

Science and Mathematics Education Centre

**An Introspective Enquiry Mutually Emplacing Teacher and Non-literate Former
Refugee Students in Pedagogical Landscapes**

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Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

Signature: Elizabeth M. Buchanan

Date: 27th JUNE 2016

Abstract

Seeking to discover what it is that is in the teacher that is brought to the teaching role within an historical and cultural context, through narrative questing this interpretive, phenomenological enquiry emplaces the teacher and adult former refugee students in a pedagogical landscape. Assuming an interface stance through the multiple roles of teacher-learner, researcher-interpreter, writer-narrator, in searching to find insightful understanding through narrative scenarios, the journey glances back over meaningful encounters and pedagogical challenges. By retrieving pictured memories of the lived experience that contributed to personal philosophy and teaching practice, reflective triangulation, sometimes through the actions, dialogue or writing of others, then gives resonance to the storying. Taking new understandings as added strata of interpretation in the reflective “*cogitationes*” (Sartre), the cameos brought into focus take on greater and deeper layers of meaning through metaphor and narrative.



Keywords – metaphor, memory, self-learning, home-school, adult former refugee students, encounters, isolation, change, deafness.



Abbreviations and Acronyms

AMEP	Adult Migrant English Program
ESL	English as a second language
ISLPR	International Second Language Proficiency Ratings (Ingram and Wylie, 2012)
CSWE	Certificate in Spoken and Written English. (NSW Adult Migrant English Service)
CPSWE	Course in Preliminary Spoken and Written English. (NSW Adult Migrant English Service)
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
NASA	National Aeronautics and Space Administration (USA)
Pre	Preliminary level students enrolled in the Course in Preliminary Spoken and Written English (NSW AMES)
PTSD	Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
SPP	Special Preparatory Programme
TESOL	Teaching English as Second or Other Language
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
WELL	Workplace Education Language and Literacy (Australian Federal Government)



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I think of students from long ago – of “Peas and prickle (meant to be ‘pickle’)” in a Primer 1 class. I think of the 5 year old progressively going deaf and blind – how I wish I could have taught you with the understandings I now have. As a swimming and physical education teacher, newly arrived in Australia, I think of the primary level classes with many students from non-English speaking backgrounds – all quickly developing the skills to “read” my relevant but strange body language instructions during outdoor physical education classes whilst low-flying aircraft on flight-paths to and from Melbourne’s airports constantly roared overhead. I think of the student with profound disability. Your enthusiastic challenges to me and my challenges to you – with parental approval – gave me the confidence to think well outside the square, to adapt and design within learning situations to allow for desired inclusion – no matter what. Thank you all.

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Table of Contents

<i>Declaration</i>	<i>ii</i>
<i>Abstract</i>	<i>iii</i>
<i>Abbreviations and Acronyms</i>	<i>iv</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>v</i>
<i>Table of Contents</i>	<i>ix</i>
Book 1 Pictures from an Exhibition - Pedagogical Axes	1
A kaleidoscopic journey negotiating intersecting axes of beliefs, ethics, and understandings.....	2
<i>Chapter I – Landscape in focus</i>	2
Introduction	2
Emplacing the teacher.....	6
Ethical Perspectives.....	11
Secret appointment	23
Methodological mindfulness – perspectives of meaning.....	23
Storying the way.....	27
<i>Chapter II - Hidden Significance</i>	32
Living and Learning Crossroads	32
Pedagogical undulations	34
Pedagogical hiatus.....	35
Negotiating crossroads.....	41
Chiasmic fear	42
Modelled learning	44
Teacherly attributes	46
Life adjustment	47
High trails	49
Teacherly course of action	50
Sylvia Ashton-Warner.....	53
Bridges, frameworks and signposts.....	56
Teaching	58
The language of books	59
Lunar Distanciation	61
<i>Chapter III - On the home front - Home School in the Bush</i>	68
The world is our school	68

Pedagogical possibilities.....	68
“Alternative education”	72
Learning in the bush.....	74
Home base	78
Other philosophies in “Professional Development”	80
Onwards	83
Home School in context	85
High school in the bush	87
Self-learning and building autonomy	90
Reflective thoughts	92
Reflective afterthoughts.....	96
Homage to Gertie.....	97
Mixing politics and home education	98
Friends in fact and fiction.....	99
Research ethics in the bush.....	101
Giving back	102
Afterword	103
<i>Chapter IV - Peripatetic Interstices.....</i>	<i>105</i>
New Beginnings.....	105
Caring other power	108
Climate of change.....	110
Places we call home	112
Belongingness	115
Originary home	117
Portability of learning.....	119
Reacquaintance with Maslow and Piaget	122
Being in the world	125
<i>Chapter V - Borders and boats</i>	<i>128</i>
Linnaeus and a pear tree.....	131
Sleight of memory	133
Signs of life	136
One sided conversation.....	142
Ulyssian horizons.....	146
Linkages.....	152
Change.....	153

Book 2 Pictures from an Exhibition - New Pedagogical Axes.....	1
<i>Chapter VI - Challenges Amidst Diversity</i>	<i>2</i>
Exchanging ways of being	2
Loss and renewal.....	3
Generational Teacher.....	7
Exchanging ways of being	9
Classroom setting.....	11
Placating panic - vestiges from the past.....	16
Cross cultural exchange.....	21
Reciprocal language learning	23
Clashing educational cultures?.....	25
<i>Chapter VII - Pedagogical Parameters</i>	<i>29</i>
Preliminary pedagogy.....	29
Planning and Curriculum	29
Reading.....	30
Taking learning beyond the classroom.....	35
In and out of class	37
Class temperament	42
Panic attack	46
Worldly technology.....	50
A broader picture with narrowed focus.....	56
Exercises.....	59
Perplexing encounters within intersecting trajectories: a confronting classroom journey	62
Workplace	75
Aged care.....	76
Hospital corners on bunk-beds	77
Farming and Horticulture	78
Handy skills.....	78
Expectations and stored knowledge	79
Reflection on the past and reflective immediacy on the present	84
Assessing progress	85
Musical interlude.....	89
Power and class dynamics.....	90
Vegetable-snatchers.....	91
Garden wraith reprieve	94
Disproportionate power.....	97

Humour	103
OH&S	109
Knives and forks	111
Hands On English.....	112
Art and craft	115
Dictionaries and readers	117
Hands on English in the community.....	119
Cast into the unknown	121
<i>Chapter VIII Signs of Learning.....</i>	<i>124</i>
Deafness in a culture of education.....	124
Fingerspelling	127
Scanning learning horizons	135
Fingerspelling aiding spelling	137
Communication and Learning	138
Downside of confidentiality	139
Teacher training	140
Recognising a learning tool	142
Hearing aid issues.....	143
Oracy and Pronunciation.....	146
Fingerspelling in the Horticulture classroom	147
Presence of language	150
Experimental Fingerspelling	153
“Specialised Literacy for Hearing Impaired”	154
Pictures at an Exhibition – A Retrospective Glance	165
<i>Chapter IX - Reflective reimaging</i>	<i>165</i>
Glancing back	165
Reflective findings	168
Final reflection from a critical stance.....	172
References:	175

Book 1 Pictures from an Exhibition - Pedagogical Axes



Take great care, fragile friend, to preserve yourself, your desperate struggle, your fears and dashed hopes, your dreams – especially your dreams. ... And keep a firm grip on your spirit, of course, that bit of consciousness floating above your subconsciousness, your way of observing yourself. (Gao, 2002, p.64)

A kaleidoscopic journey negotiating intersecting axes of beliefs, ethics, and understandings

Chapter I – Landscape in focus



Mussorgsky, Promenade, from Pictures at an Exhibition, 1874

Introduction

... how complicated things are with regard to the meaning of “principium” in the sense of that which comes first. (Gadamer, 1975, p. 15)

Welcome to my story, a phenomenological narrative encompassing diverse life experience that directs focus on a pedagogical journey culminating in the teaching of adult former refugee students at Preliminary level who have enrolled to learn English in Tasmania, an island corner of their new country of residence, Australia. That my lived experience along the journeying has highlighted, enhanced and directed my teaching practice, the storying quest is led onwards and onwards through new projects and new depths of thinking and understanding. As

teacher-learner, researcher-interpreter, writer-narrator, the tripartite journey has been both exhilarating and, frequently, extremely challenging.

By retrieving pictured memories, essences, presence, work and the accomplishments of students and others that have influenced me, I have located encounters and happenings that have shaped my personal philosophy and teaching practice as I searched for an answer to the ever present research question: What is it that is in me that I brought to teaching? The question being constantly confronted in the search for an answer, answer and understanding seemingly always in the loom, in the light beyond the horizons.

Perceiving and outlining meaningfulness by way of reflective triangulation, sometimes with and through the actions, dialogue or writing of others, has allowed me to more fully understand the “I”, “you” and “[s]he” of me (Gao, 2002, p. 25) and appreciate resonance in my storying. Taking new understandings as added strata of interpretation in the reflective “*cogitationes*” (Sartre, 1956, p. 32), the cameos of experience brought into focus take on greater and deeper layers of meaning and value through metaphor and phenomenological hermeneutic narrative.

Just as Plato and Proust and so many writers of the past have outlined vignette-cameos of their own lived experience (Freeman, 2007), this research takes example from their works. Whilst definitely not claiming to equal their insightful storying and worldly influence, this enquiry attempts to encapsulate that which has influenced and become part of me, the teacher-learner.

Originally to have been a basic study of the orientation and development of the teacher in relation to adult students, curricula, and learning environment, somehow the study became ongoing as new student cohorts and new projects worthy of study emerged in bewilderingly rapid succession. The enquiry seemed to have no end (Maxwell, 1996), for within the ongoing whirl there was just no time to

close and document the work. By continuing on, the journey became much more complex and enriching whilst I developed further as a teacher. Finding a point of closure writing began, but in the writing, revisiting and reassembling of experiences and understandings, to find meaning in the teacher/adult student relationships, the more distant past persistently intruded, necessitating further explanation to give meaning to the present (Rogers, 1959, p. 185). Thus, as if wandering by pictures at a retrospective exhibition (Mussorgsky, 1874), the introspective study guides you, the reader, through and past illuminated cameo glimpses that provide encounters (Bruner, 2003b); Bollnow, 2011; Koskela & Siljander, 2014) influential to my development as a teacher and, more particularly, my work with adult, former refugee students.

That I have lingered over the Home School years is a deliberate intention as, not only did the experience provide a strong basis for more holistic thinking in my later work with adult students but I also discovered that little had been written from the experiential stance of the home schooling teacher-practitioner in the pre-internet period. In addition, with a need to find integration of the role as mother-teacher of that time with the teacher of adults role, it became necessary to explore and document some of that work.

Beginning teaching Preliminary level adult former refugees, an ever changing cohort of students, at a time when there was little research or teaching material with focus on beginner learners of English having little understanding of the culture of education resulted in a teaching exploration which necessitated response to evolving and perceived needs in practice and theory. The exploration then took on new tangents, challenges and impetus when addressing perceived pathways for teaching English to non-literate former refugee students with deafness. Again, faced with a dearth of research literature on which to base both my work and that section of the study, the supportive references and literary links are drawn from a broad academic base.

In describing my own early pedagogical journeying there is a leaning towards phenomenology (Gadamer, 1975; Levinas, 1969; van Manen, 1990). In comparison, within the complex engagement of the adult-learner classroom, with lack of adequate linguistic communication or clear understanding of the lived experiences and intentionalities of my students, perceptions and understandings are viewed through lenses with a phenomenological-hermeneutic orientation entwined with notions of transformative learning (Mezirow, 2003). The understandings then, in turn, finding further empathic perception through the structure of a Maslow/Piagetian lens. In addition, my own practice of practical moral wisdom, the philosophy of Aristotelian *phronesis* (Halverson, 2004; Hanson, n.d.; Gadamer, 2000b), as if a magic carpet, supported and carried me through various perplexing encounters that at times almost defied teacher understanding and class management. Drawing the tangential threads together the innovative, developmental work with pre-literate, former refugee deaf students, being introduced to both a culture of education and hearing aids for the first time, brings the journey to some closure.

Through reflective storying, the interactive enquiry emplaces the narrator-teacher-learner within horizons of pedagogical landscapes, whilst also enveloping streams of students within an overflowing of cultures (Brockmeier, 2015, p. ix). It is as if being engulfed in an exuberant exuding out and blending of understandings and practices of living that have permeated the learning encounters. Strangely, it was also as if my evolving teaching experiences were neatly cartwheeling me through the human life cycle whilst my own life cycle kept shadowy pace with the relentless flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).



Emplacing the teacher

A story is never just a story – it is a statement of belief, of morality, it speaks about values. Stories carry loud messages both in what they say and what they don't say. (Goodson, 1999, p. 10)

“Who is the self that teaches?” asks Parker Palmer (1998, p. 4). What was it that brought me to teaching and what has shaped the journey? I ask of myself. In this anticipatory, narrative enquiry, searching for pathways to find understandings of my self as a teacher, I have followed recollections, my journal writing and samples of work, supported by the writing and thinking of others to find inner nuances and bring understandings to my enquiry. The questing and questioning is the illumination of a journey that draws on past memories of lived experience, learning and teaching and is particularly focussed towards teaching experience with adult, former refugee students learning English at the Preliminary (Pre) level. Whilst seeking out and exploring instances of pedagogical interest encountered along the varied pathways, narrative cameos emerge as if drawn from pictures at a retrospective exhibition. Further questing then discloses influential facets and layers of meaning and greater understanding within my evolving learning and teaching landscape. As narrator it is my story, my phenomenological interpretation and reinterpretation through observation, reflection and dustings of hermeneutic triangulation that draws out understandings within shades of meaning and complexities in the enquiry. It is as if negotiating a journey with invisible and constantly shifting ley-lines and continually redefined compass bearings.

Through the narrating and searching to find what it is that is the teacher within in an exploratory sense, much of the work is encapsulated in cameos, impressioned vignettes of lived experience, that bring into focus issues and phenomena to be further explored. Selected from teacher lived reality, incorporating personal historicity, the educational-

pedagogical environment and the wider world, strata of meaning are exposed, to be brought into closer scrutiny and linked with and embedded within the narrative.

In searching for definition of my narrative scenarios I first referred to an old dictionary which defined the term,

cameo, ... LL. *cameus, camahutus*; of unknown origin. A carving in relief, especially on a small scale used as a jewel for personal adornment, or the like. Most cameos are carved in a material which has layers of different colours, such as onyx and sardonyx, and various kinds of shells, being used. (Webster's International Dictionary, 1902, p.207)

A second dictionary defined the word thusly:

cameo *n.* (*pl.* ~s). small piece of relief-carving in stone (onyx, agate, etc) usu. with colour-layers utilized to give background; relief design of similar form; short literary sketch or acted scene. [ME, f. OF *camahieu* etc. & med. L *cammaeus*]. (The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1987, p. 143)

Adopting the notion of a cameo as a “short literary sketch or acted scene”, to find meaning I pursue the interwoven complexities of my lived experience and within layers of narrative portrayals colour, depths of contour, and light and shade of meanings are revealed. As if through an “artist’s third eye” (Gao, 2002, p.27-28), through the multiple roles of the teacher, through hermeneutic interpretation and distanciation, attained through constantly shifting horizons (Gadamer, 2004), understandings are challenged.

