Upper right Objective knowing Behavioural fit (IT)
Collective	Cultural fit (WE) Inter-subjective knowing Lower left	Social fit (IT) Inter-objective knowing Lower right

Figure 1.1 Four quadrant view of knowing. (Wilber 1998)

have been dominant with its demand that knowledge should be observable and generalisable. Wilber refers to this type of knowledge as ‘IT’ knowledge that seeks to predict and control life by reducing things into parts and seeking cause and effect type relationships between them, even situations associated with the human sciences. From this perspective ‘I’ knowing tends to be dismissed pejoratively as anecdote.

Upper left quadrant

This is the quadrant of reflective or personal knowing, revealing the subjective and contextual world of ‘I’. It reveals a perception of self that is not observable and therefore the reader or listener is at least partially reliant on the truthfulness of the writer or narrator. I say ‘partially’ because readers always project a meaning into the text based on their own experience. Hence truthfulness is always mediated.

Knowing in the left hand path makes no claim to generalisability because human life is not predictable. Each event is unique and life is constantly changing, even ourselves.

Only from the perspective of personal knowing can the practitioner meaningfully dialogue with knowledge constructed within the other paradigms and assimilate such knowledge into their personal knowing.

Upper right quadrant

However, if the writer was observed within a particular situation, the observer would pick up certain signs to provide specific information about the writer’s state of mind, behaviours and the such like, enabling the observer to draw certain conclusions of the ‘facts’ of the matter based on verified criteria. This ‘objective’ or ‘abstract’ perspective may bear little semblance with the narrator’s reflection of the event, using as it does a different language.

Lower left quadrant

As the narrator reflect on ‘I’, he or she inevitably positions ‘I’ within relationships with others, revealing patterns that shape the everyday world or what Wilber (2000:143) describes as ‘the shared cultural worldspace necessary for the communication of any meaning at all’. People do not live in isolation from others, but share a world that is largely pre-governed by cultural norms that strongly, albeit unwittingly, shape the way people think, feel and behave within situations. Reflection gives access to understanding these patterns of relationship and the way the individual is both shaped by and shapes such patterns.

Lower right quadrant

Practice can be viewed objectively as *systems* within a complex machine that governs all aspects of social life. An over-emphasis on systems, then the human factor becomes lost

within the system, *the ghost within the machine* (Koestler 1976) where humans are reduced to objects to be manipulated as parts within the machine. This is very apparent in health care organisations that are primarily governed by their self-demand for smooth running. Reflection helps the 'I' to appreciate systems for their value in supporting clinical practice.

Through reflection the 'I' can dialogue with the other quadrants as appropriate to integrate apparently diverse ways of knowing within personal knowing. Wilber (1998) urges caution because the subjective path has tended to be aggressively reduced into the objective path. As he acerbically writes:

But when you have finally finished reducing all 'I's and all 'we's to mere 'Its', when you have converted all interiors to exteriors, when you have turned all depth into shiny surfaces, then you have perfectly gutted an entire kosmos. You have completely stripped the universe of all meaning, of all value, consciousness, depth and discourse – and delivered it dried and desiccated, laid out on the marble slab of a monological gaze. (Wilber 1998:22)

Ruth Morgan (2004) writes:

Wilber's image here of dried and desiccated theory, shallow and depersonalised, is strong, and helps to balance the years of training that taught me only to value definitive, empirical research. His words are liberating, and inspire me to continue to challenge positivist dominance, to trust intuition, acknowledge feelings, and free myself from the restraints and limitations of depersonalised practice.

Reflection is opening a transformative space. It is not simply an internal, introspective process, purely for the benefit of the reflector. It has social and political repercussions affecting the wider community in ways that serve human interest (Boud *et al.* 1985). Our changed perspectives only have relevance in context with the life we share with others. As a political activity, reflection becomes part of an emancipatory process in its capacity to identify and release self and others from the irrational, unjust and repressed.

The influence of a critical social science

Jack Mezirow (1981:223) writes:

Our meaning structures are transformed through reflection, defined here as attending to the grounds (justification) for one's beliefs. We reflect on the unexamined assumptions of our beliefs when the beliefs are not working well for us, or where old ways of thinking are no longer functional. We are confronted with a disorientating dilemma, which serves as a trigger for reflection. Reflection involves a critique of assumptions to determine whether the belief, often acquired through cultural assimilation in childhood, remains functional for us as adults. We do this by critically examining its origins, nature, and consequences.

Mezirow's words suggest that reflection is 'critical' in the sense of a critical social science. I prefer to think of reflection as depth. We can scratch at the surface of experience purely in terms of problem solving without disturbing the deeper currents of affairs that determine the conditions that support the problem. We don't go out of our depth because these deeper currents are dangerous. Mezirow (1981) described this as critical consciousness leading to perspective transformation, another word to describe insights.

We learn to think about our thinking that caused the problem in the first place. Going deeper we reveal the way power is played out in practice. Going deeper we reveal the way power is constructed and maintains a certain political order. Going deeper we acknowledge our own oppression and our loss of integrity. Going deeper we drown in our misery, for we are indeed in murky depths.

