Chapter Eight: Reflections and Concluding Commentary

> Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his [sic] whole life; with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds.
>
> (Bakhtin, 1984, p.293)

Introduction

It feels like a long time since I joined the Diploma in Action Research Programme at Bath in 2002, when I felt the nervousness of putting together the collage for that first day. I now recognise, even welcome, the feelings of agitation and absorption as part of my process: of linking thoughts and emotions through the now familiar tussle of analytic and intuitive reasoning, mind and body, reason and emotion, left and right brain, head and heart (see Figure One).

Reviewing the collage almost six years later, I am struck by the dark background; by the physical space that the senses and powerful emotions occupy; and by my own mobility first to Russia and then within Europe in order to delve deeper into my father's war narratives. When I glued on the cut out newspaper headline 'Of love and loss' by the picture of the memorial in a clearing of silver birch trees, I was aware that a whole unexplored area in my life rested beneath those four short words and that image. Am I though that different from anybody else? Yes, there are questions of degree, but life is quintessentially about relation and response; and yet we are often unprepared for the emotional merry-go-round and episodic emergence that living entails, and which I have sought to track through narrative inquiry (Frank, 1995; Clandinin and Connolly 1994, 2000; McNiff, 2007).

As part of the research into the influences of World War II on my life, I bore witness to veterans' narratives; travelled across Europe to sit in war cemeteries and old battlefields; photographed the landscape of war; and reflected in places of respite and nature. In the previous chapter, through sections of the supplementary report, I drew attention to themes from participants' narratives, and to the wider context in which they lived, worked, played and learned. So a good place to start bringing this thesis to a conclusion is to theorise about our relationship with our immediate environment, because that is inextricably related to how we define a person or perceive a child's home or a tree with shrapnel wounds as Subject rather than Object and how we respond.

In this concluding chapter I begin by discussing the contribution of hermeneutics and phenomenology to understanding, and I advocate a sensory approach to recognition and response. I consider our responsibility [response-ability] *toward* the Other, to *act*, which follows with a critique of Levinas' notion of responsibility *for* the Other and his conception of 'facehood'. I argue that how the status of personhood or subjecthood is accorded is the crucial issue: understanding of diversity and difference, of the Other as another person or

being like me, only occurs through dialogue. I address issues that arise when our environment changes, that is, when and how we move in the world. I link my living theory to self/ employee care in human service organizations to slow down perception so that the Other might be seen and responded to, and to wider debates on dehumanization in public services; and I address implications for children and families work. Finally, I share the healing aspects of the research process through presentational form and I consider where that leaves me now.

The contribution of hermeneutics and phenomenology

I have referred throughout to the influence of hermeneutics on my inquiry approach, commencing with Schwandt's definition of 'understanding' in Chapter Two, which draws on the German term *Verständnis*: '*Verständnis* means comprehension, insight, appreciation for something, to comprehend it – *für etwas Verständnis haben*' (Schwandt, 2002, p.78). Thus understanding is distinct from knowing: this acknowledgement of interpretation is expressed in the question 'What do you make of that?' as opposed to 'How do you know that?' (Schwandt, 2002). In life we are always attempting to construe the meaning of something, to make something of whatever it is we seek to understand. This is interpretative or hermeneutical understanding, and it is has a crucial role to play in helping qualitative researchers, like myself, and practitioners understand how and why they arrived at particular conceptions. As Moran says:

> We grasp and interpret objects in terms of a fore-having, a 'fore-sight' (Vorsicht) and a 'pre-grasp' or 'fore-conception' (Vorgriff) of the thing. The relation between these advance expectations and future confirmations and disconfirmations constitutes the essence of understanding as interpreting (Auslegung). (Moran, 2000, p.277)

Thus all understanding involves self-understanding as we seek to understand the frames that guide our interpretations:

> Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and state in which we live. The focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror. The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life. That is why the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgements, constitute the historical reality of his being. (Gadamer, 1989, p.277)

As I have argued elsewhere, in Chapter Six and within some sections of the supplementary report in the last chapter, to challenge such preconceptions which are the basis for enduring prejudices, and the maintenance of conflict narratives is not easy (see, for example, the sections of the supplementary report on positive role models for children and young people, parental guilt and assessment issues, analysis and recording). It requires each and every one of us, as individuals and in groups, to be able to learn from the shadow side of ourselves and the organisations we work in. Biesta (2006) identifies such learning, not as being able to reproduce something, but when one has to respond to what is unfamiliar, what irritates, what disturbs. In this unfamiliar context learning can become a creation, bringing forth one's own unique response; and with others, the possibility to create new narratives of reconciliation, cooperation and partnership, such as in cross-cultural, inter-agency and inter-professional relationships.

Ladkin (2005) discusses the contribution of phenomenology in negotiating the relationships between 'self', 'other' and 'truth', which I have alluded to above. People, like me, who aspire to be action researchers, are encouraged to engage with 'critical subjectivity'; and to develop an inquiring practice which notices habitual influences on our frames of reference. Indeed, much of this thesis has been concerned with tracking 'inner' and 'outer' arcs of attention which form our consciousness (Marshall, 2001). Ladkin proposes the phenomenological notion of 'bracketing' as one way of managing our expectations, preconceptions and culturally bound interpretations, all of which influence subjectivity. Through bracketing 'we are more able to look *at* what we normally look *through*' (Sokolowski, 2000, p.50, original emphasis, cited in Ladkin (2005, p.120), allowing phenomena to 'speak for themselves'. In practice this means attempting to attend to what is happening in the present right now, without either bringing previous experiences or received knowledge to bear, and not interpreting the phenomenon to fit future expectations or anticipated outcomes. The focus is on the specific attributes of the current encounter and noticing how perceptions, as thoughts, feelings or bodily reactions, occur in the immediate experience of whatever is under consideration. I have found such analysis of reactions, and separation of what I bring to an encounter from the past and what I might expect from it in the future extremely difficult. Acquiring the focus necessary for 'bracketing' can potentially be aided by practising meditation on a regular basis (Macbeth, 1990; Schiffmann, 1996).