As in life or an exhibition of art work, specific scenes capture our attention, spark understanding or discord, maybe resonate or question in some way. So too, this study is illustrated with selected scenes, capturing and conveying meaning in my journeying. Sometimes conjuring and inviting presence and new ways of thinking whilst questing to discover

and reveal voices or avenues of thought that I had previously overlooked, or perhaps misinterpreted, then, in the re-requesting, maybe discovering new or alternative layers and shades of meaning. As Morris, interpreting Bakhtin, espouses,

Every utterance generates a response in the other who receives it, even if that response is only within inner speech. However, the initial utterance already anticipates the active response in the receiving other and so shapes itself to take it into account. But neither ... was the 'initial utterance' actually the first word in any real sense; inevitably its form is moulded not just by the future response but also as 'answer' to all relevant previous utterances. This inherently interactive – dialogic nature of discourse and consciousness ... accounts for the constant generation of new meaning. (Morris, 2003, p.5)

Initially, an artist of words or works of art reaches to identify instances in response to life situations and thinking, instances and responses which subsequently become the basis for their art. Then, selecting works for an anthology or an exhibition, based on a theme, or, as in the case of a retrospective exhibition, portraying representative samples from stages or aspects of the artist's development, a meaningful collection is assembled. In this work I have selected cameos, some undeveloped sketches, some miniatures, some portraits, others expanded to become broader canvases, to reveal and represent the layers of meaning that underpin my learning, philosophical stance and teaching praxis (Sokolowski, 2000, p.196). Then, in further exploring the development of teacher engagement through the application of hermeneutic dialogue (Gadamer, 1975), alternative and perhaps new textual interpretations emerge while other meanings, perhaps previously dominant, may be camouflaged or shrouded. As Bergson asserts, the storying,

... [c]all it what you will; ... is the feeling we have of being creators of our intentions, of our decisions, of our acts, and by that, of our habits, our characters, ourselves. Artisans of our life, even artists when we so desire, we work continually, with the material furnished us by the past

and present, by heredity and opportunity, to mould a figure unique, new, original, as unforeseeable, as the form given by the sculptor to the clay. (Bergson, 2002, pp. 224-225)



Originally composed for piano to commemorate a retrospective exhibition of the works of an artist friend, Mussorgsky's "Pictures from an Exhibition" (1874) emphatically underscores the ambience of this narrative. Just as the music eloquently portrays movement from one picture to another, "... roving right and left, sometimes hesitantly and sometimes briskly, in order to get close to pictures that have caught ... attention" (Mussorgsky, 2011), sometimes unhurried, sometimes haltingly, sometimes urgently, sometimes returning to a work or finding a new theme in others, so too the lived experience of the teacher-learner portrayed in this enquiry follows a similar journey. Almost Janus-like, providing backward roving glances on a teaching practice that wends onwards, revealing pathways opened for and followed by the teacher as the narrative unfolds.



Throughout the storying a Celtic knot, a symbol from my own cultural heritage, periodically embellishes the narrative. In this work the motif particularly symbolises both the interlinking tripartite roles of the enquirer and the wavering, hermeneutic triangulated pathways of the enquiry. In addition, the underlying trilogy of memory, metaphor and mimesis also find integrative meaning.

Claiming even further significance and a sense of respect for diversity of cultures and the unknown otherness of the many I have encountered on my journey, carved high in the golden sandstone back wall of the old church where, as a class, students and teacher tended their vegetable garden, is the same motif. Almost certainly carved by a convict stonemason during early colonial settlement in Tasmania, with undemanding presence, it is slowly responding to the vagaries of Roaring Forties weather.



Ethical Perspectives

It is not that we first need to know everything about our students before we can take responsibility for them. Neither is it the case that we can only take responsibility for our students if we know what this responsibility actually entails, that is, if we were to know what will actually happen in the future as a result of our educational efforts and interventions. It rather belongs to the very structure of responsibility that we do not know what we take responsibility for – if *taking* is the right word. (Biesta, 2006, p.30. Italics in original).

Over years working with students in educational environments and clients in counselling I have been bound and continue to be bound by ethical directives respective to each of my professional endeavours. Drawing from both streams of training the boundaries have become somewhat seamlessly enmeshed in an ever evolving ethical matrix which provides foundation to a balancing act in working with diversity of cultural backgrounds, diversity of identities and diversity of intentionalities. In addition to this, I have worked towards being true to myself, to find an authenticity (Heidegger, 1962; Guignon, 2008; Johnson, 2014) that provides an inner conscience, for

[t]here is a certain way of being human that is *my way*. I am called upon to live my life in this way, and not in imitation of anyone else's. But this gives a new importance to being true to myself. If I am not, I miss the point of my life, I miss what being human is for *me*. (Taylor, 1991, pp. 28-29, italics in original)

In counselling, each counselling situation is unique in the sense that each individual client's perceived needs, stories and backgrounds are personal property thus each individual and their stories are held in the utmost respect and confidentiality. Working with athletes and others in performing arts, with sport or performance psychology, the work is somewhat similar, yet, in other ways completely different to working with

clients seeking help to cope with trauma, loss or lifestyle stress. Individuals from each group have personal issues they wish to have attended to, it is within this context that my work has been bound by respective employing bodies, professional ethical standards, legal parameters and my owned ethical stance. The current Ethical Principles and Code of Conduct (2010) of the American Psychological Association (APA) well accommodate the focus of a counsellor and the lived experience of a teacher working with human diversity. Of note the following five APA principles give clear guidelines; “Beneficence and Nonmaleficence, Fidelity and Responsibility, Integrity, Justice, and Respect for People's Rights and Dignity” (APA, 2010).

Appointed to a teaching position within a pedagogical institution, it was definitely not my brief to counsel my students. Mostly I would never know of their past stories and nor was it my right to know. With little reciprocal communicative oracy their lived experience I could interpret only through their eyes, their body language and the way they worked with me and responded to those around them. However, by student request, I have referred students on for counselling, health or other issues. On occasion also, by way of Duty of Care, I have touched privacy boundaries. I think especially of the adult student who had a headache in class. Noting that she had taken six tablets within an hour I asked if I might see the tablet package and was horrified to find that she was using a prescription drug dispensed for a more serious ailment. Directions clearly stated “three tablets to be taken daily with water”. The tablets were definitely not paracetamol! Ethics as event, overriding duty-of-care, sometimes became part of my teacher role.

Within the pedagogical sphere I was bound by respective codes of conduct and the Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) guidelines of the institution in which I had employment. Ethics of the workplace also included Duty of Care – to students, colleagues, volunteers and self, and also the duty of informing my students, and observing myself, the

institution's Rights and Responsibilities code. Beyond that there were both state and national legal parameters, including workplace legislation, within which my work was to comply.

Over and above the guiding parameters given above, to which I am aligned, is The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the thirty article code adopted by the United Nations in 1948 (U.N. 1948; Adami, 2014, pp. 75-76). Other works of importance that have guided my work include the United Nations High Commission for Refugees Resettlement Handbook (UNHCR, 2011), the Tasmanian Multicultural Policy (2014), and, through Curtin University, the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (2007/2014) developed by the National Health and Medical Research Council and Australian Universities.

In addition my ethical stance was also influenced by publications related to cross-cultural teaching (Hanafin, Shevlin & Flynn, 2002); and psychosocial issues (APA DSM 5, 2013; Keri, 2015; Hovey & Amir, 2013; La Fromboise & Foster, 1989; Gerstein, Heppner et al, 2009; Middleton, Erguner-Tekinalp, Williams et al, 2011). Retaining an interest and maintaining professional development in both spheres of training allowed for heightened awareness and deeper understanding within my teaching practice. With students having backgrounds of displacement, trauma and violation of human rights, there was an ever-present awareness of avoiding re-traumatisation. Particularly working with former refugee adult students, the writing of Maxine Greene, affirming my thinking, reminds me that,

... it is through and by means of education ... individuals can be provoked to reach beyond themselves in their intersubjective space. It is through and by means of education that they may become empowered to ... make sense of their lived realities (Greene, 1973, p.16)

As class teacher my role frequently involved acting as an interface between the students with their cultural and lived-experience identities

and the realities, including ethical and legal, that they confronted in resettlement. In addition I was constantly aware of the “traumatic gap” (Brockmeier, 2008) that existed when, as adult students, they were negotiating the lived experience of their past lives whilst also maybe supporting others, including their children and other family members, through their respective “gaps”. For some, it must have seemed to be an abyss with insurmountable precipices at times. Unfortunately, that “traumatic gap” must be the repository for countless memories for so many in the world. I recall speaking with a sailor, retired from shipping in waters north of Australia. On occasion, whilst at sea, larger merchant ships and oil-tankers passing nearby would convey the co-ordinates for sighted “boat people” boats. After sailing to the area and arriving at the given co-ordinates, sometimes there was, but sometimes there was not a boat in sight. Disclosing that story, the ex-sailor then broke off speaking and looked away. It was very evident that recalling those, and associated memories was difficult work (pers. comm. 20.9.2015).



We are all storytellers, and we are the stories. (McAdams, Josselson & Lieblich, 2006, p. 16)

Throughout the storying and writing of this enquiry I remained conscious of the vulnerability of, and the relationships of and with my students from the perspectives of pedagogical and dominant culture power (Foucault, 1980; Gallagher, n.d.). Striving to give an ethical, authentic account from the researcher-teacher voice whilst also seeking to acknowledge the virtually unheard voices of those that shared the classroom during the enquiry, I was alert to the fact that the narrative was being constructed through the perceptions of an authority figure. Through

purposeful use of hermeneutic “triangulation”, a concept derived from mathematical, geometric applications to navigation; from power dynamics in relationships counselling (Bowen, 1978); and research methods (Hammersley, 2008; Jick, 1979), by way of multiple lenses as teacher-learner, researcher-interpreter, and narrator-writer, in the varied formats of those multiple roles (Peshkin, 1988; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 10; Josselson & Harway, 2012, p.21), I have attempted to counter such epistemological and moral bias. By adopting such multiple lenses, each lens further assuming a role of observer in the enquiry, enabled a stance of vulnerability and openness (Todd, 2015), even a stance of passivity on occasion (Butler, 2003). If challenged, the teacher “I” was then chaperoned, supported and informed through the lenses of the other selves. An overseeing that accepted tension and allowed for insightful dialogue between the triangulated “selves” in an “intersubjective space” (Greene, 1973. p.16; Peshkin, 1988), allowing for more thoughtful and reasoned responses to challenging situations.

Well describing the position of the teacher “I”, Todres intimates, “[a] ‘self’ is never self-enclosed but always in the openness of relationships” (2004, p. 41). Perhaps related to, but in no way usurping the role of *phronesis*, this inner referencing and dialoguing frequently allowed for more considered, more othered understandings of difference and otherness. The inner cross-referencing in consequence aligning with the thinking of Levinas, as Biesta interprets, placing responsibility with the self and calling on “an *ethics* of subjectivity, an *ethics* of self” (Biesta, 2007b, p. 43. Italics in original). Further, Gao aptly describes the singular self, in the guise of the multiple roles and selves that I assumed throughout the narrative, when he states,

[t]he self, at times, may present itself as a trinity, as three distinct, separate, yet interrelated figures that go by *I*, *you*, and [s]*he*. Who ... [is it who teaches? Who is it who researches? Who is it who narrates]? Is it *I* or is it *you*? Then again, it may be [s]*he*. (Gao, 2002, pp. 25-26. Italics in original)

As the enquiry progressed with further exploration of the self within the self, in seeking clarity, it became clear that in the narrating, the circularity of enquiry emphasised that,

[t]he more carefully we examine our own experience, the more susceptible the experience becomes to our own interference, for the interference changes the experience itself. Moreover, our very use of language to describe our experience transforms the experience. (Polkinghorne, 1983, p.222)

Conscious of but attempting to avoid this possibility, by relating each cameo I then looked at each afresh, perhaps repeatedly, as I searched for meaning. But, in situating the self in relation to the experience, the narrative writing and searching for understanding, although presenting the essence of a cameo, on occasion I became aware that somewhere between the “listening” (Todd, 2002) in the writing and reinterpretation a softening of understanding had taken place. It was as if words failed to fully explicate narrative presence (ibid, p.405) and meaning, or was it, perhaps, a means of protecting the dignity of an other?

Biesta, in exploring the concepts of responsibility and the “relationship of the self to the self” (2007, p.42) and “what makes the self into a self” (ibid, p. 44) indicates that self-knowledge must also incorporate “the ethical relationship with the other” (ibid). Within that concept and including Løgstrup’s focus on trust (1997; 2007), the “ethical relationship” not only incorporates others, but also the ever-present, ever evolving forms of my “I”, my “you”, and “she”.



Throughout the enquiry, in maintaining independence of research and writing, it was essential to maintain not only respectful sensitivity and authenticity in relationship with the students but also in the undertaking of the learning programme (Thompson, 2015), that it be sensitively aligned to student learning needs and abilities. The study, having been a closely focussed, ongoing enquiry with continuous changes in student cohort, my involvement existed principally as teacher, a linking entity between students and learning within the CSWE Preliminary Curriculum (NSW AMES, 2008, 2013), the educational institution and community. As student needs and abilities dictated, so the demands and content of the programme were presented in such ways as to support each at their learning level. Lather, however, provides a thought provoking conjecture when claiming,

[p]edagogy is fruitful ground to help us address questions of how our very efforts to liberate [might actually] perpetuate the relations of dominance Lather, 1991, p. 125

Indeed, in acknowledging that concern, an ever vigilant wariness of such dominance (Freire, 1973, 2005; Mayo, 1999), on occasion resulted in the questioning of and negotiation with self and others beyond the classroom. Working as an interface between student, political, institution and teacher-self expectations resulted in there being constant tension between a conforming praxis and one that worked towards a practice of social justice (Aoki, 2005) – tension that, on occasion, caught teacher responsibility between varying demands.

Sustained management of the educational-pedagogical programme also included management of student behaviours. As teacher, engaging with each at their own working pace and ability level necessitated the mutual engendering of respect with, from and between all present. Individuals or minority groups of class, age, race, gender, health, culture or national difference also needed consideration, and sometimes support. Awareness and respect of difference was essential and the multiple

aspects of this, at times, became complex for the teacher, who was also a minority presence in the class of adults. An issue that Palmer knowingly cautions me of when writing,

... teaching is endless meeting. Staying open to new meetings, trying to distinguish those that have integrity from those that do not, is a tiring and sometimes frightening task. I am often tempted to protect my sense of self behind barricades of status or role, to withhold myself from colleagues or students from the collisions we will surely have. (Palmer, 1998, p.16)

Attempted domination, differences in gender acceptance and power from individuals or cultural groups had the potential for affect. As did other controlling, attention seeking or individualistic perceptions of class, caste or other status claims and claims for assumed rights over others. In working with students having complex past histories, Levinas' ethics of face (1969) and Løgstrup's ethical demand (1997, 2007; Lindseth, 2014) provided supportive understanding for the diversity encountered. As Løgstrup reminds me,

By our very attitude to another we help to shape that person's world. By our attitude to the other person we help to determine the scope and hue of his or her world; we make it large or small, bright or drab, rich or dull, threatening or secure. We help to shape his or her world not by theories and views but by our very attitude towards him or her. Herein lies the unarticulated and one might say anonymous demand that we take care of the life which trust has placed in our hands. (Løgstrup, 1997, p. 18)



Within the structure of the curriculum, learning frequently involved activities that introduced the students to a reaching out into the wider

community. On occasion, experiencing aspects of their new culture was not without attendant drama when some took the norm of living in their own cultural background to be the norm in their new home country, a dichotomy (Todd & Sarstrom, 2008) that sometimes challenged both student and teacher. I think of the invited visits our class made to work alongside junior school students in the vegetable garden of a prestigious private school. On the first visit, to provide an opportunity for orientation as I had requested, it was arranged for us to have our lunch in the staff-room before the school lunch break. All went well and after the tables had been cleaned some of the students became engrossed in the full page of weather information, published that day in a national newspaper. Called to answer a query, after briefly explaining how to “read” that particular weather map I then noticed one class member had disappeared. Asking the whereabouts of the student and prompted by statements such as “Out, out” and “Smoke” I hastened outside, skimmed down sweeping wide steps and found her. There she was, in her distinctive traditional clothes squatting on the grass under a tree, totally focussed on carefully rolling a cigarette with tobacco from her hand-woven dilly-bag just as the smartly uniformed students of the school were emerging from class for their lunch break. How very difficult it was to explain that being outside the school building was still on school property and that smoking was not permitted at all on the school premises!

As this study explores the class world of the narrator-teacher-learner, researching both my interpretation of self-lived experience along a teaching timeline and also my lived pedagogical theory, to give some anonymity to the so many students who have shared the journeying with me, age group, gender and, in some cases, a region of the world may be cited to allow some understanding of student diversity, but, in deference to confidentiality, names and nationality are not disclosed.

Associated with that concern, throughout the writing of this enquiry I have constantly been shadowed by the notion that one day,

wonderfully, some of my students may read this study. I trust that our encounters have been as ethically portrayed as I intended.