My description of reflection reflects the tenets of a critical social science as a process of enlightenment, empowerment and emancipation (Fay 1987), what I colloquially refer to as the 3Es even as I prefer to term these three movements as understanding, empowerment and transformation (Table 1.4).

Critical social science takes the perspective of enabling people to rise up and overthrow their oppression in order to live more satisfactory lives. Governed by dominant social forces, practitioners are largely unable to take control of their own professional practice and realise their therapeutic potential (Buckenham and McGrath 1983). Roberts (1982, 2000) labels nursing as an oppressed group socialised into a subordinate role that traps them by fear into their oppression and makes them unable to take action, often denying or rationalising their own oppression. And yet, as the practitioners' narratives in the book reveal, oppression quickly surfaces through reflection. An understanding and commitment to realise one's therapeutic destiny, and with the challenge and support of guidance, practitioners are empowered to take action towards a better state of affairs, as revealed in transformation – albeit a chipping away rather than revolution. My leadership in health care programme has an overt revolutionary camaraderie to storm the barriers that constrain transformational leadership within transactional organisations.

Fay (1987) labels these barriers as force, tradition and embodiment. They are buried deep within each of us, suggesting that we are not radically free to change ourselves and certainly not from any rational perspective. Within the UK's National Health Service (NHS), it is tempting to project this oppression emanates from others: managers, 'the system', and the oppressive culture of the NHS. Yet, as Wilber (1998) reminds us, oppression also comes from within; denying voice to the feelings and anxieties that surface, denigrating intuition and closing a doorway to transformation. Developing a positive identity by respecting and valuing intuition within a nursing framework can help to liberate this oppressor within (Roberts 2000) and open the door to transformation.

To overcome oppression, the practitioner must understand it, to appreciate its nature, the way it is patterned within normal relationships and organisational structures. Only

Table 1.4 Typology of enlightenment, empowerment and emancipation (Fay 1987)

Enlightenment (understanding)	Enlightenment is understanding why things are as they are. It is a critical process of deconstruction, of peeling away the layers of experience to reveal the conditions that govern why people respond as they do. These conditions are embodied within self and embedded within the fabric of practice in ways that reinforce the embodied conditions through ways of relating.
Empowerment	Empowerment is having the understanding, commitment and courage to take appropriate action towards changing the way things are in order to realise self's own interests. Empowerment acknowledges the limits of rationality to bring about change, and the positive energy required to take appropriate action in ways that may incur resistance from more powerful others whose interests may be threatened.
Emancipation (transformation)	The realisation of self's best interests as a consequence of taking appropriate action.

then can the practitioner act to transform the situation towards realising a better state of affairs in line with her vision of practice. Of course, the practitioner may see self as oppressed, simply because that is the normal state of affairs. She may be dissatisfied and frustrated; and that is the spark for reflection to germinate the struggle for liberation and in doing so, the reflective spiral of being and becoming is developed as one thing inexorably leads to another in the awakened self (Freire 1972).

From this perspective, empowerment *is* the cornerstone of reflection, the critical edge to reflection to free ourselves from oppressive forces in order to relieve our misery. Perhaps in our frantic world it is easier to defend against anxiety than face up to such strong emotions where there are no easy answers. As such, reflection may create a crisis for practitioners as normal coping mechanisms are exposed as incongruent with achieving desirable work. Given insight into 'their condition' may exacerbate a sense of frustration ultimately leading to a personal crisis where self-doubt about competence and de-masked ways of coping become redundant. Yet with enlightenment the practitioner can view the scenario unfolding, almost as an observer, and accept that things do not necessarily change quickly.

Cox *et al.* (1991:387) write:

As we come to expose these self-imposed limitations, then the focus of our reflection shifts towards new action, towards the ways in which we might begin to reconstruct and act differently within our worlds.

However, exposing these 'self-imposed limitations' may not necessarily be easy or comfortable. It may be difficult for practitioners to see beyond themselves because of 'habits of mind' that act as barriers (Margolis 1993). Margolis refers to the way paradigms are maintained and shifted. Where particular habits of mind need to be shifted for change to take place they constitute a barrier. However, as noted, a practitioner's own best interests may be distorted because of competing dominant power discourses that she has internalised and taken for granted as normal. Practitioners may feel more comfortable adhering to false beliefs or 'false consciousness' defined by Lather (1986:264) as 'the denial of how our common-sense ways of looking at the world are permeated with meanings that sustain our disempowerment'. Similarly Mezirow (1981) viewed reflection as the means to enable practitioners to penetrate 'false consciousness' through perspective transformation. He defined this as:

The emancipatory process of becoming critically aware of how and why the structure of psycho-cultural assumptions has come to constrain the way we see ourselves and our relationships, reconstituting this structure to permit a more inclusive and discriminating integration of experience and acting upon these new understandings. (Mezirow 1981:6)

Psycho-cultural assumptions are those norms and prejudices embodied within individuals and embedded within practice settings that lead people to see and act in the world in certain ways. Mezirow (1981:7) writes of 'disorienting dilemmas' and how the 'traumatic severity of the disorienting dilemma is clearly a factor in establishing the probability of a transformation'. It is this sense of disorientation or trauma that brings the person to pay attention to the experience, although a more deliberative stance can be developed as the practitioner becomes increasingly sensitive to herself in the context of what they are trying to achieve. Street (1992:16) drew the conclusion from her critical ethnography of nursing practice that:

The confrontation with experience through reflection and of the meanings and assumptions which surround it, can form a foundation upon which to make choices about future actions based on chosen value systems and new ways of thinking about and understanding nursing practice.