A second method is also advocated by Ladkin as a means to attend to 'the things themselves', which is a central concern of phenomenologists and within this thesis: she draws on Goethe's contribution to perceive the other in a pre-interpreted way. Using his notion of 'observation' and the work of Bortoft (following Goethe), she argues that the perceiver should put all of her/his effort into plunging into the qualities of whatever is being observed. In explaining what is required, Bortoft (1996, p.67) says: 'Through trying to direct attention into the act of looking, we can experience for ourselves the gap which there is between our habitual awareness and the direct experience of what is there in front of us'. This kind of consciousness, as I have discussed previously, is a shift away from the analytic mode to a more intuitive, sensory way of seeing: 'This holistic mode of consciousness can be entered by plunging into looking, by redeployment of attention into sense perception, away from the verbal-intellectual mind' (Bortoft, 1996, p.63).

This, I would argue, is what occurred for some of the men whose narratives I included at the end of Chapter Six, when they met the eyes of the Other, such as Tom and the wounded German soldier in the back of the ambulance at Arnhem or Stan with the Russian men on the forced march in 1945. The narratives of Ernie and Ernest concern being a recipient of the Other's response, such as being held or supported at their most vulnerable. My response to Suzie's narrative also potentially falls into this category. In the inter-human moment, the giver is touched by the Other and is called to make a response.

This ethical and sensory mode of consciousness is also necessary to perceive 'the Child as a subject not an object of concern' (Secretary of State for Social Services, 1988, p.245) or looked after children, waiting for placements, as subjects, "little children"; rather than objects or like "second hand cars", in the words of approved adopters in the Family Placement Assessment Study (Jones, 2004). However, it is often difficult to slow down sufficiently to generate this quality of receptive consciousness, which is similar to the 'I-Thou' relationship (Buber, 1958, cited in Ladkin, 2005), where the Other is seen as on an equal footing as oneself. In this regard, Ladkin (2005, p.121) argues that

phenomenological methods can offer a means to perceive frames of understanding and habitual responses in slow motion, as they first form in consciousness, and are then enacted. In this way they can be attended to, and deepen interpretative understanding:

> What these phenomenological methods are trying to provide, perhaps, is a means by which this interaction can be slowed down and consciously attended to. In doing so, aspects of the other (or even ourselves and our patterns of perception) which are habitually ignored can reveal themselves, leading to the possibility of a fuller knowing of truth arising between us.

Thus the ‘holistic mode of consciousness’ needs to be infused with the capacity to decelerate, employing all the senses in a move away from the incessant chattering of the ‘verbal intellectual mind’. This is where self care techniques, such as being and walking in nature and meditation, as I have mentioned elsewhere, can be used to help move the body into stillness and focus before, during and after engagement (Macbeth, 1990; Schiffmann, 1996):

> When you experience your awareness in stillness and feel the peace within you, you will come upon a new awareness of who you are. This new awareness will convince you that “you” are part of a greater whole, that you are not separate energy nor a separate consciousness. (Schiffmann, 1996, p. 31)

Schiffman also emphasises the importance of eye contact, starting with yourself, then with a friend and then with others:

> You’re not just connecting with your eyes when you connect in this way. You are connecting mentally. You are becoming one with that “other” one. You’re being in the same world together, acknowledging one another’s existence. You’re looking beyond the surface identification to the real person inside, and you’re learning to see the thing in you that you call “you” in the other person. (Schiffmann, 1996, p.34)

When we are stilled and more attuned to the immediate environment, we are more able to recognise the Other, and most importantly, to connect and respond (Levinas, 1969). It was this kind of thinking that I used to analyse the conversation with Suzie in the previous chapter; and which informed the suggestions about making eye contact with children and parents during assessment, and quality spaces for listening, thinking and reflecting. I discuss the inter-relationship between vision and touch, and recognition and response in the next section.

A sensory approach to recognition and response

Oliver (2001) referring to the work of Vasseleu (1988) theorises about ‘recognition’ using a notion of vision as touch, where the sensible and intelligible are fused rather than separated:

> [Vasseleu] explains that the separation between the sensible and the intelligible, between body and mind or soul, has been constructed around the notion of the mind’s eye and an immaterial seeing cut off from the body and sensation, a more accurate seeing. The split between the mind’s eye and the body’s eye is interlaced with the split between objective theoretical knowledge and subjective personal feeling. Objective theoretical knowledge requires a notion of vision as a distancing sense that separates the mind’s eye from the

> body and gives it a privileged perspective devoid of contaminating sentiment. Information gathered through touch and more proximal senses is thought to provide only subjective feeling and cannot be the grounds for knowledge. (Oliver 2001, p. 212)

If we consider vision as founded on touch, as Vasseleu says, then the split between mind and body, between head and heart, between objective and subjective, can no longer be sustained: 'The distance and space for reflection and insight that comes with vision through the mediation of light are lost as the sense of sight passes to the sense of touch' (1998, p.12).