Because of my two strands of training, in education and counselling-therapy, the evolving narrative, although often flecked with insights from a counselling perspective, as issues emerge, the storying has drawn predominantly on my pedagogical lived experience. Try as I might though, it has been impossible to isolate the two in my thinking, work and writing. My practice has been based particularly on the perspectives of Person-Centered counselling (Rogers, 1959), and Existentialism (van Deurzen, 2010; Webber, n.d.) therapy, although other approaches have also been of influence. In addition, with a long interest in arts based therapy, through exercises, movement and art work I have encouraged “self-expression, active participation, ... and mind-body connection” (Malchiodi, 2005, p.16) to encourage relaxation, provide opportunities for emotional release and help build self-esteem and intercultural communication – as part of learning English.

Whether interpreted through, from or beyond legal and ethical documents, it is the human ethical constructs that apply to the part of the world I inhabit that I must carry, apply and live as part of my own living philosophy. But, essentially I have to believe in my authentic self, my “I” within before I can fully believe in what I do in the how of my interactions in work and, ultimately, the how of my life. For wherever I am on this world, my own internalised code of living, my own personal philosophy and self-expectations are what truly guide me. As Lederach sagely notes,

Ironically, the moral imagination does not build itself around nor is it primarily about ethics. Noble and necessary as it is in the human

community, the ethical inquiry remains somewhat reductionist and analytical by its very nature. (Lederach, 2005, p. 28)



Along the pedagogical journeying personalities, beliefs, values and ethics provided a myriad of challenges, frequently situating the teacher in placatory, mediatory or semi-counselling roles. The ability to remain grounded whilst balancing issues of human nature, human dignity and human rights whilst retaining tolerance and empathic awareness of the students as individuals became a trait to be pursued. Gadamer supports my thinking when he states,

... in the end, it seems clear that the hermeneutic situatedness of the human being is confirmed and that the pretence of standing back from things as if they were nothing more than objects of observation leaves out of account the crucial point of our understanding of other people (and other cultures). (Gadamer, 1990, pp. 29-30)

On occasion, when at a loss for understanding or when overwhelmed by behaviours that appeared to belie immediate logic, patience was invariably rewarded through my personal version of Aristotelian *phronesis* or, perhaps closely related, my “catchbag” thinking which appears to align with Løgstrup’s “flash of insight”. As Norlyk, Dreyer et al explicate,

All real thinking and all understanding are based on emotion and sensation – not abstract speculation. To Løgstrup, sensation is our access to the world. Our sensations carry emotions. Through sensations something comes alive within us, something works on us ... our senses by far exceed the traditional empirical understanding of the senses as instruments by which we gain knowledge. [Further,] Løgstrup compares understanding to a horizon that displays new dynamic patterns of

recognition ... sense-based impressions [which] can create a spontaneous, intuitive flash of insight ... [that] cannot be forced. (2011, pp. 2-3)

My aim was to constantly engender an atmosphere of mutual care and co-operation (Gilligan, 1974; Noddings, 1994), for as Buber claims,

Relation is reciprocity. My You affects me, as I act on it. Our students teach us, our works form us. (Buber, 1970, p. 67)

Taking this stance, as narrator in the enquiry, in avoiding a position derived from critical theory of oppression I attempted to walk with my students, working towards an horizon of restorative pedagogy. The concept of restorative justice also provided an over-arching goal, as “the capacity to imagine something rooted in the challenges of the real world” (Lederach, 2005, p. ix). Strangely, it was as if assisting my students to bridge a generation by way of my self-imposed role of generational teacher – a role which, although evading clear definition, became an underlying concept throughout the study.



Secret appointment

Good teaching cannot be reduced to technique: good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher. (Palmer, 1998, p.149)

In the course of one's own life roles can generally be chosen or roles may be conferred by agreement but, just sometimes, a role is assigned that one may not be aware of. In an interesting extension of role-modelling, on occasion I was informed that I had been claimed as “mother” by adult, female students. Initially this knowledge concerned me deeply as I certainly had not set out to attain that image when trying to reach out to and work with each student as an individual. It took time before becoming comfortable with the bestowed labelling and claimed relationship but, once accepting that the honour required of me no more than being the person I was, I was able to accept the notion graciously. That the students had “adopted” me while in a professional setting was the initial dilemma.



Methodological mindfulness – perspectives of meaning

Whatever the networks, the focus should be on that which dislodges fixities, resists one-dimensionality and allows multiple personal voices to become articulated in a more and more vital dialogue. (Greene, 2014)

In a bid to avoid narcissism (Floridi, 2015; Thompson, 2015) and solipsism (Richardson, 1999, p.62), yet allowing reflection on issues to deepen whilst exploring the inner world of my role (Josselson & Harway, 2012, p. 21) as teacher, with the notions of “could” and “can”, built on Gilligan’s “should, ought, better, good, right and bad” (1974, p.74), possibilities are explored as my self connection between students and the

pedagogical settings converged. With an emphasis on inclusion and trust within the educational environment, although challenged on occasion by various levels of relationship and participation, the rationale of Buber, as outlined by Guilherme, was comforting, "... Buber's thought when connected to education provides us with a strong argument in favour of different levels and kinds of inclusion" (2014, p.177). Through this thinking, it was also essential to recognise that my students, as new learners of English, were unable to communicate well dialogically with me. Not only were they working through complex historical matters, but they were also searching for and finding themselves anew (Fay, 2005) within their own cultural fragmentation as well as the culture of their new home country. In recognition of this, in my work I worked through the lenses that Buber identified for both the education of children and the education of adults.

In regard to educating children,

Buber maintains that the *I-Thou* relation with respect to teacher-pupil relation can only be one-sided; that is teacher towards pupil but not pupil towards teacher. Buber argues that dialogical inclusion cannot be fully mutual in *this case* because if it were to become fully mutual it would either tear apart the educative relation or the educative relation would develop into friendship. ... Thus, given that the educator is in control of his or her relation with the students it is the task and the obligation of the educator to say *Thou* at his or her will and whenever he or she sees fit. That is to say, it is the obligation of the educator to experience education both as a teacher and a student. (Morgan & Guilherme, 2014, p.108. Italics in original)

And, in regard to adult education Buber saw

... the relation between teacher and student [as being] based on a higher level of *communication* ... this mak[ing] it easier for the *I-Thou* relation to arise. The one-sidedness of the *I-Thou* relation between teacher and student in child education is replaced by an *I-Thou* relation that is more symmetrically reciprocal and more empowering for the

adult student. This empowerment of adult students via an *I-Thou relation based largely on mutuality* is the value core of adult education, as it allows it to become the source of personal and community transformation; that is, every *I-Thou* encounter in adult education has the potential for the *I-Thou* to be transformed and this affects the *I's* outlook of *I-It* relations and of future *I-Thou* encounters. And this applies to adult education based on dialogue in its various modes – formal, informal and nonformal. Such transformations, whether personal or communal, are directly connected to an individual and community's well-being and capacity to relate to and interact with other individuals and communities, and this greatly impinges on issues such as adult basic education, active citizenship and conflict resolution. (ibid, p. 109. Italics in original)

Being emplaced in such pedagogical perspectives, my varied role lenses were caught in intersubjective (Peshkin, 1988) encounters that then exerted sufficient power to influence my deeper owned self and it is those encounters that became central to the narration of the cameos, for as Thompson claims,

... tension shifts our understanding of authenticity from the security of self-determination to the messy interplay involved in being “true to oneself” and “being in the world. (Thompson, 2015, p.603)

Giving further direction to my storying, Kierkegaard, as interpreted by Grimsley, makes the distinction between the

...‘aesthetic life’... devoted solely to the pursuit of selfish enjoyment [and the] ethical individual [who] identifies himself with the existence of his fellow men, actively sharing their moral needs and aspirations. (Grimsley, 1973, pp. 27-28)

This imparting the notion that there is a choice, with *Either/Or* polarity, as Kierkegaard's work of that name indicates. But unlike

Kierkegaard, who as an author chose to use pseudonyms to acquire some distancing (Gadamer, 2004; Ricoeur, 1998) from his writing, I have chosen to use cameos and the misting presence of my multiple selves to guide me. It is this interwoven presence that carries the enquiry.



Fortuitously, this enquiry began when I was appointed as teacher to Preliminary (Pre) level, adult, former refugee students. As a consequence, in maintaining a commitment to both my students and the study for the duration of the research period, I was gifted with a double incentive for innovation and questing in my teaching practice. Thus, an underlying, focussed intentionality, based on a conscious awareness of the relationship, not only with my students but also with the course structure and course materials developed as the spirit of the enquiry guided my research (Sokolowski, 2000, p.12). That the enquiry extended over a period when many new projects, each encompassing new directions of work emerged successively, allowed each to be embedded in a continually evolving pedagogical and philosophical matrix. It was as if each was a derivative, a branching, as each new project took grounding and momentum from those previously launched so that, in effect, each project was not ever an isolated body of research experimentation – the interlinking projects were as if part of a whole, although non-existent, original plan (Maxwell, 1996).



Storying the way

... narratives are a basic agency of moral empathy. They help us ... to feel ...they address readers as human beings rather than merely as members of this or that class, sect, faction or clique. (Kearney, 1998, p. 246)

In this study, taking an autobiographical, life-story approach to narrate the lived experience of the teacher, complexities from memories of childhood to adulthood and the ongoing present emerge and are explored. The selected material, derived from teacher, researcher, narrator and self-as-learner perspectives (Josselson & Harway, 2012, p.21), and taking a stance incorporating the moral intentionalities of practical wisdom in *phronesis* as observer, as witness (Halling, 2010, p.137) my role is further transformed to that of interpreter. The multiple role perspectives adopted to interpret the material allowing for distanciation and triangulation, although Bruner, interpreting Freud, warns

that each of us is like an entire cast of characters in a novel or play ... [and that an] extensive self-making narrative will try to speak for them all, but we know already that no single story can do that. (Bruner, 2003a, p.85)

Identifying with that explanation, for me the wearing of many hats (Seuss, 1957) within the multiple roles assumed, at times became rather cumbersome, a situation gaining greater complexity by Arendt, who claims,

[l]ong before the natural and physical sciences began to wonder if man is capable of encountering, knowing, and comprehending anything except himself, modern philosophy had made sure in introspection that man concerns himself only with himself. (Arendt, 1998, p. 280)

Then, through the thinking of Dante, complicating what is becoming a dilemma even further, Arendt poses an almost back to front riddle,

For in every action what is primarily intended by the doer, whether he acts from natural necessity or out of free will, is the disclosure of his own image. Hence it comes about that every doer, in so far as he does, takes delight in doing; since everything that is desires its own being, and since in action the being of the doer is somehow intensified, delight necessarily follows ... Thus, nothing acts unless it makes patent its latent self. (ibid, p.175)

And, as van Manen advises,

The person I am is partly constituted by my life memories ... Our identities are composed of projects that we try to work out when we tell stories about our encounters, accomplishments, adventures, failings, accidents. (van Manen, 1991, p. 23)

But as the teacher involved in the enquiry I assertively claim that,

narration [a]s an act of social creation means that the writer cannot help but be cognizant of her ... position in the narrative, the position of master narrator. (Juschka, 2003, p. 91)



Within this participatory research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005) then, the narrator-writer is involved in being part of change and is certainly part of and sometimes the catalyst of the phenomenological process. That I as narrator draw dimensions from the past to give meaning in the unfolding pedagogical journey makes for a narrative that,

perhaps at times seemingly fragmented, ultimately portrays the lived experience of a teacher.

As “an interpretation carried out after the fact” (Schutz, 1967, p. 37), Gadamer provides sound direction in the dialogical approach taken within the cameos when claiming that, “we ourselves are a conversation” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 95). Therefore, finding dialogue between my teacher-self and myself as researcher-narrator (Palmer, 1998, p.154), by interlinking reflection in practice through journal writing and through the words and works of others, I intertwine my own dialogue in the storying. Through phenomenological and hermeneutic lenses, perception and resonance draw the narrative into an exploration of historical, philosophical and pedagogical contexts and in the questing for clarity and direction, questioning and searching for meaning allows for some understanding. It is an insightful narrative, a gathering of self, ever conscious of possibilities in teaching, learning and being, in a state of “wide awakeness” (Greene, 1997),

... a plane of consciousness of highest tension originating in an attitude of full attention to life and its requirements. (Schutz, 1967, p. 213)

For as Palmer states, “... if we want to deepen our understanding of our own integrity, experiment we must – and then be willing to make choices as we view the experimental results (1998, p.16).” This narrative, therefore, follows an experimental path as the teacher made decisions, risking failure in the process but being astutely aware of making the most of possibilities and opportunities as they emerged.

Thus, endeavouring to interpret my self to find my present in the past, present and future in what Glendinning (2004) termed Wittgenstein’s philosophical “nomadism” this narrative, through reflectively connecting formative pedagogical experiences with evolving

life experience and understanding, gives shape to the teacher construct. It engages the whole self, as Josselson, interpreting Bruner states,

one primary aspect of the understanding of the self is that it relies on selective remembering to adjust the past to the demands of the present and the anticipated future. (Josselson, 2009, p. 648)

This narrative then, is my view as a traveller alongside many others in an intersubjective (Peshkin, 1988) living process, with each individual acting and thinking, each contributing to the life of the other. In traversing my lived pedagogical landscape, choice, change, pathway options and encounters have all influenced my enquiry and storying. Now pursuing the journeying further by way of the road “less travelled by” I will lead you along it.



The Road Not Taken

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveller, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Robert Frost (1964, p.90)



Chapter II - Hidden Significance



Living and Learning Crossroads

Each one of us then should speak of his roads, his crossroads.
(Bachelard, 1994, p. 11)

At some point for some the will to be a teacher emerges. Is it a progression of learning and teacherly incidents? Is it an outcome of cultural or hereditary sources? Is it an innate desire to care and share knowledge? For the teacher-narrator of this enquiry it could have been a conglomeration of all of the above for, whatever subject I have loved, I have always enjoyed helping others find ways into learning, through, over and beyond the parameters of my own understanding. But where did it start?

Growing up as a middling, between two siblings, meant that frequently I was too young to do some things and too old to do others. Fortunately, living on a property with opportunities to explore to, and later beyond the boundaries, meant that the world unfolded to an exploring mind.

As a small child the creek – with the name of Taipo, meaning “devil” in Maori I was told – and the not too far distant hills were frightening boundaries with menacing, Grimm brothers (1812) fairy-tale like possibilities but, as my boundaries extended so too did my understanding of life on earth. Too young, or perhaps of the wrong gender, to go with my older sibling to Cape Kidnappers, the gannet sanctuary – so named because of the attempted abduction of a member of Captain Cook’s crew in 1769 – and the spheres of his widening horizons, I

found interests on home territory. The garden, the creek, the orchard, all provided space for exploring, observing changes and collecting spiders that were kept in jam-jars beside my bed. I had, to me, a wonderful little live collection until my mother discovered that, in a proudly labelled jar, I had a katipo spider (*Latrodectus katipo*) in my arachnid menagerie. Of the same genus and reputation as the venomous Australian Redback, I had obtained this precious specimen by inveigling my brother to procure it on one of his excursions! Within this environment, in growing up I came to some understanding of difference. The plants in the garden always known by their common names, the fruit trees in the orchard and vines in the vineyard rows always known by richly obscure cultivar names such as Trevatt, Moorpark, Roxburgh Red, Kalamazoo, Kahuranaki, Black Hamburg and Iona, but my small critters had two names. Thus was my early introduction to binomial nomenclature and the world of science that, along with so many other interests, have enriched my life.

Reading was my great love, often with a torch under the blankets, long after lights-out time, devouring books as my ability progressed. Making up story tales for my younger sibling and reading aloud, books such as Milly Molly Mandy (Brisley) and Pippi Longstocking (Lindgren) hold special memories. Just maybe those books were of more influence than I ever really suspected. But that is getting ahead of myself

Pedagogical undulations

... I begin by asking myself, who is it who really educates? When does education really begin? (Gadamer, 2001, p. 529)

Primary schooling for me held no real excitement. Although, from memory, my teachers were mostly good and caring, I was not enthused by the schooling experience. My first teacher was a Mrs. Lidderdale, on exchange from the United States of America, surely a brave woman venturing to a corner of the antipodes so soon after World War II (Middleton, 2009, p.37). Unintentionally on her part I am sure, perhaps my most mortifying moment in learning was when, on my first day at school, she gave me a wooden jig-saw puzzle of an elephant to work with. I had only ever seen a picture of an elephant in an alphabet book and had never seen a jig-saw puzzle before so had no idea what to do with it. The challenges demanded of me by the task were petrifyingly overwhelming. I was used to, and loved, large spaces so was not happy with pernickety bits of wood that had to be put together in small spaces then pulled apart to be redone over and over! It all seemed to be a pointless exercise – it was as if being required to put back together a broken milk bottle. Thus, my bruising transition from a multi-dimensional world to the two dimensional world of literacy at five years of age was not a smooth introduction to my pedagogical pathway. That experience remains as a memory, a haunting reminder as I work with my students.