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the art of understanding text (Gadamer 1975). With self-inquiry, the text is our lived experiences. As such, the practitioner must stand back far enough from the text enough to move into a subjective-objective dialogical relationship with it. The art of dialogue is to know and suspend our assumptions and judgement so as to see things with clarity.

Hermeneutic spiral

Understanding evolves from a dialectical process of moving between the parts and the whole within the hermeneutical spiral. Gadamer (1975:167, cited in Weinsheimer (1985:40)) writes:

Understanding is always a movement in such a (hermeneutic) circle, for which reason the repeated return from the whole to the parts and vice versa is essential. In addition, this circle continually expands itself in that the concept of the whole is relative and the inclusion in ever larger contexts alters the understanding of single parts.

Weinsheimer (1985:40) adds:

The universe of discourse, like the physical universe, is constantly expanding. Thus the hermeneutic circle, in which truth is understood as the conclusive reconciliation of whole and part, might better be conceived as a hermeneutic spiral, in which truth keeps expanding. That is, the whole truth never *is* but always *to be* achieved.

Within one experience everything about practice and self would be revealed if we pulled it apart enough. Reflective method first seeks to reveal what is significant within the experience (written as a spontaneous story – see Chapter 2), pulling this significance out for scrutiny against the background of the whole, opening a dialogue between the whole and the parts, and always with the view to learn, and in so doing, deepening and expanding the hermeneutic spiral of being. It is both as simple and profound as that.

Wilber (1998:1) alludes to the hermeneutic spiral:

We move from part to whole and back again, and in that dance of comprehension, in that amazing circle of understanding, we come alive to meaning, to value, and to vision: the very circle of understanding guides our way, weaving together the pieces, healing the fractures... lighting the way ahead – this extraordinary movement from part to whole and back again, with healing the hallmark of each and every step, and grace the tender reward.

Wilber's language is always tinged with a sense of grace, as he acknowledges that such work is implicitly spiritual. His words have poetic resonance, reflecting that narrative,

like life itself, is finding expression to flowing with meaning. Hermeneutics is not primarily seeking understanding *of* the movement of experience but *is* the movement or flow of experience. Yet I recognise a risk in identifying hermeneutics as a ‘method’ in a traditional sense. It may suggest a linearity and structure that belies the circular, seamless, fluid nature of this reflexive, reflective approach to inquiry. I would suggest though that the hermeneutic circle accommodates this fluidity. Zukav (1979) urged us not to see hermeneutics as a concept to fit into but as a descriptor of inquiry into mystery, a kind of dance.

In his critique of Gadamer, Weinsheimer (1985:35) writes:

Historical understanding sees every moment of history, including its own, as ineluctably factual and particular, immersed in having been, and never finally determined as an instance of a general concept under which it could be conclusively subsumed, but always awaiting interpretation and always exceeding it.

Now, the subtlety of these words may have alluded me, but the practitioner always positions self as a movement within the flow of history, seeking to find meaning in experience situated within a background of past experiences. In finding meaning, the ‘who’ of practitioner changes, not simply what she does.

It is an event of being that occurs. But this event changes who she is in such a way that she becomes not something different but rather herself. (Weinsheimer 1985:71)

A resonance with Buddhism, in that one finds oneself through reflection, a self that is already there but a self obscured by false consciousness. It is as if we have to lift the blanket to see our true selves. But would we recognise our true selves? I think so, because lifting the blanket is peeling away the layers of false consciousness.

The practitioner does not stand outside tradition. Indeed she is determined by tradition. Yet by understanding tradition, she can see how it applies to her experience and can learn from it – indeed, this is how tradition and practice changes – the way a tradition determines itself from within – that is, for the way understanding alters it precisely by belonging to it. Indeed, tradition can only be understood in relation to its application to the present. Without applying learning to future experience there can be no understanding. In other words, understanding is something lived not merely an idea. As such reflection is always lived, a way of being in the world rather than an intellectual technique or learning approach.

Weinsheimer (1985:182) writes:

It is possible to become more aware of our own historical situation, the situation in which understanding takes place. Having such awareness does not mean that once the situation has become more fully conscious, we can step outside it, any more than seeing our own shadow means we can outrun it. Rather our shadow moves along with us. The situation of understanding can also be called our horizon. It marks the limit of everything that can be seen from a particular point of view, but the idea of horizon also implies that we can see beyond our immediate standpoint.

Reflection is a way of appreciating and moving beyond one’s own horizon through understanding. The idea of ‘horizon’ is visual in contrast with ‘perspective’. Becoming more aware is becoming mindful of self within experience. In becoming mindful, the practitioner makes conscious her prejudices that shape perception. Here a guide is helpful

to provoke. In provoking, the guide offers his own horizon towards co-creating meaning (see Chapter 3).