In this conception of vision, which involves touching light, we are touched and are touching everything around us even as we see the distance that there might be between us and our immediate environment and other people around us. The unseen source of light is sensuous: 'Space is not empty, because it is filled with the density of air. And the density of air connects and separates everything on earth. Remembering air and the density of air reminds me that I am both connected to and different from those around me'. (Oliver 2001, p. 213)

I used this conception of vision as touch in understanding the inter-human in narratives about 'eyes', which Tom and Stan alluded to when Tom saw the wounded German soldier eye to eye in the back of the ambulance and Stan touched the eyes of the Russian men on the forced march. I applied the same conception in the visual inquiry, when I took photographs of the natural environment, such as the trees in Oosterbeek with their shrapnel wounds. I also developed the notion of 'vision as touch' in professional practice during the interview with Suzie when I bore witness to her suffering.

Narrative, response and response-ability

In our conversation and in our joint witnessing of her narrative on the sound file, Suzie was re-working her life story. Laub (1992), referring to narratives of extreme human pain, reminds us of the importance of bearing witness, of listening to and hearing the Other; a process of reconstructing a history, re-storying a life, needs to be set in motion for the Other to begin healing. This, Laub argues, involves transferring a story to a person outside of oneself, and then taking it back inside again. This dyadic relation is the recognition that even though our bodies might be physically separate, 'this other *has to do with me as I with it* '(emphasis added by Frank, 1995, p.35; Buber,1958). In that moment of dialogue and touch, I recognised Suzie's woundedness. Like me, she was re-storying her life and I was called to respond. I was a witness who helped Suzie to re-build, or perhaps even plant for the first time, a seed or sense of self esteem and self love: prolonged neglect, when basic needs are consistently unmet corrodes body, mind and self perception.

When encountering another's narrative early on, like Suzie's, we have little preliminary knowledge of the lay of the land. For example, when I listened to my father's narrative about the troop ships in the Mediterranean and he suddenly started crying, I was taken completely by surprise; and when I had the session with Graham on my birthday, which I recounted in Chapter Four, I had no idea he had witnessed the violent scene he described to me. All I knew then was that Graham had been neglected and that he might have been sexually abused. My initial response was to attempt to leave as soon as I reasonably could, drive home as fast as possible and celebrate my birthday with a waiting family.

In the telling of any narrative which involves trauma, some long buried memories might only return in the telling of the story. Laub (1992) powerfully reminds us what might be at issue here for the listener:

> Bearing witness to a trauma is, in fact, a process that includes the listener. For the testimonial process to take place, there needs to be a bonding, the intimate and total presence of an other – in the position of the one who hears. Testimonies are not monologues; they cannot take place in solitude. The witnesses are talking to somebody: to somebody they have been waiting for for a long time.(Laub, 1992, pp.70-71)

This discussion raises the issue of response, and the need to reflect on the nature of responsibility (Levinas, 1991; Oliver, 2001). In the previous chapter referring to my practice on the evaluation, I argued for an extension to Levinas' notion of responsibility, as it relates narratives of suffering, to one which encompasses appreciative and practical, trust-building responses in daily practice, with an emphasis on follow through and accountability. This type of respectful and service-user or participant-affirming orientation from the outer witness helps the inner witness to come forth and begin re-storying her/his life.

However, the obligations which Levinas' sense of responsibility places upon us and his notion of 'facehood' raise some difficulties. For Levinas, insofar as we are Subjects in our relations with otherness and Others, we have an obligation both *to* and *for* the Other. The notion of command is inherent in this obligation. Moreover one's responsibility is not symmetrical or reciprocal:

> Responsibility is what is incumbent on me exclusively, and what, humanly, I cannot refuse. I am I in the sole measure that I am responsible, a non-interchangeable I. I can substitute myself for everyone, but no one can substitute himself for me. Such is my inalienable identity of subject. It is in this precise sense that Dostoyevsky said:"We are all responsible for all men [sic] before all, and I more than all the others.(Levinas, 1985, cited in Oliver, p.234)

To refuse this responsibility is to deny our humanity, and yet infinite responsibility is an ideal as Levinas admits (Levinas, 1989). For Levinas the face of the Other is 'a demand not a question. The face is a hand in search of recompense, an open hand' (Bernasconi and Wood, 1988, p.169).

However as Moran (2000) points out, Levinas fails to define the nature of 'facehood', or in my terms, 'personhood' or 'subjecthood'. This leaves us with somewhat of an ethical conundrum: for Levinas the nature of the ethical is to offer or provide the appropriate response, whatever that might be. As such he stops short of specifying the manner of response, although there is a responsibility to make one (Moran, 2000), but how facehood or personhood is accorded and to whom remains unanswered.

History teaches us that how we determine personhood is fundamental, as I have argued in earlier chapters. Whenever the right to personhood is being called into question, it is a calling for a dialogue with difference. A genuine event of understanding has the potential for profound learning, but also comes with inherent risks challenging habitual, largely unconscious responses and self-identity:

> . . . Historically and culturally conditioned prejudices provide the forestructure that makes [understanding] possible. To listen to others different from ourselves we must remain open and that means parts of our interpretive forestructure is rendered at risk. Said differently, active listening requires personal vulnerability. Risking self-identity is dangerous. Advocates of dialoguing across differences rarely acknowledge this danger. (Garrison, 1996, p.449)

In my conversations with Gerd, I was potentially in this situation and so was he. We built trust and understanding gradually, through our conversations and email, and I reflected on how my perceptions changed and how I could act on the learning.