Other remembered teachers came and went and, although I must have done some learning, which I am most grateful to them for, there were too many things waiting to be explored and schooling, including “the imported reading books” (Richards, 2014, p.10) of “Janet and John”, got in the way.

Pedagogical hiatus

To speak of the encounter does not mean that we meet “others,” but it means that we meet “each other”: that is, in a human and undeniably creative social reality; in a complex but never completely understood network of circumstances and problems to which human thinking and acting responsibly must be responsive. (Langeveld, 1983)

Although enjoying friendships and sport, school really was not my favoured place, a feeling that was intensified when at the age of nine I was put in a class with a teacher who has left me with memories of unchallenged classroom power, power that leads to a story that is as fresh in my mind today as if it took place yesterday.

The classroom was part of a big, old, high ceilinged, wooden school building, the school that my mother and her siblings had attended. There was a big, cast-iron stove in one corner and high, sashed-windows that were so high up that when sitting at my ink-welled desk I could see only the waving fronds of the old palm trees outside, white-fluffed cumulus clouds scudding across a bright blue sky, or sometimes, dark, black clouds and the flashing lightning of autumn thunder storms, and occasionally, the bright pathway and gentle arc of a rainbow. Inside was not a good place when the outside called. As the year progressed so too did the tension within the classroom. As the days got shorter, so too did the temper of the teacher. As his anger rose his face would match the colour of his shocking-pink, hand-knitted tie. As his colour rose the tension in the room reached breaking point and his anger would be unleashed on whoever was deemed to be the recipient. He would hurl wooden chalkboard dusters at students, he broke blackboard set-squares over boys' shoulders and he would line up students to give the strap for little cause. Lined up with others, I was given the strap for not having all of my spelling correct. When I loved reading, and spelling was usually no problem for me, it seemed so unfair and, in reflection, I long continued to

feel the injustice of his wrath. As a child, finding iniquity in the situation and unable to verbalise the enormity of it, I could only react with responsive behaviour to the teacher's behaviour that was straight out of a draconian fairy-story told to inculcate fear and absolute obedience.

With his raging behaviour, in me this teacher instilled such fear that soon I adamantly refused to go to school. "[E]ducational influence bec[a]me the stuff of [my] own bad dreams" (Todd, 2010, p.3). I became a school refuser, adamantly insisting that I would not go to school, and I did not!

After my flight and the subsequent fear of some form of retaliation or retrieval, from both the teacher and the arms of the law, had subsided, I felt free to roam at home. Although my child brain did not fully understand the machinations of the law, instinctively I somehow understood that I had no control over the actions of the teacher and that full accountability was not required of me, although that did not stop incessant parental urging of me to return to the classroom.

Whilst my siblings attended school I enjoyed my solitary, homebound existence. With orchard, vineyard, creek, and towering old Spanish chestnut and walnut trees, just right for the making of huts or tree houses in or under, as my territory, I was more than happy. I had the best school possible – home school. All too soon it seemed, occasional home-work coming to me became an uncomfortable reminder of the situation I was evading – unwelcome reminders of the classroom where it was deemed I should have been. That the homework had to be collected by others also provided opportunity for verbalised pressure to return to school in its presentation to me. But I remained adamant – I was happy with my books, the animals – especially our horse – and open learning space.

As winter wore on our great, working Clydesdale horse, Prince, was taken from his winter bogged and flood-filled, creek-side paddock, to a wind-break paddock that bordered a vineyard down the road.

This huge, plodding animal was the puller of the orchard spray pump, the puller of the plough and harrows. He was my giant, gentle teddy-bear, having been part of my life since I was born. Always he heard my sorrows as I wept into his mane or shared my tales in his wonderfully, horsey smelling ears. As he listened, all the while he would determinedly keep feeding on great mouthfuls of grass around my feet, blinking his big, black eyes with such knowing understanding and a tilting flash of his long black eyelashes. With a back like a table-top he was my circus horse for hand stands and other tricks. I would lie flat on his back to read on sunny days. With my hands tucked under his mane to keep them warm I would lie on his warm back on cold days. We had a special friendship, especially from the time when he was so ill. After the vet had attended to him I knelt beside the great head of my big friend, stroking his big velvety nose, quietly imploring him to get better as he lay sprawled, almost lifeless, on the grass. His eyes barely casting a focus on me, his whole being in complete contrast to his joyous dust bath ecstasy after a hard day's work when, oblivious to the world, he would roll and roll, powerfully punching and flailing his great hooves and shaggy legs skywards.

But, suddenly we were parted when he was walked down the road to fresh pasture, where, with his usual enormous appetite and ever ready sense of mischief, he whiled his time away. The vineyard worker's bags, stored near the fence-line with tasty lunches tucked inside, were more than tempting. Perhaps seeking company, on occasion, at night, with deft management of a Taranaki gate – a wire and fence-post compilation strung across the paddock gateway – he would dislodge the wire loop that held the fence-like gate taut and would be found next morning, ravenously absorbed in eating grass in the car turn beside our house – always the picture of innocence. In the dark of night he would turn left and plod

down the road, straight through crossroads then turn left down our long driveway beside the grapevines. But whilst I was at home and missing his presence badly, one night he dislodged the “gate”, turned left, plodded to the crossroads and turned right

The teacher, whom I was evading, had recently bought a house and had been spending much time and effort landscaping his new garden. With the freshness of spring, spikes of bright, new, green grass were emerging through a beautifully manicured bedding of grey sand. Already sporting fresh, young leaf buds, there were also newly planted, standard rose bushes elegantly lining the concrete pathway from the road to his house. Of all the gardens possible to visit in this rural community, what compelled my beloved horse to visit this one? Although already at home next morning, devouring grass, the unmistakable dinner-plate sized hoof prints he had imprinted in the sand of the newly emerging lawn and the severely chewed-upon rose bushes were overwhelming evidence as to who the culprit was!

Not long after that incident, having been assured of no retribution for my long absence from the classroom, I finally relented to pressure and was persuaded to return to school. In effect, the actions of my much loved horse – and whatever reparation was made by my father – allowed me to overcome fear and absolve myself of, almost certainly wrongly harboured, feelings of guilt in the broken relationship with the teacher. It was with great trepidation, and feeling like a new student entering into a totally new pedagogical environment, I returned to school, to a different class and a new teacher.

Buber, referring to his childhood I-thou encounter with a grey horse (Hodes, 1975, pp. 57-58), at a comparably similar age as I was with my experience, has allowed me to narrate my cameo. He eloquently clarifies both his and my own equine encounter when he states,

No encounter with a being or a thing in the course of our life lacks a hidden significance . . . The highest culture of soul remains basically ... barren unless, day by day, waters of life pour forth into the soul from those little encounters to which we give our due. (Buber, 2002, pp. 38-9)

What a profoundly insightful message those words convey, a message that comes back repeatedly as delights and challenges confront me, as my ongoing lived experience unfolds.



In Hobart, Australia, over fifty years after being in that never to be forgotten class in New Zealand, I met with a classmate from that year and learned that at some more relatively recent time, that teacher, “a sad, little old man”, long-retired, had met another fellow classmate and had allegedly apologised for his behaviour in our class! How amazing that the gist of that dialogue should reach me when so far removed, in distance and time, from the classroom environment that I had rejected decades before. In addition, it was also a strangely unexpected, almost unnerving experience to find that the information instilled warm compassion and forgiveness (Zaibert, 2009) towards the very person who had instilled such fear in me as a child. Having pushed the memories of that experience into a sometimes contemplated but unopened package, that had been a constant companion for so long, and then to have the memories unexpectedly reawakened was both strange and confusedly liberating. It was as if a long absent reciprocity of human dignity had finally been restored. Perhaps ungraciously, until that confrontation with the memories of that classroom violence, the experience just could not be set aside.

As an adult, I now wonder what had caused such pain for this teacher. Was it a reaction to some past experience? I wonder had he seen World War II service in a theatre of war as a young soldier and had experienced situations that had made a deep impression on him? Was it that, in a history of family violence (Minuchin, 1974; Johnson, 2010) he was repeating the cycle in yet another generation? Had his father, his grandfather and others before him, modelled such behaviour and he was inwardly compelled to act similarly?

[For, such acts] can be ... situated not as isolated events but as part of a cycle with a history of actions, reactions and counteractions. Only when understood in the context of a broader pattern, which in the short term can be very difficult to visualise, is it possible to see that how we choose to respond has consequences and implications in terms of a wider, historic pattern. (Lederach, 2005, p. 25)

What was it that caused him such a pattern of pain, a pattern he could not relinquish? For,

... as Freud postulates past violence suffered by the individual continually play ... out in interminable ways in our present encounters, while simultaneously we continually remake the past through a projection of the present. (Todd, 2013b, p. 12)



Negotiating crossroads

Transferring the notion of “crossroads”, as related, to my teaching and pedagogical thinking, I turn to Meacham’s clarification of Vygotsky’s understanding. Vygotsky interpreted the notion of crossroad through the analogy of jazz improvisation, when jazz players retain the integrity of their traditional music but reach out to amalgamate music derived from other sources or cultures. Thus the metaphor “crossroad” is

[d]escribed as a definitive moment of challenge or crisis, a crossroad is reached, when one is urged ... to move beyond the familiar range of understanding and integrate new domains of information. (Meacham, 2001, p. 193)

It was such crossroads in the classroom that I saw so often when students made a quantum leap in their learning, often not of curriculum tick-worthiness, but a great accomplishment. Celebratory moments indeed.

In addition, the metaphorical notion has allowed me to recognise the convivial support that I drew from my multiple selves throughout the pedagogical crossroad challenges that I confronted and moved through during this enquiry. It was those crossroads that confronted me in my various pedagogical encounters, crossroads that pointed out directions, offering support or contradiction when facing choices.

With different connotation, Palmer also uses the metaphorical notion of a crossroad, an intersection, when explicating the place of a teacher in the community. He observes,

Unlike many professions, teaching is always done at the dangerous intersection of personal and public life ...[for] a good teacher must stand where personal and public meet, dealing with the thundering flow of traffic at an intersection where “weaving a web of interconnectedness” feels more like crossing a freeway on foot. (Palmer, 1998, p. 17)

Although not elaborated, it is an astutely, perceptive comment for on reflection, emanating from the teacher-classroom role, the range of professional, curricula and extra-curricula duties that may be required or expected, is both demanding and ever-expanding. All automatically, incrementally part of the teacher's burgeoning role but seldom fully acknowledged.



Chiasmic fear

Prompted by Palmer's analogy, for me the notion of "crossroad" conjured the memory of cycling in Ho Chi Minh city during the last year that bicycles reigned supreme as means of transport there. Being guided by a local student-friend, after a day of visiting temples and remnants of the ancient city walls, returning to the city centre, we approached the bottleneck of a major intersection. With what seemed like ever-streaming, thousandfold herds of cyclists relentlessly converging from the four corners of the compass, we slowed to match the inexorable momentum of the voiceless, whirring, eerily bell-tinkling mass. Cyclists turning to left or right would give indication of their prospective moves by extending one arm downwards and rigidly wriggling their fingers before daringly cutting across the paths of the relentless, surging herd of the majority as it proceeded straight ahead.

Blithely following my guide into the seething fray I quickly realised how terrifying the excursion had suddenly become, but, there being no space to turn back or other means of evading the collision course, I cycled on as if in a dream of ever increasing traumatic tension. With no space between bicycles to accommodate a fallen cyclist, let alone a fallen bicycle,

I implored the local water spirits and the treasured little stone tortoise god in my back-pack to keep me safely upright as the mass slowed even further. Incredibly, maintaining course, the converging traffic somehow, like threads of fine muslin, gradually oozed through the intersection and bled into the opposing, channelling streets. After having ridden at near standstill pace, almost defying gravity, cyclists, on emerging, resumed pedalling as their invisible clouds of focussed tension evaporated in the humid, clammy air and, resuming individuality, they became part of the noisy, dusty, bustling city throng once more.

In reflecting on that cameo, I now recognise a paradoxical, internalised sense of intense isolation whilst being a constrained, living organism compressed into a space with a countless multitude of others. Helplessly embedded in a people-powered flow of directional intentionality, for me, exercising freewill had been neither an option nor a possibility.

Locating the notions of life crossroads and the incongruently intense isolation that were part of the experience conveyed in that cameo, a previously unstoried part of my “solitary journey in the company of millions” (Buchanan, 1998), Brockmeier astutely gives understanding when he states “meaning is where culture and history are *not*” (Brockmeier, 2009, p. 218. Italics in original). Indeed, engulfed in such a seemingly never ending sense of powerlessness, “history” and “culture” were definitely not part of the scenario and I ask of myself, under much greater, unrelenting tensions and trauma, “Is that, with much greater intensity, what so many of my students have endured along their journeying pathways?”



Modelled learning

As a counterbalance to the abdication-from-school episode in my life, Prince, my giant teddy-bear, taught me so much more. It was not until more recent years, when watching other horses working that I realised what a team my father and Prince had been, what a special relationship they had and how well my father had trained this big animal. Prince just loved ploughing – he would pace proudly up a long furrow then swing around for the next, nearly always well aligned but if not my father would patiently shake the rope reins on the off-side that he wanted him to move to before they continued on. Prince’s ears would go back to listen to instructions and when given the “Gee up” to move on, he would step out with great joy – I can still see him in my mind. His shining eyes and stance said it all – head up and striding out – which was a bit hard on my father following with the plough if the ground was boggy! Perhaps the most amazing thing my father had coaxed Prince to do when ploughing, ensuring that more ground was cultivated, was to walk straight up to a barbed-wire topped fence, swing his nose up and over the fence as he turned in an arc, then swing his nose back over again to align himself for the next furrow. The big animal treated barbed-wire with respect but he could also stretch its boundaries in mischief!

I don’t ever recall my father losing patience with Prince – he could be firm and would occasionally talk sternly to him if mischief interrupted work. My father would always stop Prince if he misbehaved. Leaving the plough lurched at an angle and the long, rope reins loosely lined on the ground, he would walk up Prince’s off-side, firmly hold the blinkered halter and give a stern talk to the big working horse at a conversation distance, right eye to left eye. As my father returned to the plough on the near-side, carefully checking horse and harness as he went, Prince would always lower his great head, letting the big, dusty collar fall forward to his ears, as if giving an acquiescent apology. Then, with a sudden lift of his

head as he refocussed, the big collar would fall back into place in a cloud of dust and jingling harness, and he was ready to be off again.

Being on the periphery of that teaching and training for all of my childhood home-life taught me so much about patience. It also taught me that one lesson is often not enough!



... listening is an attentiveness not only to speech, but also to the other that speaks, to the other that exceeds the spoken words. (Todd, 2002, p. 407)

One day in class with my students of many nationalities, reminding me very much of that past learning, we were looking at a vocabulary-picture list of animals. We had “discussed” the roles of horses and donkeys in different cultures. I had attempted to replicate the words for “donkey” in various languages – attempts acknowledged by polite smiles then corrected with mimetic modelling (Maran, 2003) of my own style of pronunciation correction! Accompanied by the trumpeting blasts of rampaging, raging elephants we had listened to and understood various frightening body languaged “stories” of elephant power when bulldozing houses and uprooting corn. Then we came to the word “buffalo”. Immediately one student stood up, raced to the window ledge and selecting a toy buffalo and a bull, he set them paired abreast on the table saying “Two, two” while pointing to the buffalo. Then, by using coloured pencils from a nearby mug, he proceeded to yoke-up the beasts just as if he was preparing for work in his homeland fields. Proceeding to take one pencil for a plough and another as a goading cane, with sparkling eyes and full concentration he began to firmly but patiently “drive” the stationary beasts to commence ploughing. Both of the beasts, clearly with

individualistic behaviour, had their names, and the calls and procedure explicitly showed us all watching how this student had ploughed with his animals not so very long before. His storying held us all enthralled and totally absorbed. It was as if we were actually watching him work with his own big animals, as if we had been transported from a two dimensional page into multidimensional reality.