Gadamer (1975:263) writes:

If understanding always means coming to an understanding, then it always involves two – and two different – participants. The ideal is not that one party should understand the other but rather that they should reach an understanding between them. This between is the true locus of hermeneutics.

The suspension of beliefs, judgements, prejudices and the like within dialogue reflects what Gadamer (1975) refers to as pre-knowledge; the way people dialogue through a lens of personal concerns. These personal concerns are shared within a *tradition* that characterises society. Tradition has a powerful impact on the way people view the world largely because it is pre-reflective. It is most powerfully reflected in the prejudices people hold and which govern their responses to the world. Given the powerful impact of prejudice and tradition on the way people respond to the world, the reflective effort is to surface and understand the way the practitioner's prejudices create contradiction with what is desirable. It goes without saying then, that the practitioner must suspend her preconceptions.

Background

Heidegger (1962) terms *background* as a pre-reflective state that leads people to respond to others in certain ways. Heidegger (1962) noted that the researcher's background will inevitably influence understanding simply because they exist in the world. Heidegger's idea of fore-structure gives structure to background (Table 1.5). It has three aspects; fore-having, fore-sight and fore-conception. It isn't simply descriptive, but reflective, enabling the writer to consider carefully who they are, where they are coming from and what they are moving towards, and to enable readers to appreciate better where the narrator is coming from in drawing out significance and insights from the text.

The background is an introductory personal statement. It sets the boundaries to the narrative space. The significance of background usually emerges slowly through the transformative journey in context of the experiences being shared.

Table 1.5 Fore-structure as background

Fore-having	All interpretation must start with fore-having – something we have in advance. I interpret this to mean that the writer sets out their past experiences that influence the way they are in the world. How their being has been shaped. These experiences often stem back to childhood, through training and positions held. This is not easy considering who we are has largely been taken for granted.
Fore-sight	There needs to be something we see in advance. I interpret this to mean how the person views self in the context of their practice (and life), the assumptions, values, fears they hold – relating to how the present moment shapes intention.
Fore-conception	The narrator already has expectations as to what he will find out – fore-conception. This relates to expectations and projections that influence what the writer anticipates, driven by a vision that is held tentatively because often a vision is merely words. What such words mean as lived is the project.

- What is my vision that guides me forward?
- What aspects of my past are influencing how I am now?
- How do my circumstances now shape me?

As the practitioner begins to reflect and consider ideas such as vision, history, and influences on actions, then she can begin to connect with her history. Only then does history make sense in the light of who I am now.

Buddhist psychology and ancient wisdom

I have been a Buddhist these past nine years. Buddhist ideas have slowly soaked into my skin and permeated my being, inspiring and influencing my approach to reflective practice. Why I became a Buddhist is immaterial except perhaps to say that the Buddha's central message of acknowledging and easing suffering resonated deeply with my practice as a nurse and complementary therapist working with people facing death.

People suffer and lead unsatisfactory lives trapped in the samsaric world chasing pleasure and avoiding pain, poisoned by craving, aversion and ignorance. However, there is a gate along the wheel of life where they can shift, if mindful enough, into a spiral towards enlightenment, where suffering can be eased to lead a more satisfactory life in realising one's vision as a lived reality. The gate lies between the junction of feeling and acting on the feeling. The gate is open if I am mindful enough, leading to insight and changing how I am in the world.

My self-image as a complementary therapist is the Bodhisattva, flowing with wisdom and compassion in response to ease suffering. To be wise is to be mindful. The ultimate expression of reflective practice is mindfulness. Mindfulness is being present to self within the moment, with clarity, without judgement.

Goldstein (2002:89) notes:

Mindfulness is the quality of mind that notices what is present without judgment, without interference. It is like a mirror that clearly reflects what comes before it.

The idea of being without judgement, without interference, is very significant, as if being mindful is a precursor for making good judgements based on clear understanding; a precursor for wisdom. Pinar (1981) challenges us to be aware of the smudges on the mirror that distort the way we perceive self. Hence to learn, we must be aware of the smudges and then to clean the mirror to see with clarity, without distortion.

Previously I have described 'being mindful' as holding a vision within that moment, that being mindful is intentional, a movement towards transforming self towards realising one's vision as a lived reality (or enlightenment). Another aspect of being mindful is *apramada* – being aware of negative mental events that are destructive (*sangharakshita* – know your mind) – what I describe as the guard at the gate of the senses. In summary, mindfulness has these three aspects – of being present now, of being aware of the path ahead, and of being aware of how the past impacts on now. In being present now, the Buddhist sees all things as impermanent, ever changing, free from attachment to self and ideas, and that life is unsatisfactory, that it causes suffering because of ignorance (what is described as the three *lakhanas*).

Mindfulness is traditionally developed through meditation, using the breath to concentrate the mind and develop insight. Through reflection, the practitioner learns to pay

attention to self within the context of her practice. She will be more aware of those things she writes about when she returns to practice, including herself, her senses, her thought patterns, her emotions, her responses, her energy, her anxieties and the such like, and also her vision (Why am I here? What am I trying to achieve?). The development of self-consciousness is vital for the development of reflexivity.