One of the biggest challenges we face in the world today, along with global warming, is terrorism and the rise of religious extremism: given historical and cultural prejudices, wars of the 21st century will inevitably centre around such extremism, and walls built of fear and misunderstanding on all sides, unless we dialogue with difference in times of peace to prevent to war. So after my conversations with Gerd, I enrolled on a 'Multicultural Mosaic' extra-mural programme to learn about different faiths in Leicester and visit their places of worship. Taking this course was a modest step towards helping me dialogue with people of different cultures and faiths within the UK; however it is far more than that, it is the commitment that each and every one of us needs to make as we go about our daily business all of our lives (see quotes from the Jersey War Tunnels, Chapter Six, p. 135).

We stand to learn the most when dialoguing with diversity and difference; when we are stretched and challenged in the worldly space of Otherness; when we question self-identity; and when we rise above stereotyping and the conflict narrative to a new understanding of the I-You relation (Biesta, 2006; White, 2004; Buber, 1965; Avnon, 1993). Understanding conceived of in this way happens to us, it is a dialogic event that we take part in as historical beings. Human existence is about dialogue and relation; it is how we learn about each other as 'faces, using Levinas' terms, or persons or subjects using my terms. All the time asking ourselves: *What is my responsibility towards this person? And how should I act?*

In my living theory, the notion of *responsibility [response-ability] towards* emphasises action on my part, *ability*, even down to the smallest detail, but also a sense of the Other's responsibility *for* themselves. How I respond, how I act in daily life is inextricably linked to my being in the world; it is also related to the power or powerlessness of the person I am responding to (see, for example, Chapter One, section on Respect for persons and understanding power relationships in practice).

I have far more responsibility *towards* a child who I think is being abused, because their carer may not be acknowledging the child's needs and exercising their responsibility as an adult *for* him/her. This is different to Levinas' notion: in his view, as I have indicated above, I am always responsible *for* the other's response, which I would argue places an impossible burden on me: what if the other decides to assume no responsibility for themselves, and yet is capable of taking it? Or consistently fails to assume responsibility for a dependent? It also fails to take sufficient account of the wider systems, such as families, in which most of us live: what is their responsibility?

In any set of circumstances, there needs to be a balance between my responsibility *for* myself, my responsibility *towards* the Other, her/his responsibility *for* her/himself, and *for* Others, for example children or other dependents, and *towards* me. This is not to imply

that responsibility is impossible without reciprocity, rather this is an organising framework for dialogue and reflection. One very concrete example of this is determining the limits of family support in families where chronic child neglect is a problem (see, for example, the Chronology of Graham's early life in Chapter One where services were offered but refused by the adults). Another is making sense of the responsibilities of family members, perhaps where they are from a different culture to one's own: what is reasonable and how should I respond?

The key issue, as I have discussed in Chapter One, is how a person is accorded the status of personhood; and in order to recognise the Other as a person, we need to be in the right frame of both mind *and* body to dialogue and respond. This is where self care, awareness of movement, and our mobility as human beings come into the picture.

Moving between stillness and engagement

During this inquiry I became far more aware of our movement as human beings in the world and our ever changing relationship with our immediate environment as we travel: a participative world-view which emphasises the dynamic inter-relationship between the environment, the individual and her/his community, and between human communities and the natural world (Reason, 1994). Dewey's conception of experience (Dewey, 1981) rests on this fluidity of consciousness: the continuous interaction of human thought with our personal, material and social environment, which is, itself, perpetually changing as we, ourselves, move.

Dewey's ontology is transactional and has far-reaching epistemological implications where the regulative ideal for inquiry is not to produce a faithful representation of reality outside of and independent of the knower (Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007):

> Because every experience is constituted by interaction between "subject" and "object", between a self and its world, it is not itself either merely physical nor merely mental, no matter how much one factor or the other predominates . . . [experiences] are the products of discrimination, and hence can be understood only as we take into account the total normal experience in which both inner and outer factors are so incorporated that each has lost its special character. In an experience, things and events belonging to the world, physical and social, are transformed through the human context they enter, while the live creature is changed and developed through the things previously external to it. (Dewey, 1981, p.251)

I have argued for a transactional or relational ontology (Thayer-Bacon, 2003), where experiences of movement, person and place are interpreted and re-interpreted as the narratives and this account of narrative inquiry illustrate. Many of the men's stories are about people, travel and movement: the disorientation that continually being on the move can cause (Wolse, Undated); being in the air, physically landing on the ground and finding your way about in a strange land when under attack; the embodied nature of combat; immobility on the battle field (Mellett, 1970-1980; Sims, 1980); movement as a prisoner on foot, by ambulance, in cattle trucks; incarceration in the camp; the 'liberation' flight home; and settling back into a changed post war Britain. The embodied experiences behind these narratives only really begin to make sense when they are theorised from the perspective of movement and 'mobilities' (Urry, 2000, 2003; Ferguson, 2006): to get close to or rather sense the whole picture as far as that is possible, the narrative accounts need

to begin with the journey into service or battle and end somewhere back home, wherever home is or might be. This is body and mind moving through unfamiliar space.

My own journeys, such as the narratives of my visits to Graham's home and to the 'tucked away' household in the evaluation, and the journeys I made within Europe and Russia have helped form my living theory of response-ability, movement, stillness and engagement. I noticed when I acted out of character within a strange land and my body craved chocolate, and I applied that learning to the otherness of the men's experiences as they moved on foot and were moved by different forms of transport across Europe in conditions which threatened survival on a daily basis.

In a professional capacity, I tracked the sensory effects of travel in my car (Ferguson, 2006), leaving my car and going into a child's home; 'touching' the child's world with my senses (Oliver, 2001); when I felt tired, when I disengaged, when I was open. I logged movement, engagement and withdrawal at the reunions and in Jersey; the intense journey by car and on foot around Germany with Svenja in June 2006; and movement by bike and on foot around Oosterbeek in August 2006. I described moments of movement and stillness in the elements and landscape of Eastern England. And finally I reflected on movement, time and space in the additional learning report of the evaluation. In this thesis I have used a phenomenological hermeneutic approach to develop a dynamic, relational understanding of experience, text, and object.