Teacherly attributes

A year or so after my school refusal episode I completed primary schooling, in the old school building, with another teacher who was also my swimming coach. This teacher, having grown up in a remote rural area near where I later spent several summers working in a national park, was well suited to understanding the student cohort of the school. His firm grasp of the Maori language and understanding of Maori culture was also an asset. Although not fluent in the language myself, one lunch-time in the playground I jumped when hearing this teacher, on playground duty, calling out in Maori to some Maori boy classmates who were away out on the football field. Having been reprimanded over some issue they had wandered away out of earshot and were apparently discussing the teacher and their consideration of his handling of the incident. What they had not known was that not only could this teacher speak Maori fluently but he could also lip/speech read! The boys were aghast to have had an unperceived eavesdropper from afar and all reeled apart in shock. They had not known that this teacher, earlier in his teaching career, had taught in a school for the deaf!



Life adjustment

...experience has its proper fulfilment not in definitive knowledge but in the openness to experience that is made possible by experience itself. (Gadamer, 2004, p. 350)

At this time also, in repayment for swimming coaching from this same teacher, along with the rest of the swimming squad my summers were spent teaching many children to swim. Very occasionally we would teach groups of children with physical disabilities from the nearby city, work that required a special call for extra energy and care on those days, as well as the usual joy of teaching. Those children, all about the same age as those of us teaching them, were amazingly trusting. They would try so hard and were so infectiously cheerful – it was a joy to work with them and those rare days were very special indeed. But, vividly still, my memory can take me back to one occasion.

Needing to collect a towel, I climbed out of the pool and proceeded from the sunlit, sparkling pool into the girl's drab, unlit, unpainted change-room. There, as my eyes adjusted to the lack of light, I was faced with a sight that has stayed with me ever since. In the cave-like dimness, lying on the benches lining all four walls was a seemingly endless ring of black leather boots, prosthetic limbs, metal rods, thick leather strapping, laces and buckles. As if I was centre-stage as an audience of one, in a strange reversal of theatre-in-the-round, all end to end surrounding me, personified, the prosthetic limbs seemed to be sleeping in the gloom. It was as if they were being revealed on stage by the overhanging drapes of towels and clothing. Turning slowly, this confrontation was an enormous shock. Engulfed in a strange loneliness (Stein & Tuval-Mashiach, 2015) it portrayed a startling message of what living with disability and difference meant, and, pulling me up short, momentarily wiped away the excitement of our connectedness and work in the pool. Perhaps being the most profound experience to that stage in my twelve year life, the encounter

(Bollnow, 1972; Koskela & Siljander, 2014) gave me an utterly engulfing feeling of humility and a strong message that I lived in a world of diversity (Nieto & Johnson, 2007).

I then returned to the pool, reclaiming myself and my work as a very different person.

Decades after that transformative event (Mezirow, 2003), that left me suddenly divorced from a childhood self, Brockmeier softens the understanding when, interpreting Gibson (1979), he claims,

We do not perceive, through sense-data or sensory information, “neutral” physical objects to which we cognitively “add” meanings or whose meanings we cognitively “decode”. Rather, what we perceive is already a meaningful and ecologically valid structure, otherwise we would not be able to perceive it at all. (Brockmeier, 2009, p. 220)



The only wisdom we can hope to acquire
Is the wisdom of humility:
Humility is endless.

(T. S. Eliot, 2001)



High trails

Soon I was in high-school but spent precious weekends in the mountains, then spending summers working at the Headquarters of Urewera National Park. Providing tourists with track and weather information, identifying flora and fauna and assisting with evening information sessions made the work so memorable. One year additional work entailed being part of a small party of National Park employees that went into the upper reaches of the Whakatane River searching for old survey pegs that had been set, almost a century before, for a proposed road into Maori land. The sturdy packhorses that carried our food and camp gear were sure footed and, being well used to the steep terrain, provided ideal anchor-points when clambering over landslips or out of gullies. They too enjoyed the challenging work.

The whole of the Urewera became “home”. Lake Waikaremoana, Lake Waikareiti, Panekiri Bluff, rushing rivers, the waterfalls, kiwis whistling at night, the smell of the forest, and the great, entangled ratas with billowing swatches of red flowers are all still part of me.



Teacherly course of action

By this time a love of teaching in the informal sense prompted me to apply for teacher training and soon after I was duly called for an interview at the provincial Education Department building. Then, as with pending exam results, it was a time of nervous waiting. What would the verdict be? Would I be accepted? My life had reached a stage when adult decisions had to be made but little did I realise how pivotal that interview was, marking a major turning point in my life. How could I have known what the future held?



Soon then, I was off to college. To Ardmore Teachers' College, the only fully residential college in New Zealand, located in decaying World War II Air Force buildings south of Auckland. With a focus on early childhood education, I became immersed in the learning and work alongside students from far off Pacific islands and both Maori and pakeha from the central and east coast areas of the North Island. Living with such cultural diversity, lectures and learning became entwined in the lived reality of the environment.

A special highlight at this time was an invitation from Betty Fairbrother – the wife of Peter, a ranger in Urewera National Park where I had worked – to another student and me, to assist with a camp she had organised for her Maori School infant class. Although at the beginning of 1967, the penultimate year of the existence of the New Zealand Maori School system (Middleton, 2009, p. 35), it was the first camp ever to have been approved for infant level children from a Maori School.

We spent three wonderful days with the children in the bush edging the Urewera. With special leave dispensation from college, the time passed quickly as we built rock weirs in the river and got soaked as we discussed concepts related to maths and physics and heaved great, river

worn rocks into patterns. We estimated distance, time and weight. We compared and counted stones and leaves. We watched and listened to the birds, and we drew, smelt and explored the bush as if no person had been there before. It was a magical experience that was so deeply grounded in the traditional legends of Tane of the forest, and the spirits that Peter enthralingly orated in the evening at bunk-time, before the lanterns were extinguished. Although my handwritten report of that experience, required by the college authorities, has long since disappeared, those three days have had lasting influence on my teaching practice.

With focussed engagement by all, it was a time of intensive learning, being almost as culturally and pedagogically authentic (Magrini, 2012, pp.16-19) as I could imagine, well encompassing the four major criteria that Rule (2006, pp. 1-2) posits as being integral to a claim for authenticity. The activities involved “real-world problems” (ibid) in an enchantingly real world environment. “Open-ended inquiry, thinking skills and metacognition” (ibid) were addressed at many levels throughout the camp from varied physical, cultural, spiritual, pedagogical, emotional, technological and authentically natural world aspects. The students were definitely well engaged in “discourse and social learning within a community of learners” (ibid) in teamwork, cultural affirmation and an awareness of cultural difference – this being particularly so when meeting a hand-powered egg-beater for the first time. Watching the children’s initial, spontaneous reactions of astounding fear rapidly move through awe to delighted wonderment provided me with an unanticipated, and certainly not deliberately provoked, memory sequence. And, the students were greatly “empowered, through [self-volition and] choice, to direct their own learning in project work (ibid)” as they busily engaged in mathematical concepts, and the laws of physics and nature in the reality that the rushing river, the forest and the imposing landscape provided.

In retrospect now, I wonder what learning and love for the environment the children derived from and, in turn, placed back into all

of those memory stones? It was as if our interaction with the environment had been choreographed by some very masterful, guiding hand and emphatically emphasised Rousseau's claim that, "Nature wants children to be children before being adults" (2013, p. 236).



Those few magical school days spent in the bush have had ongoing and incalculable impact on my own pedagogical thinking and classroom practice. Set within the rapidly evolving 1960's context of educational thinking, with influence particularly from Britain and North America, I wonder now what pedagogical and philosophical thinking Betty Fairbrother built her practice on. As a teacher in the Maori School system, a system that from the outset had different historical and theoretical underpinnings to the national school system (Dr. Allan North, Te Whaiti, pers. comm, 9.8.1967; Middleton, 2009), I wonder what motivated Betty to run the camp and whether the work and writing of Sylvia Ashton-Warner, or who, of other educationalists, might have influenced her.

Perception leads us to assume the split between organism and environment. But organism and environment are always inherently one interaction ... (Gendlin, n.d.)



Sylvia Ashton-Warner

About this time I found Sylvia Ashton-Warner's novel *Spinster* (1958), the first edition with the line drawing of the school and playground on the front cover, so typical of country schools in New Zealand at that time (Richards, 2014, p. 5). On the first read I avidly identified with the location portrayed in the narrative as it seemed to fit the country I knew so well. Although still a teacher in training, within the story the writer's pedagogical philosophy resonated with me. On the second reading I recall skipping much of the personal drama of the heroine, and on the third read I became impatient with the storyline that intruded into the philosophy. Attuning me to pedagogical possibilities, that novel certainly enlivened me in the yet to be experienced reality of being a classroom teacher.

Soon after I read Ashton-Warner's other early novels, but they remained undistinguished in my thinking and it was not until my first year of teaching that I finally read Ashton-Warner's better known work, *Teacher* (1963). Interestingly, that book was not referred to at all during my teacher training in the mid-60s. Was the work a political anathema in some way? Was the lack of recognition a snub to a local educationalist who had published internationally? Was it, perhaps, that the ethos of Ashton-Warner's pedagogical philosophy, through her or others, was already part of the educational thinking of the time? Was there a possibility that because Ashton-Warner worked outside mainstream practice that her thinking was marginalised, perhaps even being overlooked due to an element of cultural prejudice?

Written during and describing her teaching and evolving pedagogical understanding whilst at Fernhill, a rural area that had been on the furthest reaches of my long, solitary weekend bike-rides during adolescence, the work seemed to cover much old territory for me. The city shops where she had sought the brown gym-frocks (Ashton-Warner, 1963) for her basket/net-ball team I could locate in my memory and I well remember how imposing and proud the girls wearing them were when

they came to our school for an interschool competition. How smart they looked in their brown, pleated uniforms with swinging, golden-yellow cord belts, a smartness that I recall, met with muttered, jealous, comments from some older, pakeha girls at our school. On that day too, on the sideline of the court near a goal-post, I recall standing next to the only person who was cheering the Fernhill girls on – and indulging in sideline and on-court coaching – a tallish pakeha (white) woman. I strongly suspect that person was Sylvia Ashton-Warner.

Having lived with a copy of *Teacher* (1963) for several decades into my teaching career, perhaps because of the writing style or perhaps the pedagogical understandings were already instilled in me, it failed to have the same impact on my thinking and practice that *Spinster* (1958) had. But now I readily acknowledge the influence that Ashton-Warner cast on my own teaching praxis.



Surprisingly, in writing this, my own “slice of time”, I have found a compassion for Ashton-Warner. Although a generation apart, she, as we all are, was a “product of her time”. Individuality, gender, family, community, national and world politics, and technological machinations all played a part in who she was. Like me, she was a product of the New Zealand teacher training system of our respective times. Early publishing in the national teacher’s journal, the most logical affiliation for her at that time, she was caught in colonial-postcolonial, pre and post-World War II interstices – a world with powered household technology emerging through depression years in a pre-computerised world without the inter-networking power that we have today. Despite her personal, even generational, struggles, she clearly attempted to impart a pedagogical philosophy of her own passion, time and place. Engaged within the

context of what is now pedagogical history – the Maori School system, previously the Native School system (Middleton, 2009, p.35), at a time when it was becoming increasingly aligned to the national education system. I wonder if there is more to know of Ashton-Warner in her own pedagogical context, for as Todd explains,

We become present in the world as unique beings in a time that is neither determined by the past nor entirely shaped by the future.
(Todd, 2010)



Bridges, frameworks and signposts

The bridge. It is the bridge from the known to the unknown; ... and universally speaking, from the inner man out. (Ashton-Warner, 1963, p. 28)

“Bridges” and “frameworks” are metaphorical labels that I find to be overly restrictive. Bridges to me indicate a conformingly channelled pathway and frameworks indicate something contained as if definitive and needing power to escape from. The latter metaphor particularly, appears to claim ownership of concepts by writers who have wanted to claim something as their own, but, to break from the delineating concept requires power to argue or restructure the theoretical thinking. I much prefer the concept of signposts or pathways as these metaphors have much less closed or rigid connotations, allowing for creativity that invites open dialogue and the development of new ideas.



A bridge or passage usually leads in two directions with the additional possibility of homeostasis, whereas, signposts signify directions allowing for detours, new decisions and destinations, and future learning with so many possibilities.

Acknowledging with understanding Ashton-Warner’s emphasis on the metaphor of “bridge”, New Zealand with its relatively young landscape, its mountains and rushing rivers is a land of bridges – railway bridges, log bridges, road bridges, viaducts, rail and road bridge combined, ratty farm bridges, and long concrete bridges. Living mostly in relatively remote locations, for her, bridges allowed contact with the outside world, and, occasionally in flood-time, precluded that contact

altogether. Then, throughout her middle years, Ashton-Warner appeared to hanker for a “bridge” to the outside wider world. A “bridge” that came to her later in life when she spent time with her son in London (1970), the United States of America (1970) where she established a community school in Aspen, Colorado, and Canada (1972-1973) where she was employed by Simon Fraser University to deliver courses based on her teaching methodology (Middleton, 2012).

A generation later my bridges were also those that Ashton-Warner would have known during her time at Fernhill – 1951-1956 (Hood, 1988), her years there overlapping my primary schooling years. Between our respective rural townships there flowed two rivers. Closer to my home was the Tutaekuri River, beside which was the pa, from which most of my Maori classmates came. At this river we would sometimes spend hot summer days swimming in waterholes, swinging from willows and dropping into swirling water below, or lazing on the algae grouted, waterworn greywacke rocks, soaking ourselves in the warm, guzzling shallows.

Well recalling one swimming excursion there, chilled by the cold water swim I was searching for a place to lie down on the smoothly worn rocks to warm up, but the sun-scorched river-bed was baking. Wandering, with feet on fire, I suddenly became aware of intermittent, clashing. Looking upstream, under and beyond the echoing bridge, by a bend in the river, there was a group from the pa. Selecting large rocks, smacking them together and listening to the sound, the group was searching for those suitable to put in their hangi cooking pit. Non-fractured stones were safe when heated but those that were fractured would have exploded, perhaps throwing out rock shrapnel and creating havoc within their hangi. How I wished that I could have been more closely involved in that learning.

Closer to Fernhill was the Ngaruroro after it too fell onto the plains after draining the Kaweka Range. I recall many tramps into the headwaters of these rivers and long solitary, bike rides in my adolescence

with bridges and signposts leading me to Poraite, Puketapu, Waiohiki and Fernhill. Bridges were for getting there, wherever there was but signposts indicated possible routes to travel. So, as with maps, I have a penchant for both bridges (Buchanan, 2005, p.42) and signposts, but claim to be a teacher who prefers to operate by providing “signposts”. To me the multidirectional indications offer choice and a freedom to explore the landscape and a freedom to learn.



Teaching

You do not need moral genius for educating ... ; you do need someone who is wholly alive and able to communicate himself directly to his fellow beings. His aliveness streams out to [the students] and affects them most strongly and purely when he has no thought of affecting them. (Buber, 2002a, p. 105)

Eventually teaching engulfed me. After a Probationary year, as a newly fledged teacher I had a very large class of New Entrant 5 year old children from several cultures and countries, including Maori children, children from various Pacific island nations and also pakeha – white New Zealanders by birth and immigrant children from Europe. The country service school was in a bleak, forestry township, on the volcanic plateau in the middle of the North Island.

Just as it was for the children, for me as a new teacher, there was so much to absorb, explore and learn. I recall taking the class to a farm on a windy day. With gently rolling, open slopes the children just could not stop running – in all directions – through the silky, shimmering wind-blown grass. Thankfully their excitedly chaotic movement mesmerising

the enormous farm bull in a nearby paddock! I recall the children of a large family all sharing one pair of shoes – on freezing, frosty days with the designated child wearing the shoes, the others ran to school with bare feet. The child in my class, being the youngest, would arrive at school with a beaming smile of great pride as he showed off his well-shone, oversized footwear when it was his turn to wear them. As I discovered in this graphic example, as with everything in life – one size certainly does not fit all (Palmer, 1998, p.16)!

I think of the children finding and excitedly tugging me down to their level to look more closely at the exquisite white, skeletonised, miniature soccer balls of basket fungus that were nestled amongst dried autumn leaves under shrubs in the playground. I think of the incessant wind and older children flying kites. When it was school time they merely tethered their still flying kites to a metal rail outside their classroom door, later, to be untethered at lunch time or after school, to continue the fun.