Bringing the mind home

It may be difficult cognitively for the practitioner to focus on self, especially if the self is well defended from looking in, fearful of what might be unearthed. As such the practitioner and her guide may benefit from contemplative practices such as meditation to help her tune into 'who I am' and become more present to self to bring the mind home prior to reflection or prior to any clinical moment. This can be done by just paying attention to the breath, and flowing the breath in and out, clearing the mind of thoughts and unwanted feelings. It relaxes, energises and focuses mind, body and spirit, a mind that is often scattered in so many places.

Rinpoche (1992:31) notes:

We are fragmented into so many different aspects. We don't know who we really are, or what aspects of ourselves we should identify with or believe in. So many contradictory voices, dictates, and feelings fight for control over our inner live that we find ourselves scattered everywhere, in all directions, leaving nobody at home. Reflection then helps to bring the mind home. (p. 59)

and yet, how hard it can be to turn our attention within! How easily we allow our old habits and set patterns to dominate us! Even though they bring us suffering, we accept them with almost fatalistic resignation, for we are so used to giving in to them.

Rinpoche's words help balance the image of reflection as a cognitive activity. The ancient wisdom keepers know the secrets of the universe and consciousness, whilst the theorists grasp for explanation. Reflection is where the Buddhist and quantum theorist collide in the way they talk of the whole and the relationships between things. Spending a few minutes 'quiet time' before a session relaxing and focusing self will also help establish guided reflection as a special place for reflection, creating a sense of connection between the practitioner and her guide. It will also help the guide to be more aware of her own concerns and the need to suspend these for effective dialogue and co-creating meaning.

Framing the pursuit of self-realisation within Buddhism, or indeed any other faith, the search for self-realisation is a spiritual journey. Perhaps another way of saying self-realisation is the search for wholeness, and putting Buddhism aside, the idea of writing as search for wholeness is compelling. It is enabling self to become present to self, a self that has become distracted in so many ways. Presence is at the very centre of what nurses do ... to be fully present to another one must first be fully present to self. So writing can bring us home to ourselves.

Bentz and Shapiro (1998) draw together Buddhist thinking with Western thinking in their *Mindful inquiry in social research*, which resonates with my own thinking. They blend Buddhism with phenomenology, critical social science and within the spiral of mindful inquiry. They position mindful inquiry as a necessary approach as the fabric of modernity is torn apart in an increasingly complex world.

They set out a number of values that underpin ‘mindful inquiry’:

- Human existence, as well as research, is an ongoing process of interpreting both one’s self and others, including other cultures and subcultures;
- All research involves both accepting bias – the bias of one’s own situation and context – and trying to transcend it;
- We are always immersed in and shaped by historical, social, economic, political, and cultural structures and constraints, and those structures and constraints usually have domination and oppression, and therefore suffering built into them;
- Knowing involves caring for the world and the human life that one studies;
- The elimination or diminution of suffering is an important goal of or value accompanying inquiry and often involves critical judgement about how much suffering is required by existing arrangements;
- Inquiry often involves the critique of existing values, social and personal illusions, and harmful practices and institutions;
- Inquiry should contribute to the development of awareness and self-reflection in the inquirer and may contribute to the development of spirituality;
- Inquiry usually require giving up the ego or transcending self, even though it is grounded in self and requires intensified self-awareness;
- Inquiry may contribute to social action and be part of social action;
- The development of awareness is not a purely intellectual or cognitive process but part of people’s total way of living their lives.

Bentz and Shapiro’s work is centred on the posture of the researcher rather than as a methodology for undertaking research, suggesting that research is both moral and spiritual. Indeed, the transformation of self into higher consciousness towards self-realisation *is* spiritual (Wilber 1998). The idea that inquiry is social action leads into a deeper exploration of self-inquiry within the influences of autobiography and autoethnography.

First nations

In 1996, rummaging in a small Cambridge bookshop with Dawn Freshwater, I pick up *Earth Dance Drum* by Blackwolf and Gina Jones. It is truly an inspirational text on reflective practice, offering a poetic sense of reflection as movement through ritual dance.

I am caught by the idea of Bimadisiwin (Jones and Jones 1996:47):

Bimadisiwin is a conscious decision to become. It is time to think about what you want to be. The dance cannot be danced until you envision the dance, rehearse its movements and understand your part. It is demanding for every step needs an effort in becoming one with the vision. It takes discipline, hard work and time. Decide to be an active participant in your life journey. It is rewarding. Embrace the joy your vision brings you, it is yours to hold forever. It is freeing, for it frees the spirit. It releases you to become as you believe you must.

Believe in the vision of you
Practice the vision
Become the vision

Buddhist and First Nations' ideas are essentially ways of being in the world; they were not formulated cognitively. These ideas help to balance a Western cognitive approach grounded in rationality – itself an ironic twist from Schön's idea of overturning a technical rationality in favour of a personal knowing that determines practice, to emphasise reflection is essentially grounded in an ontology of *who we are* (Johns 2005) in contrast with an the epistemological perspective, which whilst significant, is concerned with ideas about reflection and doing reflection as some technique to be applied.