Self care and cultivation of the self

In Chapter Two of this thesis I introduced care of the self, and cited Foucault's essay 'The Cultivation of the Self' to argue for the importance of self care in human inquiry (Foucault, 1986): if I cannot care for myself then I will not be able to care for or respond to others.

During this thesis I have tracked the relation of myself to myself as I moved through and within various cycles of action and reflection. I wrote up some of the activities, which supported self care, such as good nutrition, yoga, meditation, being and moving in nature, and the role of more vigorous exercise which I found particularly helpful in times of intense inquiry (Macbeth, 1990; Schiffmann, 1996; Servan-Schreiber, 2004). However, I will resist any temptation to be evangelical or overly prescriptive as to how, you, the reader, and others should practice self care: there is enough of that available through the media, on the Internet and on the lifestyle shelves in large book stores.

What I can say is that we all have to find our own ways of cultivating ourselves and it is not necessary or desirable to punish yourself for not having done what you planned to do last night or this morning: a pattern which I possessed in the early days at Bath but which gradually relaxed and became more emergent with the changing seasons and what I really felt like doing here, right now. There is no magic route map, just to keep experimenting with a range of options to find out what makes you feel most alive, responsive and resilient.

As I have identified in this research account, there are times in our lives when self care can be particularly challenging: when we experience loss and change, and how our response to ourselves clears the way for experiencing both the suffering and the joy of the inter-human. A strand within this thesis has been my evolving adjustment to the death of my father and to the deaths of his comrades in North Africa and at the Battle of Arnhem, and all the nameless others, either as the cause of suffering, the one who killed, or as

witness to the Other's suffering. An undercurrent, running like a stream or perhaps even a torrent upon occasion, has been loss and change in my own life, particularly over the past 11 or so years. As I mentioned early on in Chapter Two, I made a decision not to include detailed discussion of this within the thesis to protect myself and those I have loved or love: some things, quite rightly, remain private and bound up tightly within the multiple webs of identity we all inhabit (Griffiths, 1995). This may mean that perhaps some of the learning I have drawn on in the chapters is not the best I might have used, however, that is as it is. This forms part of self care, my responsibility *for* myself, and *towards* others.

Throughout the inquiry I have had reaffirmed the importance of making an appropriate response to narratives of chaos, loss and change, including my own (White and Epston, 1990; Frank, 1995); processing loss as close as possible to the time, for example, being able to cry and being supported; and the central importance of narrative in the ever evolving web of identity, how self esteem, self love, and resilience are spun together to get us through the hard times. In this conception of our emotional lives, traditional divisions between service users and professionals break down. We are all human beings primed for relation who, consciously or unconsciously, face similar challenges.

Implications for children and families work

This thesis has taken an inductive approach to theory building, drawing on multiple ways of knowing across two interwoven strands in my life – the personal and professional. An alternative approach to thesis construction has been used to represent the learning as faithfully as possible (Fisher and Phelps, 2006): from experience, to representations of experience, to propositional knowledge in the form of published research and theoretical influences, to implications.

Given the focus and 'learning journey' nature of this thesis, it is beyond the scope here to review the extensive literature on public services, and more specifically children and families work. Rather in this penultimate section of the thesis, I lightly link the findings of the research to wider debates on dehumanization in public services, referring mainly to children and families work and recent relevant research, and I address organizational implications.

The needs of children and families

The literature on children and families is replete with qualitative studies which confirm that children and families value and respond to a respectful, relationship-based practice, such as the children and families who were helped by their lead professionals in the Team around the Child evaluation. However more depressingly, the research literature is also full of studies showing that many service users are not treated with kindness, compassion or respect by practitioners and have limited access to services beyond assessment (Brandon et al, 2008).

A qualitative study on good helping relationships in child welfare (de Boer and Coady, 2007) shows the importance of soft, judicious use of practitioner power and a humanistic orientation which extended traditional professional ways-of-being. One of the most interesting findings relates to workers who go out of their way to meet the needs of a family, perhaps extending the boundaries of their more traditionally defined roles like some of the best lead professionals in the evaluation. Being a 'friend' to the family, using 'small talk', and an 'informal, conversational style' characterise this kind of I-You orientation

(Ribner and Knei-Paz, 2002, p.384; Drake, 1994). However, woven into the infrastructure of such relationships is the requirement to communicate empathically whilst raising child protection concerns with carers (Forrester et al, 2008); differences of opinion need to be worked with on a pro-active basis to overcome potential conflict narratives (White, 2004). This is highly skilled work where positive working relationships are forged with parents, appreciating strengths and positives, whilst raising parenting and child welfare issues in an open manner.

McLeod (2007) uses findings from another qualitative study to discuss 'power plays' in relationship-building with looked-after young people. She makes similar points to my own about the need for trust to be built slowly and for response-ability at both the individual and organizational level: in the absence of follow up, listening and consultation exercises can merely be seen as 'frauds'. These studies highlight the importance of ethics, the positive reading of emotion, acknowledging and seeking to resolve conflict, and right response in the moment. I now address organizational issues to support this compassionate, responsive, curious yet open, and occasionally sceptical orientation in children and families work.