The language of books

the wholeness of the self is constituted by the story of a life – a coherent narrative of which we are always the protagonist, but not always the author or the producer. (Benhabib, 1992, p. 127)

I particularly remember the very welcome cardboard boxes full of library books that would arrive in the classroom at the beginning of each term, by courtesy of the Country Library Service (Middleton, 2009, p. 36). A service of which I was reminded more recently when learning of the volunteers that, continuing Paolo Freire's philosophy (Freire, 1993), were

taking books by pack-donkey to remote villages in Brazil (Osuna-Gatty, 2012).

Always a wonderful gift, at the beginning of one term the picture books duly arrived and as they needed checking and shelving after class time, I left the full boxes in the middle of the mats where some of my New Entrant five year olds were sitting reading. After inviting them to explore the books I checked on those writing, those painting, those working with games and puzzles and those in the play-house. Then, on turning, I found the reading group on the mats all crowded around three children. Holding just one book, the three book bearers were holding it wide open, with covers back to back like a paper-lantern. All were totally engrossed in discussion and excited exclamations as they focussed only on that one book. What a sight – peering over shoulders and taking turns, without tugging or snatching, all were trying to peer through holes in the pages. Some were peering from the back to the front, some from the front to the back. Others, swarming to the group by the focussed energy, like bees around a flower, were excitedly peering over shoulders into the wedge-shaped views between pages. So easily that book could have been torn apart in the excitement of discovery and eagerness to explore but, with gentle care, with layers of children surrounding it, all were totally absorbed – all drawing from it an essence of wonder. And the book – it was Tove Jansson’s *The Book About Moomin, Mymble and Little My* (1953) – a children’s picture book that, even today, decades after it was written, continues to enthrall.



Lunar Distanciation

Perhaps the cameo that I most remember from that time was on the day of an event that is well marked in history, 21st July (22nd July New Zealand time), 1969, the day that brought the Space Race to some closure.

Throughout the days previously, by way of radio reports and black and white television news, the world had been kept informed of the planned landing on the moon. In our locality, I recall, that auspicious day started a little cloudy but cleared to bright sunshine as the chilly winter morning wore on. With no television in the classrooms, teachers were told that the minute by minute account of the moon landing would be broadcast over the classroom loudspeaker system, which was always turned on in case of the need for earthquake drill or emergency evacuation.

Over the preceding days, in class, I had talked with the children about spacecraft, which were frequently depicted in their paintings and drawings, and men travelling inside them around the earth and to the moon. We had thought about the moon and how far it was from the world we lived on. We had talked about the spacemen that were going to try and walk on the moon. Then, on that eventful July morning, preparing the children for the moon landing attempt, I briefly reviewed the information outlined over previous days. I drew my usual stick-figure diagrams on the black-board - the world where we lived, the moon that we could see shining at night and three men in a spacecraft close to the moon, explaining again that two men were going to get into a smaller spacecraft, like going in a bus and then in a car, to try and walk on the moon. Finishing the last drawing I turned to face the children once again, but it was as if an icy draught had suddenly come between us. There was absolute, stony silence (Zembylas & Michaelides, (2004). The children, sitting cross-legged on the mats, leaning forward, all in exactly the same position, seemed to be frozen in time. Through hazed eyes, as if in a trance, with what seemed like disdained disbelief, they looked through me

as if nothing made sense to them. It was as if, for them, I was talking but making no sound at all, or as if I was simply not present. What happened? What did I say? Maybe they were merely “switched off” for, as Langveld confirms “As we all know, nothing is so silent as that which is self-evident” (1983, p. 5). Was it because they already knew that there already was a “man **IN** the moon”? They knew that, because that is what they had always been told by others when looking at a full moon at night. Certainly other children in the class would have had various legends emanating from their own cultures that gave other perspectives, but it was as if I had been placed, by all, into a transparent box of silence (Zembylas & Michaelides, 2004) that needed to be ignored. It was as if I was in, and part of, a box of chilled nothingness that had been isolated, pushed outside the reality of their five year old world. It was as if I did not exist. As teacher, with over forty children in the class, suddenly I was not there, not even part of the classroom. It was a most crushing feeling, as if I had irretrievably destroyed something that was so precious to them. It seemed as if their trust had been erased and was unreachable (Ennis & McCauley, 2002).

Fighting the rejection, as if supporting the children in a blurred, nightmarish shipwreck dream, with a sense of great fragility we then moved on, with our usual work routine acting as a life-raft. Slowly we re-engaged, tangible reality gently, tentatively at first, giving way to the shared hustle and bustle and give and take of an infant school classroom. Suddenly, without warning, the big, white-faced class radio above the blackboard blared to life. With loud sputters and crackles, the voice of the announcer from NASA Mission Control flooded the room. With guarded excitement he proceeded to describe, with a strong American accent, what was happening as Neil Armstrong prepared to descend to the moon surface from the landing craft, Eagle. In the classroom, the noise from the radio was almost deafening and the commentary rather difficult to understand so, with quick organisation, knowing that the moon was visible in the clear blue sky, I took the soon warmly clad children to perch and sit on the edge of the long raised garden bed and the long bench

outside the classroom. In the crisp, wintery sunshine, with no other classes outside, alone we all looked up at the moon and imagined a man climbing down a ladder from a space-craft and walking on the moon surface as the commentator described it, and in turn, I interpreted the commentary to the children. We wondered what it was like to stand on the moon? Was it like standing in gumboots on sand at the beach? Was it like standing on crunchy pumice - the aerated volcanic glass that was very much part of the soil where we lived? In complete reversal to where they had been barely an hour before, now the children were mesmerised as they stared upwards. Perhaps it was the voice of the NASA commentator and actually seeing the moon in reality that provided the children with an atmosphere and understanding that they had not fully grasped previously. Whatever the catalyst, their focussed sense of wonder was as if they were immersed in a magical fairy-tale. Now regrounded but with constant glances upwards, with typical five year old wriggles and sideways smiles of inclusive effervescence, without hesitation, we were as one, alone in the experience that we shared.



I ponder now, as so often since that time, how many of those, now grown, children remember that day and what memories they might hold. That the children, as a class, found a way to exclude me so completely was an incomprehensible shock. It was as if there was some unwritten dialogue, an inaudible calling, that they had been compelled to follow. What was the message they had responded to? What had they “heard” that I had been deaf to? Was it “a voice we cannot fully know, but to which we must bear witness, commanding us to awaken to something that ‘burns’ at our edges” (Robertson & McConaghy, 2006, p. 4)? Was it something I said? How did they find the power to assume “Kierkegaard’s

silent voice” (Hay, 1998, p.115)? But, incredibly, despite the chill, in such a short space of time, as if one, they were able to reverse their state completely. Van Manen well emplaces my sense of being at the time by writing, “the eyes are on me and these eyes rob me of my taken-for-granted relation to my voice and my body” (1990, p. 35). Indeed, it was as if the children’s and my own being had been temporarily obliterated, leaving us as if shells of humanity. But what happened? Perhaps, as children, they may have been caught in a state of what Maslow identifies as a form of transcendence. Identifying thirty five possible states of transcendence Maslow summarises with a “Condensed statement” explicating thus,

Transcendence refers to the very highest and most inclusive or holistic levels of the human consciousness, behaving and relating, as ends rather than as means, to oneself, to significant others, to human beings in general, to other species, to nature, and to the cosmos. (Maslow, 1999, p. 66)

Merging the thinking of Todd, in her exploration of the notion of “Pedagogy as Transformative Event” (2010, pp. 1-11), with that of Csikszentmihaly’s concept of flow state (1990), I wonder too, were the children encapsulated, lost in a story far from their lived reality and, perhaps, transported by the tone of my voice. Or was each making connection to their own respective “self”, drawing on their varied ethnic and cultural origins, whereby spirituality, intuition and different worldly reality was part of their existence. In turn, was the shock I experienced derived from my grounding in the scientific attitude of that time? As Arendt elaborates,

Where formerly truth had resided in the kind of “theory” that since the Greeks had meant the contemplative glance of the beholder who was concerned with, and received, the reality opening up before him, the question of success took over and the test of theory became a “practical” one ... (Arendt, 1998, p. 278)

Perhaps too, while emplaced in my “geocentric” attitude, the children had moved through to a “heliocentric” attitude (Arendt, 1998, p.263) and had left me behind.

Todres and Galvin, in exploring Heidegger’s notion of “gegnet” open yet another avenue of thinking,

... in which Being was not just space and time (merely a neutral concept), but a wholeness that was more intimately implicated in the way beings are related to one another and Being-as-a-whole. ... Gegnet means open expanse or abiding expanse, but it is at the same time also a gathering. (Todres & Galvin, 2010, p. 2)



Now, on a time-line long removed from the story of that day, I ponder on how Michael Collins felt as, alone, he remained onboard the command space craft, Columbia, in lunar orbit, waiting whilst his two companions, Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin, walked on the moon. What incredibly intense isolation he must have endured, quite apart from the absolute concern for his two fellow space travellers that he wrote of in a note.

My secret terror ... has been leaving them on the Moon and returning to Earth alone; now I am within minutes of finding out the truth of the matter. (Collins, 2009)

But mixed with and through that “terror”, as he waited alone, what perceptions of isolation did he endure that very same day that I confronted isolation in the classroom? He would have been in contact with human voices from NASA. He would have been able to see the moon

where his astronaut companions were and at even further distance, he would have been able to see the earth, his “homeland”. With such tenuous social links his isolation must have been achingly intense (Stein & Tuval-Mashiach, 2015).

Just as my experience with the children is so marked in my memory, what unrecorded, deeper memories did Collins take from his time of isolation? And, I continue to wonder what it was that caused the children, as if one, to isolate themselves beyond my presence, and what is marked in their memories of that day? It is a wondering that “has long been tormenting me without having found a solution thus far” (Freud, 1988, p. 314). Indeed, it is like a never ending riddle, the notion of which is whirlingly encompassed in Gadamer’s interpretation of Aristotle’s questioning,

... motion ends in rest, for at the end of motion there must be something that remains and stands there completed. But what is its beginning? When does the motion begin? When does it end? (Gadamer, 1999, p. 13)

But it is Gao who eloquently sums up the reverberating experience and its lingering, attendant but intermittent memories:

When we speak of a thing that does not exist, it, in effect, begins to exist, but when we deny its existence altogether, then it ceases to exist – this ... is a marvel of language, of its autonomy. (Gao, 2002, p. 29)



As I pursue the self as learner and teacher in further dimensions and new spaces, particularly the challenge of home school, my ongoing enquiry continues. In ongoing roles (Connelly & Clandinin, 1984), in

encounters with others, the multiple lenses through phenomenological storying and

hermeneutics translate the messages of the text for a better understanding of [a]...human being in [her] own specific contexts. (Chung, 2012, p. 25)

Arendt, providing further understanding, clarifies the core of the enquiry by stating,

The chief characteristic of this specific human life ... is that it is itself always full of events which ultimately can be told as a story, establish a biography; it is of this life ... that Aristotle said that it “somehow is a kind of *praxis*”. (Arendt, 1998, p. 97. Italics in original)



Chapter III - On the home front - Home School in the Bush



The world is our school

Students learn in many different ways, including ways that bypass the teacher in the classroom, and in ways that require neither teacher nor classroom! It is also clear that teachers possess the power to create conditions that can help students learn a great deal ... or keep them from learning much at all ... (Cunningham, 2007)

With the realisation that much published material referring to home education had been written by academics or others from perspectives as observers and interpreters and not as active participants in the actual learning environment, this chapter aims to not only redress the imbalanced focus in a small way, but also to give some insight into the underlying philosophical and pedagogical thinking that formed the basis of such an undertaking. The impinging presence and influence of the lived experience was too powerful to ignore especially as it ultimately contributed to and permeated my later teaching work with adult, former refugee students, the major focus of this enquiry.

Pedagogical possibilities

Searching for a school suitable for my four boys when two were of school age I made an appointment to visit a small, independent school in the nearby city and took the boys with me. As they explored and played in the school ground I became acutely aware that, as a group, they actually “filled” the playground! Not at all unruly or over-boisterous, indeed they were the only children in the playground and yet their energy and

exuberance was such that it seemed there was no more space for any other children. It was a peculiar experience! How could one possibly say that there was no room for other children in a playground? Despite the school having the reputation and the “feel” of a good school, this was not the place for my children. But – was I too hasty in decision making at that time? I often wonder where my “students” would be if we had taken that path. In juxtaposition to that wonder, I also wonder where a teaching pathway would have taken me had I not taken the path “less travelled” (Frost, 1966, p.90)

Eventually the three older boys were enrolled at a little independent school, in the bush, across the valley from where we lived.



Home school had always been a consideration for the boy’s education but for one reason or another had always been set aside in favour of school schooling. However, when the situation arose that we experienced a taste of school-at-home our decade and a half of home schooling eventuated, although the precursor taste did not provide a comprehensive concept of what was in store for me as the teacher. In summing up the experience retrospectively the following light- hearted, after-the-act “Position Vacant” advertisement gives some introductory insight into the multiple demands the role entailed, a role in which I was very much a learner alongside my students.



Position Vacant – Home School Teacher

Position description:

Duties include, but are not restricted to, being mother and/or father, and educator of 4 young boys.

Other duties include but are not restricted to being: secretary, taxi driver, nurse and body mender (to children and animals), pet carer and trainer, cook, house cleaner, vegetable gardener and supervisor, astronomer, nocturnal bat catcher (when these whirling, fluttering mammals invade the bedrooms at bedtime), huntsman spider catcher (when these large arachnids find their way into the house), mender of clothes, librarian, music practice supervisor, leech and tick remover, tent pitcher and camp manager, swimming teacher, ski instructor, snake detector, bicycle and billycart pusher, fishing buddy, choir leader, gymnastics instructor, fire warden, boat maintenance handyman and water safety coach.

Essential Qualifications and attributes:

Dedication to mothering and/or fathering with devotion to duty, driver's licence, first aid certificate or ability to gain same, teaching qualification and/or strong commitment to a sound educational pedagogy, a love of the outdoors - but, some days, apart from feeding the chickens be prepared to see little of it. Enduring patience, outstanding levels of humour and tolerance, high energy levels and exemplary time management skills are absolutely essential. Previous experience as a military or shearing-shed cook is essential for kitchen supervision and food conservation.

Desirable attributes:

Sound project management skills for undertaking background responsibility for disparate collections of books, shells, fossils and other rocks, toys, games, "kiznas" - a term from the boy's own language referring to their collections of assorted bits of wire, nuts, bolts, and electronic and mechanical components, musical instruments and music books, art and craft materials, diverse sporting and camping equipment, and a range of uniforms and costumes required for out-of-school activities. High levels of group management skills necessary for intra, interstate and overseas travel.

Location:

Schooling will be based on a property in the Australian bush, in the vicinity of Mt Arthur, northeast of Launceston (a city in the north of Australia's most southerly state, the island of Tasmania).

Hours: 24/7

Salary: A\$000,000.00

Warning:

Should the appointed employee be found to be satisfactory, further qualifications, and other duties and skills may be deemed necessary in accordance with the children's growth and developmental needs.



Had I read that “advertisement” prior to taking on the “job” I might well have had second thoughts! Why ever would anyone want to become a Home School teacher?

“Alternative education”

I do not accept any absolute formulas for living. No preconceived code can see ahead to everything that can happen in a man's life. As we live, we grow, and our beliefs change. They must change. So I think we should live with this constant discovery. We should be open to this adventure in heightened awareness of living. We should stake our whole existence on our willingness to explore and experience. (Buber, in Hodes, 1975, p. 69)

In the early years of the children's lives it was a family joke that the children would have home schooling. But, one day it became a reality. The little independent school across the valley, which the older three boys had begun attending, was closed for a period and the boys stayed home. To while away the time and to continue a routine incorporating music practices at home, and library visits and music lessons in the city, we fell into a pattern of learning activities. Then the first indication of what was to come emerged – the joke becoming reality. The boys wanted to stay home!

But, where to begin? Legal, educational, social as well as philosophical issues all seemed to be of importance.

At the time, over a decade before the present Tasmanian Education Act (1994), home schooling was a “legal loophole”. Totally unaware of this complication but wanting to do the “right thing” I contacted a local district officer, a colleague from the past. “Write an application to the Minister,” I was told. “Give the names and ages of the children, your reasons for choosing to home school, an outline of your planned programme and your guiding philosophy.”