Autobiography and autoethnography

Self – the elusive 'I' that shows an alarming tendency to disappear when we try to introspect it. (*Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* 1996)

Self-inquiry is at the core of autobiography and autoethnography. Pinar (1981:184) captures the essence of autobiography as movement:

We write autobiography for ourselves, in order to cultivate our capacity to see through the outer forms, the habitual explanations of things, the stories we tell in order to keep others at a distance. It is against the taken-for-granted, against routine and ritual we work, for it is the regularized and habitual which arrest movement. In this sense we seek a dialectical self-self relation, which then permits a dialectical relationship between self and work, self and others. ... one falls back on oneself – rather than on the words of others – and must articulate what is yet unspoken, act as midwife for the unborn. One uncovers *one's domain assumptions*, one's projections – not in order to wipe the slate clean but in order to understand the slate of which one is the existential basis, the basis which makes knowing possible.

Dialectical relationships resonate with dialogue, commencing with self and then, like pebbles tossed into the still water, rippling out to embrace all situations and relationships, peeling away the surface layers to reveal the concealed taken-for-granted that constructs unwitting lives, enabling the practitioner to come to a reflexive awareness of self. From this awareness comes movement to move beyond existing understandings. Pinar's language resonates with critical social science yet on a personal level as if suggesting that *one's domain assumptions* constrains one's possibilities – the idea of a self not yet born. As Pinar (1981) continues:

What we aspire to when we work autobiographically is not adherence to conventions of a literary form. Nor do we think of audience, of portraying our life to others. *We write autobiography for ourselves*, in order to cultivate our capacity to see through the outer forms, the habitual explanations of things, the stories we tell in order to keep others at a distance. It is against the taken-for-granted, against routine and ritual we work, for it is the regularized and habitual which arrest movement. [Emphasis added]

When I first engaged with reflection, I saw it as self-inquiry in order towards realising a vision of practice and of self. Pinar's words do not reflect this quest. He suggests autobiography is understanding what exists or existed. He does suggest that this understanding opens a path to move beyond but he doesn't say move beyond to what. Perhaps simply getting in better shape.

Reflecting on Pinar's words, 'We write autobiography for ourselves', I want to add a proviso – 'although others may read it'. Narratives are to be read and performed, to

engage and challenge others. They are always written for more than just ourselves, although I would agree with Pinar if he had said that narratives are written *primarily* for ourselves. Reflection is always concerned with *self*-realisation.

Pinar asserts that the focus of autobiography is *the felt problematic*. The emphasis on *felt* suggests that autobiography is not simply a rational approach, but perceptive, responsive to situations and intuitive, without formulaic approaches on how to do it. Leaps of the imagination to be tested.

Autoethnography

Discovering autoethnography I spontaneously felt at home such was the resonance. Clough (2000:282) writes:

Autoethnographic writing has been nothing so much as the work of a subject self-consciously reflecting on the process of knowing self and other – that is knowing one's place in relationship to the other.

Ethnography is the study of culture whereby the researcher is immersed within another's culture in order to study it as if from within the culture rather than as a stranger to it. It is only by experiencing culture every day can it be appreciated. The researcher is immersed in his or her own culture.

Ellis (2004:xix) defines autoethnography as:

Research, writing, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural and social. This form usually features concrete action, emotion, embodiment, self-consciousness, and introspection portrayed in dialogue scenes, characterization, and plot. Thus, it claims the conventions of literary writing.

Linking the personal to the cultural and social suggests that autoethnography reveals and critiques social conditions that govern the personal, a personal that is traumatised, characterised by trauma stories that reflect issues of gender, class, abuse, race, prejudice, hatred and oppression, and triggered by rage and a 'disturbed' subjectivity – narratives that reveal and heal wrapped into an experimental intellectual covering where the personal becomes political and the political becomes personal, an image drawn from autoethnographic accounts from the USA.

Holman Jones (2005:767) cites Oleson (2000:215) that 'rage is not enough' – the challenge to move from rage to progressive politic action, to theory and method that connect politics, pedagogy and ethics to action in the world. In other words, feelings trigger reflection on some unsatisfactory aspect of life and culture, and that the revelation in coherent narrative form must move to social action that confronts and changes culture for the better.

Clough (2000) argues that the critique of traditional ethnographic writing is grounded in a reconfiguration of nature, culture and technology, both a reflection of and a response to what Bentz and Shapiro (1998) note as the 'post-modern turn', suggesting we are living at a historical turning point, when modern myths no longer offer adequate explanations, leading to a crisis in ways of knowing and opening a contested space for ways of knowing and what counts as truth.

In line with this, Holman Jones (2005) views autoethnography as a radical democratic politics – a politics committed to creating space for dialogue and debate that instigates

and shapes social change. Again shades of a critical social science. Emotions are important to understanding and theorising the relationship among self, power and culture and that narrative/performance is a palpable emotional experience for the writer/performer. It is writing the body. Hence narratives themselves must be written in deeply engaging and shocking ways to make their point *if* social change is the agenda. The narrator is transformed in the process of self-inquiry.