The issues for children and families practitioners

In Chapter One, I used the work of Donald Schön on reflective practice to show that the territory of children and families work is the 'swampy lowland', where the 'indeterminate zones' of everyday practice are preoccupied with 'the problems of greatest human concern' (Schön, 1987, pp. 3-6). It is the domain of the unpredictable, and yet organizational responses typically include a pressure to work to strict timescales, procedures and rules, more paperwork, attention to parts rather the whole and a focus on outcomes (Fook and Gardner, 2007). Within this context Fook and Gardner identify common issues facing those working in human service organizations: increased complexity, fear of risk and a sense of powerlessness derived from uncertainty. The Team around the Child evaluation, particularly later sections of the supplementary report on professional issues, showed how some of these issues influence decision making and recording within the complex arena of integrated working where an electronic assessment tool[68] and a national database, ContactPoint[69] are seen as the primary means to manage need, risk and information sharing within this complex human and multi-agency environment.

Fook and Gardner argue that the increasing bureaucratisation of public services generates tensions for practitioners forced to apply rules and procedures to solve what are essentially multi-faceted problems. These frustrations are identified in the research by Margaret Bell and colleagues (Bell et al, 2007; Bell, 2008) on the Integrated Children's System (ICS) – the framework introduced under *Every Child Matters* (Department for Education and Skills, 2003, 2004) that all English and Welsh children's services are now required to use when assessing a child's needs:

> We found ICS requires more recording time than previous systems. Earlier this year, the Lifting the Burden Task Force Review noted that local authority staff believed ICS "moves the focus of activity towards compliance with the expectations and needs of a standardised system, which appears chiefly

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[68] See www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/resources-and-practice/TP00004/

[69] See www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/deliveringservices/**contactpoint**/

> related to data capture, and away from using effective professional approaches and analysis related to meeting the needs of the client family and child". (Bell, 2008, p.1)

Bell goes on to say that although social workers welcomed the system in theory, they found it difficult to apply in practice: the exemplars were too time-consuming, prescriptive and repetitive; the child's story was difficult to follow as information was divided into chunks; the tick boxes were often too imprecise or irrelevant to be helpful; and the forms were too cumbersome for effective use with client families (Bell, 2008). I raised similar concerns about the similar assessment tool used in early intervention, the CAF, in the supplementary report. These centred on where and how family composition and family dynamics were recorded on the form; the sense the parent and child/young person made of their lives; completing the form not getting in the way of relationship-building with the family; and the all-important analysis of the information collected leading to hypothesis formulation.

Morrison (2007) writing about emotion and social work raises allied concerns about the use of overly prescriptive assessment frameworks in children and youth justice services (Department of Health, 2000; Youth Justice Board, 2000), which 'give limited attention to the significance of history, or understanding of the interaction between current problems and experiences of loss, trauma and bereavement' (Morrison, 2007, p.255). He argues that insufficient attention has been paid to the role of emotion in assessment frameworks, which derives from a poor understanding about 'feelings': emotions are more than feelings (Siegal, 1999). As I have shown in this research account, they are as essential as and complementary to the more 'hard-nosed' forensic analysis done when sifting through files.

> [Emotions] are deep level signals about information that demands attention, as to whether a situation is to be approached or avoided. The rapid appraisal of such signals conveys the *meaning* of the situation and is often a trigger for action. Emotion, meaning, perception and action cannot be neatly segregated. Needs cannot be elicited or addressed without an appreciation of their emotional and cultural meaning. The result is that workers may see the need, but not the meaning of the need. In failing to elicit the meaning, well intentioned plans may fail. (Morrison, 2007, p.255)

Moreover the suppression of emotional information may stem from either organizational, cultural, personal or professional views which fail to separate our 'being emotional' from using emotion constructively at work on a daily basis: 'Practitioners need to make sense of not only the meaning of emotions in others, but, equally, the meaning for emotions in themselves, in order to make and interpret observations' (Morrison, 2007, p.255). It was this kind of thinking which was behind my recommendation for reflective spaces in the supplementary report.

Organizational climate has a crucial role to play here. Glisson and Hemmelgarn's methodologically robust children's services' study on organizational climate and inter-organizational co-ordination found an unequivocal link between the caseworker's rating of their work environment and positive outcomes for the children with whom they were working: improvements in the children's psychosocial functioning were significantly greater for children and young people served by offices with the most highly rated organizational climates (Glisson and Hemmelgarn, 1998). This relationship between organizational climate and outcomes for children was particularly significant because the research was conducted as two separate studies relying on independent methods. Key characteristics of the offices with positive organizational climates were the ability to be

flexible and use discretion, both of which are essential in the complex terrain of children and families work: 'effective children's services require nonroutinized, individualized, service decisions that are tailored to each child' (Glisson and Hemmelgarn, 1998, p.416).

Taylor et al (2008) in their paper addressing the anxieties and defences of children and families' social workers involved in care proceedings also highlight the motivational aspects of good practice and the role of organizational climate in facilitating the safe expression of emotion:

> Ultimately, it is not procedures which will protect children, but the mobilization of the perceptions and anxieties of individual social workers, other professionals and members of the wider community. This essential process will be best supported by an organizational culture in which anxiety can be expressed and worked through rather than projected elsewhere, and in which uncertainty can be acknowledged and held while also coming to the necessary conclusions to be made without damaging delay. (Taylor et al, 2008, p.31)

A study by Gupta and Blewett (2007), in which they interviewed social workers on a Post Qualifying Child Care Award programme, also raises concerns about increasing paperwork and bureaucracy getting in the way of relationship-building with children and families: many had chosen social work because they wanted to improve the life chances of vulnerable children, however the time available to form good relationships with children and families was becoming increasingly compromised by administrative demands.