That two-page, foolscap sized, type-written document (written before the days of personal computers in our part of the world) pushed me to explore thinking, reflection and philosophising in recesses of my thought processing that I had not ever delved into before. But the depth of

consciousness explored broadened the parameters of understanding regarding the responsibility involved (van Manen, 1990, p.124) and helped me deal with the diverse issues that arose over the coming years.

With my pedagogical thinking particularly grounded in the writings of Maria Montessori (1912) and Sylvia Ashton-Warner (1958, 1963), and based on the prevailing educational, philosophical and sociological writing of that time, I recognised that I was on my own. Just as the words of Arthur Ransome, a favoured author of the Home School days, advised,

You ... start with a blank map, that doesn't do more than show roughly what's water and what isn't ... you'll be marooned fair and square. You'll have to depend on yourself[f] alone. (Ransome, 1984, p. 26)

Indeed, I was emplaced on a blank map and I did have to depend very heavily on myself.

My philosophy, planning and practice had to encompass my own children. Not the children of others – personalities arriving in the classroom with histories unknown. This was a situation where I really did 'know' the children. They were my very own children, that I loved and cared for and I was agreeing to their wish to have school at home (Magrini, 2012) but like parenting, it was a demanding of me that life had not fully prepared me for.

The letter was duly composed and sent to the Minister of Education. We continued our 'school' routine with greater depth, extending interests whilst incorporating the traditional range of a school curriculum and my workbook documented our activities. But, by the end of that first term there had been no response from the Education Department regarding our status for home schooling. Fearing allegations of truancy I contacted the District Office and soon after a letter arrived giving permission to proceed. What a relief – it was now official. I could think further into the future and have greater consistency in planning. At

that time I made a pledge to the boys, and myself, that if all went well and it was what they wanted, then I would teach them to the end of their primary schooling.



Learning in the bush

The issue is not to teach him knowledge, but to give him a taste for cherishing it and methods for learning it ... (Rousseau, 2013, p. 243)

Home School began officially with the three older boys being of school age. The youngest, then aged 3, would join activities as and when he chose. Every morning, rain or shine, with his tucker-box full of edible goodies he would drift from drawing or painting to the big, square sand-pit under the big, umbrella-like *Cryptomeria* tree across the patio from the back door. He would emerge, to sit on my knee for story time, at lunch time, to sit with the dog, or just be one of the boys as they ranged the paddocks and bush. Trying his hand at school work became a gradually increasing part of his 'school day' and if out of sight he could always be located by his singing. Playing was his "job" (Jones, 1990, p.1), just as it was very much part of the work of the other boys. Throughout the years of home schooling I was constantly aware of the effortless, unconscious role that play took in everyday life (Eberle, 2011). For serious "work", playfulness, companionship, and even in sadness, play, in the sand-pit especially, was of enormous importance (Hase & Kenyon, 2007, p.111). Already finding notional direction in "the need to be flexible in the learning where the teacher provides resources but the learner designs the actual course" (Hase & Kenyon, 2001, p. 5) we moved into Home School mode. Also about that time, Howard Gardner's notion of multiple

intelligences was finding a resonant place in my own thinking through his newly published book, *Frames of Mind* (1984, 1st ed.). As with the concepts of Montessori, Ashton-Warner, and later, Freire's pedagogical philosophy, all permeated my teaching, eventually also profoundly influencing my teaching with adult former refugee students.

Morning-tea time and lunch time were definite breaks in the day and, having been refuelled, after lunch the boys would scatter to the four winds – usually as a foursome – sometimes to continue building a hut or miniature stick and mud village in the bush or along a clay bank, sometimes to work on a project in the workshop, sometimes to dam a stream in a paddock, sometimes to read books, sometimes to ride a bilycart or sledge – over frosted or sun-dried grass – down the hill behind the house or over in the gully, sometimes to catch tadpoles, or collect wild blackberries (to be eaten later with maple syrup, slivered almonds and ice-cream), AND, once to catch a giant, bucket-sized, claw-snapping freshwater crayfish – a yabbie – in the top dam, an escapade that resulted in a large triangular slash to the palm of one of the boys. A wound that was, thankfully, easier to repair than several fingers had they been snapped off by the guillotine like claws!!

To gather the boys back to class after lunch-break I would call from the back door, rather ineffectually in windy or stormy weather – although with the branch-dropping reputation of eucalyptus trees the bush was out-of-bounds in windy weather. My sometimes ineffectual calling was a problem not unnoticed by my mother when staying with us. Before leaving after one visit, to return to her home in New Zealand, she presented me with a large, hand-held brass bell, which over the ensuing years clanked its sturdy tones up to the bush and out over the valley as a call for school time, for dinner time or, only in dire circumstance, as a call for an emergency muster.

Traditional school hours and a structure somewhat resembling a normal school day not only provided a good momentum but was, I felt, a

familiar pattern of operation to the boys should they return to traditional schooling for any reason.

Along with the seasons, the primary home-school years rolled by. The youngest joined “class” and the Department was duly informed. Basic maths and English were based on a series of texts at that time used extensively in schools but the difference in our curriculum was that each subject area was supplemented by many other activities. Rebus, signs, codes, mazes, puzzles and projects of all description were sought or devised in great quantities – the demand was inexhaustible. Playing with numbers, words, shells, sounds, shapes, colour, play dough and clay were all part of exploring (Eberle, 2011). Maths involved a great deal of counting, measuring and estimation. Some days, after autumn rains, we would scour the sodden bush to collect weird and wonderful, colourful fungi – later classifying and counting them as we set them out to dry above the wood stove, later entrusting the specimens to the Tasmanian State Herbarium. One activity I clearly recall was estimating the refraction of a pole placed at an angle into the swimming pool, a problem that resulted in inconclusive results and much watery thinking! The International Year of the Tree (1982) saw us estimating and measuring girth and height – using a clinometer borrowed from the Tasmanian Forestry Commission – of any Dawn Redwood (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*) trees that we could find. These trees fitting appropriately into our dinosaur phase at that time. From an early stage, a philosophical addition to the curriculum involved regular reading, discussion of perceived interpretations, and illustration of Haiku poetry – an activity we continued into the high school years. As a ‘class’ we turned the writing of Basho, Buson, Issa and others upside-down and inside-out as we discussed possible meanings and interpretations, discussions in which all suggestions were valued and given equal weight. No interpretation was discarded although the eventual drawing to illustrate the Haiku text might depict only the personal concepts of the designated artist for that day. Singing was great fun – with enthusiasm and skill in

harmonising and part singing it was a favourite part of the school day, until later – when young male voices began to break. Singing then became a non-favourite subject and was soon dropped from our curriculum! As Eliot sagely advises –

Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the shadow.

(Eliot, 1980, p. 80)



Home base

Early in the Home School years it became abundantly clear that our “classroom” was not the centre of our pedagogical journey. Although the kitchen table was our central focus, it was the wider world that opened out, manifesting an imposing presence, a presence that could not be ignored. Despite confronting outside criticism claiming the contrary, our home school most definitely incorporated the wider world. Through a broad range of outside home activities the outside world, new concepts and many people, of all ages and backgrounds, became part of our ever expanding horizons (Lederach, 2005, p. 29).

Being given permission to Home School one’s own children did not give permission to teach children from outside the family, however, for short periods we did accommodate two other children – friends of the family – before they returned to mainstream schooling. I have two vivid recollections of the period with the first short-term, day-boy, student. One occasion was when we were working on fractions, sitting in the warm, autumn sun up by the big dam in the paddock above the house. Each of us had a large board, a knife and a big ball of clay-mud. The ball of mud was flattened then cut in half. Then the ball was remade, flattened then cut into quarters and $\frac{1}{4}$ was thrown into the dam leaving $\frac{3}{4}$ and the imprint of the whole on the board. Flinging quarters into the dam was apparently a very memorable way of learning fractions for this young fellow! The other memory entailed a lunch-time escapade when all five boys disappeared. It was a freezing, frosty day and the boys gravitated over to a steep gully. On clanking the bell as a call for afternoon school to begin, five beaming, exceedingly lively, mud encrusted boys emerged, to then be quickly propelled to the bathroom for cleaning and warming. But the visiting student’s trousers were badly torn. In classic boy exuberance they had all developed an ice/mud slide down the steep gully, a place that, in honour of that fun time, was thereafter called the “Knickerbocker Breaker”!

Our other short term student came to stay with us when her parents needed to go interstate urgently. That she was very much grounded in traditional schooling, it was an interesting experience for me to watch her rigidity in expectations relax and an other-self emerge as she, tentatively at first, then with greater freedom threw herself into “work” and the array of projects and options opened to her. Watching this girl, within a male dominated cohort, release herself from gender and institutionally defined expectations was a revelation to me. Although slightly older than the boys, her level and intensity of play was possibly initially curbed by the fact that she was a “visitor” and that she had not been privy to the years of intensive interaction and dialogue that the boys shared. In effect she was learning the cultural pattern of the group and very quickly at that. Learning the boundaries, she soon became one of the family. Being with our family group twenty four hours a day would, perhaps, have made her enculturation transition easier whereas, in comparison, the boy coming to join Home School daily underwent the “shock” of cultural transition twice a day. This realisation returned my thinking to the experience I had as a child when returning to school after my school-refusing absence, and allowed me to more fully understand the request that the older boy made later when requesting to leave a formal secondary schooling environment. The notion of cultural shock also came to underline my understanding of transition when working with my adult, former refugee students.



Other philosophies in “Professional Development”

With my teacher training strongly grounded in the writings of Bruner (1960, 1996), Freud, and Piaget (Oelkers, 2002; Gardner, 2006) and with personal interest particularly in the works of Montessori (1912) and Sylvia Ashton-Warner (1963, 1958), my own philosophy, pedagogical thinking and practice was certainly influenced by all. To refresh and align my thinking to the Home School context I ordered all of the Montessori books then available through the State Library Service, an eagerly awaited assortment that soon began arriving one by one via the monthly, Country Library Service bus – some of the books being original editions! Having hoped to undertake Montessori training, professional development that did not eventuate, I was fortunate to have a friend with Montessori teaching background. During periodic visits, as our children played, we would spend the afternoon talking. With gentle, astute questioning she pushed me into ever deeper reflection of practice; into reflective patterns that I fostered and have carried with me since. The caring patience she engulfed me in was, in effect, a spiralling web of reflective scanning with linking to a proactive planning of hypothetical pathways and justifications for pedagogical practice. Her patient, gentle questioning and supportive discussions instilled a pattern that gave me the confidence to approach new areas of teaching practice since. Sadly, her tragic death in a road crash deprived her family especially, but also me and the world, of a special person who had immense depth of feeling and understanding in the real nature of teaching and learning.

Two other philosophies also lightly influenced my pedagogical thinking at this time; that of Rudolph Steiner (Matchan, 2013), and that of Shin’ichi Suzuki (Suzuki, 2012) in music education. Since childhood I had known of the philosophy of Rudolph Steiner, there having been a Steiner school near where my grandmother lived in New Zealand. From a meagre knowledge base my understanding of this philosophy increased through reading and contact with family and friends who had attended Steiner

schools, at both primary and secondary levels, in New Zealand, Australia and elsewhere.

There were several aspects in my understanding of Steiner education that challenged my thinking at that time. The first was the notion of age phased reading introduction which confronted my child “readiness” and “windows of opportunity” philosophy. Similarly, the introduction and use of colour in art work was also of interest. With all the colours of the rainbow out-doors in my boy’s daily lives, including the blackest of black mud, which was associated with so much fun, and the deepest of purples that could be seen regularly in the magical rainbows that arced over the valley, in the finger stains of juicy, ripe blackberries, and in the beautiful, shrubby old Gallica roses that flourished beside the house, I could not see the point of attempting to restrict access to colours in the boy’s creative activities. In fact, when so much creative work was undertaken spontaneously out of doors where they met all colours in real life, restriction of colour would have been an impossibility.

Another underlying concern was the Steiner philosophy of anthroposophy (Matchen, 2013). Perhaps stemming from the modelling from a grandmother, who took all nine of her children to the local sole-teacher country school whenever there was a visiting priest, minister, pastor or preacher on a Sunday, she would play the organ for the congregation of any denomination. With that influence I grew up with an eclectic acceptance of spirituality – a freedom that, I consider, has served me well.

The major interest in Steiner education I had was the placement of students with one teacher for a number of years. Somewhat mirroring this situation in the Home School situation, it was a concern that, incorporating possibilities of personality difference and specific learning needs that maybe I could not accommodate, was constantly with me throughout the Home School years.

There were two aspects of Steiner education I did note and appreciate. The first was the broad range of reading material to be read to and, later, read by the children. The second point I noted was the inner confidence and sense of life-purpose-satisfaction that adult Steiner educated friends evoked, despite their education having taken place in various countries and communities around the world.

The other philosophy that touched Home School was the Suzuki Method of learning music (Suzuki, 2012). Through this method each of the boys began learning both piano and violin at four or five years of age, one later transferring to cello and another to double bass. Participating on the periphery of this program, as a parent, gave me sufficient distance to observe the individual differences in the way that each boy reacted to the teaching. It was also interesting to observe how each, in their own way, initially relied upon and then moved past colour coded notes (Szilvay,ND), subsequently moving on in their musical development. As a parent, I particularly recall the young cellist son being exceedingly reluctant to participate in his first orchestra performance unless his mother was also playing. It was a wry situation that resulted in me playing my battered old cello alongside him onstage, but disconcertingly, with more *vibrato* in my knees than in my cello playing!

... with human beings: no matter what the activity, we go slowly at first. The process of acquiring an ability is a time consuming one. (Suzuki, 2012, p. 10)

Although not having profound influence on my own teaching practice, parts of each of the two philosophies provided thought provoking aspects – aspects that have continued to linger on the periphery of my pedagogical thinking.



Onwards

Learning ... neither dislocates nor interrupts; it merely gives definition to what is already there. (Todd, 2003b, p. 38)

Throughout our home school years a postcard attached to the front of my lesson Work Plan folder depicted a young girl and boy sitting at a kitchen table, a work by the Norwegian artist Carl Larsson, entitled “Evening Meal” (1905). For me the table symbolised our kitchen table, the hub of our home school work, where much of our discussion and so many of our activities took place. The young boy, on the right, appears to be blowing the soup on his spoon to cool it so that his hair is caught in the updraught. His glance up to see if mischief has been detected is so typical of tell-tale clues that my own home-school boys unconsciously displayed, leaving me guessing as to what was afoot. A giveaway glance that, if part of sheer mischief, it was usually better not seen. However, if the mischief could be construed as a slight against another, an animal or the property of others, then there would be some admonishment. Respect for others, animals or property was tantamount. This respect was especially enforced when the boys, with divergent interests and being at different ages, stages of development and skill levels, had projects and construction work in progress or temporarily set aside. As part of Home School it was possible to re-establish interest in old projects, to rework ideas as skill and further thinking dictated. Thus it was permissible to deconstruct or destroy one’s own work but unless permission was given by the maker/owner it was not permissible to work on the project of another, especially as some projects took many months to reach a completion stage.

In the picture, for me, the girl, older than the boy, symbolised myself as the solitary female in our male dominated microcosm, perhaps sometimes acting as a stand-in, female sibling on occasion, and most definitely, myself as a co-learner in the Home School experience. The broad table-top imparts a sense of isolation; generational, gender and the

concept of our family choosing to be non-conformist in not sending the children to school. The pussy-willow and fir branches in the vase on the table remind me of the giant pussy-willow we had in the garden beside the stream beyond the back door – that split asunder during a great storm – and the big fir branch the boys would cut and bring inside to decorate as our Christmas tree every year. From other works by Larsson, it is evident that his family had a penchant for indoor plants thus the one in the foreground of this painting is a tulip, a bulb that has probably been “forced” indoors. The straggly foliage reminding me of the diverse assortment of newly found plants, seeds, stones, fungi, feathers, sloughed snake-skins, iridescent Christmas beetles and so many more treasures and items of interest brought to the table for inspection.

That most of the food is on the boy’s side of the table reminds me of the bottomless-pit appetites that growing boys have and the continual flow of food preparation necessary to assuage that basic human need, especially when young boys are involved!

Our sturdy Tasmanian blackwood table was the hub of so much activity, later becoming the focus for electronic projects, repairing musical instruments, drumming and bagpipe lessons, music composition and shared musical activities.