What differentiates autoethnography from narrative as self-inquiry and transformation is reflexivity. Autoethnography is not so much something being lived through as a looking back on a situation. It does not seem to have an overt agenda of self-inquiry towards self-realisation in tune with a vision of self or practice. Stories help us create, interpret, and change our social, cultural, political and personal lives. Autoethnographic texts point out not only the necessity of narrative in our world but also the power of narrative to reveal and revise that world, even when we struggle for words, when we fail to find them, or when the unspeakable is invoked but not silent (Holman Jones 2005).

The performance turn

And as if narrative was not enough stimulation, I am turned by performance.

As we move beyond ethnography as description to consider its performative potentials, we open a space for conceptual flowering. (Gergen and Gergen 2002:12)

I suppose this chapter is about conceptual flowering, shaping ideas into a coherent whole. To reiterate – narrative is the representation of the journey towards self-realisation. Along the journey, barriers that constrain self-realisation are encountered – barriers that are embodied within self and embedded in social structures. The practitioner seeks to understand these barriers in order to understand them and shift them, changing these conditions and self as necessary to realise self. Not an easy task given the resistance of these barriers firmly embedded as they are within self and society. There is no rational approach, just finding new paths through experience. As such the personal is always social, cultural, political and vice versa.

Performance shifts narrative into a new domain, from representation of self to presentation of self. Denzin (2003:9/14) writes that performance is an act of intervention, a method of resistance, a form of criticism, a way of revealing ... agency ... performances make sites of oppression visible. Narrative also does this, but performance does it in a different way – engaging the audience in a lived experience of their own within an agenda to use the performance as social action towards change, however slight.

I know that reading a narrative and listening to a narrative are different experiences. Some years ago I read a narrative as a conference paper. I had given this paper to a number of delegates to read some weeks before. In the ensuing dialogue these 'readers' commented that the experience of listening to the narrative was different from reading it. In what way? The reading was more heart-felt. People tend to listen with their hearts and read with their heads. As I envisaged reading narrative, I began to write them differently – the reason why my narratives struggled for publication acceptance – so that people were reading words meant to be listened to! And with a critical eye that revealed prejudice to what a scholarly paper should look like. A significant insight.

I take some refuge in the words of Gergen and Gergen (2002:18) (ethnographically speaking):

but given the twin assumptions that scholarship is inherently the work of the rationally engaged mind, and that words are the finest expression of rational deliberation, the visual media are typically treated as secondary to the more important craft of writing. It is high time to challenge the prevailing logo-centrism of this tradition, not only with visual media but also with the entire range of communicative expression at our disposal.

At this time I was simply reading my narrative, often against a background of images and music to heighten and contrast the impact of words. I was not self-conscious of 'performing it'.

Langellier (1999:127) writes:

Performance is the term used to describe a certain type of particularly involved and dramatized oral narrative. Of special importance is how performance contributes to the evaluative function of personal narrative – the 'so what'.

I realised that the difference between reading a narrative and performing a narrative was primarily my self-consciousness of the impact of the performance on the audience. So I began to write performances from the narratives. The scripts were no longer the same as I learnt that performance is a stylised form of narrative that seeks to make dramatic impact to make certain points that aim at disrupting the normal state of social affairs. In other words, the personal became political. This is what I understand by *performativity*. Langellier (1999:135) writes that performativity:

Articulates and situates personal narrative within the forces of discourse ... which makes cultural conflict concrete and accessible – to become aware of performance as a contested space, problematizing identity and contextual assumptions. ... The personal in performance implies a (performative) struggle for agency ... without performativity personal narrative risks being a performance practice without a theory of power to interrogate what subject positions are culturally available, what texts and narrative forms are privileged, and what discursive contexts prevail in interpreting experience.

Langellier's words reflect the critical social science agenda. I resonate with the idea of contested space – that the performer opens this space for dialogue – and so performance must always have this space built in, otherwise it is merely a performance that lacks performativity. It lacks the 'so what'. So, performance is textured to reveal the 'critical' relationships between people grounded within a specific situation, with the intention of triggering self-inquiry and transformation within the audience about their own lives. The performer crafts a dialogical space to disturb public life.

Ellis and Bochner (1996:28) write of the desire for the audience to engage on some level in a self-conscious reflexivity on their own relation to the experience. Turner (1988) writes of enabling the audience to draw back upon themselves self-consciously.

Performance of possibilities

Alexander (2005) drew my attention to Sonyi Madison's (1998) idea of the performance of possibilities. I could see that narratives were narratives of possibility and resistance – that they opened the path of what was possible and revealed the resistance to that path. Such conceptualisation offers a neat way of summarising the critical social science agenda. Hence the reader or listener can ask – to what extent is this narrative a narrative of possibility and resistance?