Participants also identified resource-dominated decision-making and the threat posed by performance targets as compromising their professional authority. Within their current work contexts, although participants recognised the importance of critical reflection, there was little opportunity to address the very complexity which constitutes the territory of children and families work. This kind of gulf between aspirations and reality goes some way to explaining worker burnout and the current recruitment and retention crisis in the profession:

> A consistent problem identified by participants in all the focus groups was the dissonance between their original motivations for entering the profession, their professional knowledge and value base, and the realities of their work, particularly in front-line local authority services. '*Create more time for relationship-based social work. It is what we and families want.*' (Gupta and Blewett, 2007, p.6)

The focus needs to shift to what really motivates practitioners to do this challenging work well: responding to 'Otherness' in this field can engender very strong and painful emotions, sometimes on a daily basis. These need to be acknowledged, worked with, and responded to for the sake of children with additional needs and their families, and for the well-being of practitioners. The supplementary report developed this idea by pointing out the more subtle aspects of what different parties in children and families work - children and young people, parents and carers and the practitioners who work with them - bring to the table, but which are often not apparent.

In the professional sphere, the work of Ferguson on critical best practice (Ferguson, 2001, 2003b), the emotions of child protection and the importance of self care (Ferguson, 2005), and welfare interventions as mobile practices (Ferguson, 2006) is resonant with my own

way of theorising about the challenges of working with children in need as developed in this thesis:

> Child protection is not only constituted by administrative power and the law, but by an aesthetic sensibility and an expressive dimension. The 'aesthetic' sensibility arises from how it is fundamentally a social practice based on mobility, movement, creativity, involving engagements with time and space (classically, alternating between the office and the homes of children and families). (Ferguson 2005, p.783)
>
> Thinking about practices in terms of mobility can help us develop a theory of practice based on understandings of flows of information and practices, how the (professional) body moves through spaces (such as the home), or becomes immobilized and fails to move (enough). This means focusing on 'the recentring of the corporeal body as an affective vehicle through which we sense place and movement and construct emotional geographies' (Sheller and Urry, 2006, p216). (Ferguson 2006, p.11)

I now consider the implications for organizations of dynamic notions of practice where professionals are constantly interacting with and are influenced by the multiple environments they move in and through during each day.

The 'whole practitioner in action' and organizational implications

Hermeneutics, phenomenology, the extended epistemology of action research on multiple ways of knowing, and a relational or transactional ontology can, together, yield the kind of learning that is required to unravel complex professional responses: in the office, perhaps reading a file, perhaps not; on the move, perhaps thinking about what to say, perhaps not; at the child's home, perhaps feeling what it's like to live here right now as this child, perhaps not; on the move, perhaps time for reflection, perhaps not; back in the office, perhaps time to write up the visit, perhaps not; on the move home, perhaps time to disengage, perhaps not; back home, time to relax, perhaps not and so on and so forth.

As the practitioner moves during the day, s/he needs to ask at various points: What did my senses tell me? How did that feel? What did I notice in my body? How did I respond? What happened? What happened next? This is where presentational form and quality spaces for reflection are essential in facilitating the shift from the verbal-intellectual mind to experience and sense perception (Bortoft, 1996; Winter et al, 1999), what we commonly refer to as more intuitive ways of understanding the world.

The findings from this research elevate both the importance and dynamic nature of the emotional and ethical terrain of children and families work and the ways in which practitioners and managers navigate their way through complexity and uncertainty on a daily basis. It is now timely for the human face of practice to be re-launched in children and families work and for agencies to offer a range of employee care services on a routine basis. This is body-mind work, where all the senses need to work together; and as such it requires quality 'time out' in the kinds of reflective spaces I have mentioned earlier.

The degree to which the body-self is cared for influences integrity, sense perception, and our attunement to the multiple environments we move in and through in the course of each day of our lives; and requires a dual responsibility from both employee and employer (Ferguson, 2005).

There is a pressing need to generate new ways of continually developing knowledge and practice, for example through presentational form, to respond to a complex, ever-evolving multi-agency context. Critical reflection, focusing on intellect, emotion, ethics and self-care, has a central role to play in constructively working with uncertainty, risk and complexity and practising response-ably. This needs to be supported by new performance measures, which address how service user responses are obtained and acted upon to improve services for children and families; how reflective capacity is built and promoted, and organizational climate continuously developed to support the 'whole practitioner in action'.

In this final section, I return to my personal journey as the child of a former prisoner of war to address the process of representing this thesis to the world; and how the research influenced self care, healing and re-storying my own life.

The process of writing and representing this inquiry to the world

At this stage I break off from writing: the light is going and I need to get out and walk.

I return and sit down for a cup of tea and to watch the news. Stan phones and we talk about the reunion last weekend in Hayling Island.

It was lovely weather down south, and I am pleased that the march on Sunday went off well: Stan tells me this year on the march the prisoners of war were joined by the evacuees, who shared the same weekend last year and this time at the holiday camp. I am touched by that image of inter-human solidarity, of evacuees and prisoners of war marching together. I wish I had been there, but I needed to work on the thesis, to finish it. Stan has Dave's address for me to check the section I've written, which includes a bit of his story about working on the farm in Poland. Then we discuss when I will print off and send the draft of their "bits" to Stan and Tom what with the postal strike. We agree on the next draft. I shall call Tom tonight or tomorrow to let him know.

Now back to the writing.

This narrative, a narrative web woven with the narratives of others, is itself an example of the inter-human: what I have written could not have been written without the enthusiasm, generosity, support, contributions and assent from so many people. I am grateful to each and every one of them.