Madison (1998, cited in Alexander (2005:430–1)) sets out a number of criteria to appreciate her stance on possibility:

- ‘The performance of possibilities functions as a politically engaged pedagogy that never has to convince a predefined subject – whether empty or full, whether essential or fragmented – to adopt a new position. Rather, the task is to win an already positioned, already invested individual or group to a different set of places, a different organization of the space of possibilities.
- The performance of possibilities invokes an investment in politics and “the other”, keeping in mind the dynamics of performance, audience and subjects while at the same time being wary of both zealots and cynics.
- The performance of possibilities takes the stand that performance matters because it does something in the world. What it does for audience, the subjects, and those engaged in it must be driven by thoughtful critique of assumptions and purpose.
- The performance of possibilities does not accept being heard and included as its focus, but only as a starting point. Instead, voice is an embodied historical self that constructs and is constructed by a matrix of social and political processes. The aim is to present and represent subjects as made and makers of meaning, symbol, and history in their fullest sensory and social dimensions. Therefore, the performance of possibilities is also a performance of voice wedded to experience.
- The performance of possibilities as an integrative field aims to create or contribute to a discursive space where unjust systems and processes are identified and interrogated. It is where what has been expressed through the illumination of voice and the encounter with subjectivity motivates individuals to some level of informed and strategic action.
- The performance of possibilities motivates performers and spectators to appropriate the rhetorical currency they need, from the inner space of the performance to the outer domain of the social world, in order to make a material difference.
- The performance of possibilities necessitates creating performances where the intent is largely to invoke interrogation of specific political and social processes so that art is seen as consciously working toward a cultural politics of change that resonates in a progressive and involved citizenship.
- The performance of possibilities strives to reinforce to audience members the web of citizenship and the possibilities of their individual selves as agents and change makers.
- The performance of possibilities acknowledges that when audience members begin to witness degrees of tension and incongruity between a subject’s life-world and those processes and systems that challenge and undermine that world, something more and new is learned about how power works.
- The performance of possibilities suggests that both performers and audiences can be transformed. They can be themselves and more as they travel between worlds – the spaces that they and others actually inhabit and the spaces of possibility of human liberation.
- The performance of possibilities is moral responsibility and artistic excellence that culminates in the active intervention of unfair closures, remaking the possibility for new openings that bring the margins to a shared centre.
- The performance of possibilities does not arrogantly assume that we are exclusively giving voice to the silenced, for we understand they speak and have been speaking in space and places often foreign to us.

- The performance of possibilities in the new millennium will specialize in the wholly impossible reaching toward light, justice, and enlivening possibilities.’

As I dwell within these criteria I begin to explore their meaning for my own work. I recognise that my own narratives lack this political intention. I am beginning to rectify this, nurturing my political consciousness reflected in more recent performances such as *My mum's death* (Johns 2009c) and *Jane's rap* (see Chapter 11). Like all ideas, Madison's ideas of possibility and resistance requires the reader to consider and critique in applying to their own work. I ask my students to consider Madison's criteria whilst observing performance, offering a context much easier than an abstract review. Dialogue enables a play of ideas, evolving into a gradual weaving into meaning. The hermeneutic spiral at play. Considering Madison's criteria seems to interrupt the flow of meaning; it demands looking at each criterion as a part rather than grasping the whole of the performance. The criteria become a checklist and yet deepen appreciation of performance as possibility.

Self-inquiry as chaos

Wheatley (1999:118) writes about a chaotic view of order:

When we concentrate on individual moments or fragments of experience, we see only chaos. But if we stand back and look at what is taking shape, we see order. Order always displays itself as patterns that develop over time.

Self-inquiry is essentially chaotic in its quest to find meaning and gain insight through the maze of lived experience. Yet self-inquiry doesn't seek to impose order, rather it seeks to pattern the myriad of meanings within the complexity and uncertainty of human service practice. Self-inquiry is guided by the intention to realise a vision of practice. This is the strange attractor that patterns meaning. The reflective practitioner stretches to move beyond personal and organisational boundaries in the quest to realise self. As she moves away from the centre where it feels safe and secure because things do not change, the practitioner comes to realise that practice *is* chaotic. Chaos is the creative edge. It is confidently stretching into the unknown, encouraging the practitioner to let go of any need to impose control on experience and to being open to the possibilities of her own practice. It is liberation from the demand of the Newtonian machine for control and predictability.

Wheatley (1999) in her exploration of the world of chaos and complexity finds there is no analytical language for explaining things at the quantum level. Technical analysis is inadequate to understand and embrace the wholeness of human life. Wheatley (p. 141) finds it necessary to move beyond traditional ways of knowing into the realm of sensation described by the German philosopher Heidegger as a 'dwelling consciousness'. This is a realm in which analytical skills are put to one side and intuition and sensation are called on in their place. In traditional science, the scientist creates a question and then interrogates the subject in order to draw a conclusion. The art of 'dwelling consciousness' demands that we move away from interrogation to receptivity, that we 'dwell with the phenomenon and feel how it makes itself known to us' (Wheatley 1999:141). With greater appreciation of the ultimately random, irrational world of existence, reflection is a way of drawing the self together from the turmoil of daily life. Johns (2002:11) describes it

as a 'space of stillness that enables the practitioner to reconstitute the wholeness of experience'. Sadly modern life has developed such a momentum that without discipline there is no time to reflect or be still. Lack of meaning has little impact until tragedy draws us to a halt. Then we find we cannot ignore the human need for self-reference and meaning (Wheatley 1999).

Self-inquiry is finding pattern both within practice and as a way of looking back on practice, shaping the reflexive narrative through meaning and insights.

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