But beyond the people and as part of the natural world we interact with, place has featured strongly: the qualities of place and the impact of places on narratives lived and told are vital: it is that physical, sensuous experience with the earth, nature, landscape and sky that brings into focus the Other beyond humanity:

> As places animate the ideas and feelings of persons and feelings animate the places on which attention has bestowed, and the movements of this process – inward toward facets of the self, outward towards aspects of the external world, alternately both together – cannot be known in advance. When places

> are actively sensed, the physical landscape becomes wedded to the landscape of the mind, to the roving imagination, and where the latter may lead is anybody's guess. (Basso 1996, p. 107)

In Chapter Six I spoke about the photographic inquiry, which evolved during 2006, as playing a crucial role in developing attentional practices: in the words of Henri Cartier-Bresson I put my head, eye and heart 'on the same axis' (Cartier-Bresson, 1999). This led to enhanced perception or recognition of the Subject and its meaning. When I started using my camera, to focus on and interpret the world in this way, I had no idea that its use would help form a healing narrative from the past and write a legacy for the future. I have referred to this elsewhere as the 'generativity script' (McAdams, 1993, p.227). The photographs in this thesis represent the interpretative quilting on the page as sense making unfolds, an organic process which draws on hermeneutics and action research as ways of accessing more intuitive ways of being in the world (Schnetz, 2005).

The arts-based research for the thesis included putting together the collage (Figure One), taking photographs, and drawing a mandala to represent the three-dimensional nature of inquiry: backwards, forwards and moving from place to place (Clandinin and Connolly, 2000). Each image and representation beckoned me to form a dynamic relational understanding, to dialogue with it, either as a whole or part of the whole: as such visual inquiry has formed a core component of the research presented here, and will continue as part of my inquiry practice.

To conclude, I present the mandala I drew to represent my evolving sense of self in relation to the environment, which has influenced my inquiry and the process of writing and presenting this thesis (see Figure Two, p.274).

Saraswati (1981) describes a mandala as 'a form of art, a drawing, an archetype, a tool for working on oneself: it is a mirror of ourselves and of the world'. The word 'mandala' means circle in Sanskrit, with the circle being organised around the centre or the seed (*bindu*). The essence of the mandala lies in this central point with the rest of the mandala flowing from it. Mandalas reflect our perception of our inner and outer worlds and how they interact and intersect; and all the time there is the centre to which we can return:

> Even if everything around us collapses or seems to collapse, when we are aware of a centre from which springs the strength that dwells within us, we stay calm and full of hope. This centre gives value and cohesion to our life. It allows us to draw the energy we need to start and build again. (Saraswati, 1981)

In my mandala, the colour orange is at the centre, which signifies my soul; blue is the colour of running water, crashing waves and the sky; green is the colour of nature, of trees, grass and landscape; yellow signifies the sun's energy, warmth and positive emotion. The honeycomb like pattern around the centre signifies my mind and body.

The bottom left quadrant represents my father's experiences, barbed wire for imprisonment, grey signifies ghosts, and red is for blood. The symbol of the Manipura Chakra [Navel or Solar Plexus Chakra], one of the body's energy centres in yoga, is there to signify powerlessness, a sense of my father's anger about the war, and the impact of this unresolved anger on his digestive system. Most importantly the ability to grieve, represented by blue tears, is not symbolised in this quadrant because it was so hard for

the men, like my father, who were prisoners to process the degree of human pain and suffering they witnessed when they were on the battlefield and throughout their captivity.

The bottom right quadrant signifies healing from sorrow through crying, which was not represented in the other quadrant: the healthy response of the heart to grief and loss. The warm pink tones in this quadrant and the Anahata Chakra [Heart Chakra] symbol represent heart energy and healing, finding the right balance between compassion for self and others. The dark pink beam of colour emanating from the centre symbolises love nurturing my soul.

The top hemisphere signifies an integration of the energy of the Vishuddha or Vishuddi and Ajna Chakras [Throat and Third Eye or Brow Chakras] [70]; how I use imagination and concentration to express myself, communicate, and contribute to the world; my soul, signified by orange, permeates my work and is all the while nurtured by nature and the elements, represented by the colours blue, yellow and green. When the Vishuddhi [Throat] Chakra is balanced communication, interaction with the world is enhanced; and when the Ajna [Third Eye or Brow Chakra] Chakra is balanced creative energy flows freely.

Mandalas were experimented with by Carl Jung, the founder of Analytical Psychology. Jung was an expert on symbolism; for him the round shape of a mandala expressed the totality of a person's psyche or soul. As such making a mandala, as I discovered, was not an arbitrary creation, but came from somewhere deep inside me:

> [Mandalas] . . . are all based on the squaring of the circle. Their basic motif is the premonition of a centre of personality, a kind of central point within the psyche, to which everything is arranged, but which is itself a source of energy. The energy of the central point is manifested in the almost irresistible compulsion and urge to become what one is, just as every organism is driven to assume the form that is characteristic of its nature, no matter what the circumstances. The centre is not felt or thought of as the ego but, if one may so express it, as the self. (Jung 1950, p.73)

So a cycle in a journey of discovery of the self, represented in text and image, draws to a close, and remaking begins: one ever evolving web of identity which moves, and in relation, is influenced by the narratives and webs of Others, and the world that we inhabit.

I interact, I respond and I wait for a response in anticipation of what next . . .

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[70] The third eye logo of Mindful Practice is loosely based on the Ajna Chakra, but the colour is blue/green, again loosely related to the blue colour of the Vishuddi Chakra, thus symbolising the influence of the two chakras on how I would like to contribute to the world (see www.mindfulpractice.co.uk).

Figure Two