Evening Meal, Carl Larsson, 1905

Home School in context

Our home schooling time began over a decade before the establishment of the Home Education Advisory Council when, with the rapidly increasing numbers of home schooling families at that later time, the formation of social groups evolved. When we began there were no other home schooling families in our area, in fact initially, I knew of only one other family in the whole of Tasmania. In the early days, being fewer in number, without email and mobile phones, home schooling families were all relatively isolated. In fact, we were definitely classed as being different.

One of the boys, following a violin exam emerged from the exam room absolutely glowing. His demeanour was not the usual for those having sat an exam with uncertain outcome. He was so excited in having found that his examiner, from London, had not gone to school as a child either. He had been taught at home by a tutor! This normalisation of home schooling was obviously so gratifying at a time when people would frequently stop us in the street to challengingly demand why the boys were not at school on the weekday when we went to the city for music lessons and library visits. Following my model the boys would always politely explain that they were home schooled and then they would patiently respond to the usual battery of questions. But one day I was horrified to hear “We don’t go to school” as the somewhat defiant, exasperated response to the usual probing question! Uttered in unison, it was a seemingly, secretly, well-practised, retort.

Defending or explaining my practice to others, in public or private debate, became commonplace. But, within myself the defence and incessant overviewing and reflection became an internalised, automatic, almost unconscious action that gave me strength in the belief of what we were doing. It was a stance that Taylor explicates,

... however we explain it, it is clear that a rhetoric of “difference,” of “diversity” ..., is central to the culture of authenticity. (Taylor, 1991, p. 37)

Another instance of 'difference' arose when one of the boys played the piano in the local eisteddfod. After playing well I was quietly amused to find on his judging sheet that marks had been deducted because he had not been dressed in his "school uniform". Ironically he had worn the best "school uniform", the best set of clothes that he owned, discounting his black and white "penguin suit", clothes that were reserved specifically for orchestra and band performances, which he should have worn – had we known !

We were definitely outside the accepted norm at that time but gradually more and more families chose home schooling.



High school in the bush

What a dangerous activity ... [teaching] is. All this plastering on of foreign stuff. Why plaster on at all when there's so much inside already? So much locked in? If only I could get it out and use it as working material. And not draw it out either. If I had a light enough touch it would just come out under its own volcanic power. (Ashton-Warner, 1958, p. 45)

As the eldest son came towards the end of his primary schooling years my original decision to teach the boys until the end of primary school meant a decision had to be made regarding the next stage of his education. With a love of music he chose to go to a city high school that reputedly fostered music well. With special permission to enrol outside the home area he embarked on his secondary schooling. But, as time went by he found that the chunking of lessons and the lack of time to spend on his own music and interests became a hindrance to his learning needs. Although having his own set of friends at school he was soon asking to come home for his secondary schooling. This request provided quite a dilemma for me, for, as I readily acknowledged, my own schooling had definite weaknesses in the maths and science areas. In addition, my pedagogical thinking, let alone experience, had not ever encompassed teaching at the secondary level.

After much thought, through feelings of inadequacy and qualms about socialisation issues (Biesta, 2007), a common accusation against home schooling, once again perceived positive and negative aspects were addressed and thought through. Finally, countered against my concerns about a disjointed trend of mainstream school curriculum around core subjects, with little consistency in subject matter and any deeper interest in a topic being occluded, I agreed to move into secondary home schooling. Recognising the “holes” in my own education and also recognising that other adults also had “holes” in their learning was a major justification in my decision.

Agreeing to work at secondary level consequently pushed me to devise a structured curriculum, which as with the primary level format, also allowed much room for personal interests. It was also an agreement to initially work until the end of that current academic year and then decide if the situation was satisfactory to all. Also included was the proviso that if Home School at secondary level continued, any boy who wanted to pursue university studies should go to Secondary College – years 11 and 12 – to study pre-tertiary subjects appropriate to their proposed field of study. My reasoning for this being that not only would the formal learning environment be an introduction to a more academic pathway, but also, being required to respond to learning requirements through the direction of a range of teachers and not just their mother was essential.

As with the primary years, the core subjects were based on texts as then used in private and public schools. I was able to purchase a better computer which saw us through the secondary years. Newly on the market, laptops were not available in our price range and access to the internet was confined to the city at that time!

Following from the pattern of primary home schooling, secondary home schooling automatically placed an even greater emphasis on self-learning (Gadamer, 2001a), moving beyond pedagogy towards a heutagogical learning environment (Hase & Kenyon, 2001, 2007) and self-learning (Mezirow, 2003). We incorporated horse riding, technical drawing (computer aided drawing, CAD, programmes were not available to us at that time), we continued languages – mostly French and Latin, and some Maori before travels to New Zealand, biology and much else as interests came and went or came and stayed. As with the primary routine most music practices had to be done before school began in the morning, animals fed and most chores accomplished.

As teacher, I incorporated the philosophies of Montessori (Montessori, 1912; Rathunde, 2001) and Ashton-Warner (1958, 1963) that

I had leant on in the primary years and also included the work of Paolo Freire (2005, 1973) to my working philosophy, reading and rereading texts of his writing that were available to me. How I wish I had known of Rousseau and his “Emile” – not that I necessarily agree with all of his pedagogical recommendations – but he and others, such as Greene, Arendt, Bollnow, Lefebvre, Bakhtin – who was educated at home by a governess in his early years (Holquist, 1990, p.1), Buber – who was also home-schooled until the age of ten (vu Nguyen, 2014), and so many others would have been welcome friends at that time.



Self-learning and building autonomy

When learning is self-directed, each experience beckons the student onward. We are not destined to all live the same lives or take part in the same professions. The foundation of learning can be created no matter what the subject. What is most important is that learning happens and the student is fully engaged. For this we need self-motivation, and that happens when the student is *allowed to choose*. The most we can do is to create an environment that supports the freedom to learn. (Spigel, 2015. Italics in original)

Acknowledging one of the criticisms of the home-coming son about wasted time traipsing from one classroom to another in the formal schooling he had experienced, we planned a system of negotiated work. Once the contracted work had been completed satisfactorily the rest of the day was free for projects, reading, computer work, completing music theory, motor biking, driving the old Land Rover up in the bush, or furthering whatever interests were in favour. We continued to have music lessons and library times in the city and incorporated many other activities. Swimming, orchestra, bands, pipe bands, Scouting and much else called for regular trips to town or various excursions. Once the pattern had been set in place the boys, one by one, moved into secondary schooling at home.

My maths and science fears were solved for a time as I worked hard to keep virtually one lesson ahead but through the momentum of their own study the boys soon developed their own self-research and self-learning strategies. “It [wa]s a question of philosophy and humanity, not of recipes for children’s pedagogy” (Ranciere, 1991, p.41). When now I hear of home educating parents proudly announcing the Australia-wide NAPLAN testing (The Conversation, 11.7.16) results of their children I inwardly cringe and recall the accusation levelled directly at me by a university education lecturer. With lack of discussion he erroneously proclaimed that I was trying to give my children an “accelerated

education"! How definitely not so – all I had hoped to provide was an extensive, broadly grounded education that opened doors of learning appropriate to the interests, abilities and personalities of each of my “students” (Gardner, 1980), extending the learning programme as and when new interests and issues arose. Little did I realise that our work was matching the development of Gardner’s further thinking as he added new “intelligences” to his original list (Gardner, 2006).

Through our years of home schooling I too was learning fast. Issues arose that teacher training and my teaching experience to that date had not prepared me for. Lateral and strategic thinking was continually called upon to maintain momentum and incorporate interests and I certainly had moments of doubt in my own ability. The intensity of focus and management of the whole was, in retrospect, an exhausting yet totally fulfilling commitment.



Reflective thoughts

I have many memories of the home schooling years as I think back; of sunny afternoons taken from school time to go and play Pooh Sticks (Milne, 1958, pp.254-255) from a track bridge that crossed a forest stream – little did the boys know that they were giving themselves lessons that included time, counting and estimation. I remember four boys crawling tortoise-like, with cardboard box carapaces, up the grassy hill behind the house as lapwings, with nests or fledglings secreted in the grass, dive-bombed them. I think of the sunny winter days when, avoiding the weekend crowds, we would go skiing up on Ben Lomond, where we also shared our homemade sledges with others. I think of the inflatable rubber boat that became the means for a brief, mid-winter abdication from school work! Mmm – perhaps I should expand on that story: Lunch eaten the four boys disappeared, rugged up in jackets and boots to brave the several days of frost that had not melted in the shade. Soon it was afternoon school time and, after clanking the “school bell”, three boys shortly scuttled in, noticeably just too promptly settling to work, all three with heads down and pencils working. “Where is T...?” I asked but there was dead silence (Hay, 1988) as the three boys focused intently on their work. Directing the question at one of the boys by name, I asked again. “Oh. I think he was up near the big dam,” was the reply from a studiously bowed head. Suspecting mischief, I donned warm clothes against the freezing temperature outside then slipped and trudged my way up to the dam. Sure enough there was the missing boy out in the middle, lounging in the new rubber boat. “T... . It is school time now.” I was rewarded with a characteristic ear to ear smile and the rather cheeky response, “Come and get me.” Looking at the metre rim of ice edging the dam and figuring that there was about ten minutes of chill factor with his back separated from almost frozen water by a few millimetres of rubber I returned the big smile. Giving a big wave, and responding, “I will see you soon”, I turned and slid my way back to the house. My time estimation was close to perfect. One rather cold boy sheepishly returned to the house, was

directed to a hot shower and picked up his school work where he had left off before lunch. With some exasperation and an inclination to give orders just simmering but held in check, I see shades of similarity in my reasoning and responses in later challenging class encounters. As a teacher, “being with” my students, yet always seeking space to be able to drop half a step behind provided opportunity for an equality of power from either source yet allowed for a full step forward should authority be deemed necessary – not that I was always a perfect model. Of even more importance, the strategy allowed both parties to avoid a ‘win-lose’ situation whilst also providing a non-confrontational opportunity to learn. As Rousseau states,

Notions of things are without question much clearer and more definite when one learns them ... on one’s own, than are notions acquired through the teaching of others. (Rousseau, 2013, p. 251)

And, supporting that notion Freire states, “in order to function, authority must be *on* the side of freedom, not against it” (Freire, 2005, p. 80. Italics in original).



I remember when the boys were in early primary years. There had been a succession of clear, freezing nights and every morning the ritualised outdoor round of breaking ice wherever found, snapping icicles hanging from taps and stomping on rime frosted grass and frozen puddles always ended with an inspection of the swimming pool. Rugged up against the cold, as if leaving the best activity to last, the boys would eventually arrive at the pool to break the surface ice with sticks. Every morning the ice was thicker than the previous morning. Finally, heavy sticks were ineffectual – the ice was so thick that they just could not break it. After a time their hammering and bashing ceased, and, following a serious group

discussion all four hoisted, hauled and bundled each other onto the iced over pool, whereupon they began to stomp. Expecting them to fall through, unseen, I watched from the kitchen window and waited – but in vain. Soon cheery, red nosed boys returned to begin their day’s school work! What I thought was to have been a lesson about falling through ice had, instead, become a fun, ice-skating in gumboots session!

Not that I claim to have been a perfect example at all, but in accord with my teacher-parent stance, van Manen succinctly describes my thinking,

the real life of teaching and of parenting happens in the thick [of] life itself when one must know with a certain confidence just what to say or what to do (or what not to say or do) in situations with children. Therefore, pedagogical thoughtfulness and tact may be seen to constitute the essence ... of pedagogy ... (van Manen, 1991, p. 130)



There are other memories. One solar eclipse we “observed” after climbing nearby Mt Arthur. Using gum-tree leaves with grub-chewed holes, we tracked the sun’s path from the image cast by the sun through the holes onto bare expanses of dolorite rocks. I recall the small shark we found, washed up on a beach. Deciding to take it home for measuring the boys bundled it into Gertie, our vehicle, and we set off for home. But – a kilometre or less down the road the intense odour of rotting fish soon had the poor fish being returned in quick order to where it had been found.

I remember the coffee cake making. “Mum, Can I make a cake?” Helping to stoke the wood stove and sort ingredients I then disappeared to do other chores. Returning to the kitchen I was greeted by an intensely pervading aroma of instant coffee. “How much coffee did you use?” “1 cup. Just as the recipe says,” was the reply. True, the recipe had been read correctly but, like many exam papers, the trick was to have interpretive understanding. “1 cup of coffee” in this case did not mean 1 cup of coffee

granules as it meant in the way of “1 cup of sugar” – it meant 1 cup of coffee made with hot water ready to drink! Dividing the mixture we then made six strongly flavoured coffee cakes!!

I remember a still, cold, early spring afternoon, when with school-work for the day completed we took our bicycles to ride around a nearby pine and ash plantation. Just as it was getting dark, coming back to our vehicle and while loading the bicycles ready to go home, the big pine tree nearest us suddenly started gushing sappy water. As if from a fast flowing fire-hydrant, the forceful flow of sap from a severed branch at about head height startled us all. Immediate reactions ranged from querulous laughter to deep concern that the tree was “being sick”. What an amazingly graphic example of rising sap in spring! Our days were always full and very busy.

Not having found Rousseau during the Home School years, I now appreciate his philosophical writing on education and find much that resonates with my thinking during our Home School era. As Oelkers interprets,

Rousseau’s basic scene of natural education is very suggestive: the time of this education is not the time of ongoing events that cannot be foreseen but the time of nature itself, which can be foreseen. Piaget’s laws of development mirror this suggestion. They allow a discrimination between one form of education that accords to ‘nature’ or ‘laws of development’ and another that does not. Only education according to nature and development is legitimate ... (Oelkers, 2002, pp. 690-691)

Thus, our learning environment and ever expanding horizons drew us along ever more pathways, across ever more bridges, with ever more decisions to make as we came to ever more sign-posts.



Reflective afterthoughts

Without hesitation, I can say that Home School was demanding work. It was a time that was a frenetic whirlwind of diverse activities that interconnected and contrasted with the more patterned manner with which we approached the core of our formal schoolwork. By keeping a pattern to our working process I felt strongly that if something happened to me or the family, and the children were obliged to fit into a mainstream schooling system it would have been unethical not to have maintained a systematic approach. Looking back, remembering my feelings of dislocation when resuming school after my school refusal period, I still think that in our case, this was the most sensible thing to have done. Also, from an early stage at primary level, once the core work was completed there was so much else to explore and I feel that this system led to an even less structured adherence to time management during the secondary years. Projects such as designing and making a mousetrap that caught live mice – one mousetrap soon after being made being lent to a friend, whose pet mouse having escaped had his mother threatening to set lethal mouse traps – were just part of our day.

In writing about this period of lived teaching experience now, as a person long removed from what I am writing about, I am able to differentiate between the multiple “I’s” (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990, p.9) that were the composition of the “me” at that time. It was a time in which I recognise that my ‘self’ so often was truly “othered”! (Joyce, in Finnegan’s *Wake*, in Kearney, Epilogue Narrative, 1998, p. 246). Looking back, I now wonder how I managed to keep the pace going and, almost jokingly, have said that like *The Cat in the Hat* (Seuss, 1957), I wore multiple hats. No sooner was there one hat on my head than it was magically wiped off and instantly there was another in its place – I was so many people – a “divided I” (A. Rogers, 2006, p. 110), sometimes multiple people at the same time. The endless round of wearing the multitude of

hats was like living in a world of endlessly revolving doors but, retaining focus and clarity of purpose was an absolute necessity.



Homage to Gertie

Of strategic importance to those years of exploring the countryside and being part of our chosen way of life when school hours overflowed into life itself, overflowing into the wide world, Gertie was our trusty vehicle, our second home and school on wheels. Although without a kitchen sink, as our mobile classroom she transported us and our phenomenal assortment of belongings – musical instruments, canoe and kayak, bicycles and motor-bikes, camping gear, fishing gear, animals to the vet, and so much more. Our venerated workhorse, indispensable to our way of life, even had a bagpipe tune composed in her honour, Gertie's Reel (Campbell, 1991).



Mixing politics and home education

The final years of being a home educator coincided with my three year term as an inaugural member of the Ministerial Home Education Advisory Council. Instigated by the Tasmanian Minister of Education at that time, Hon. John Beswick, the Council was in complete contrast to my long pattern of Home School life. Political thinking, lobbying and representing a minority group was a new experience for me as I firmly retained an allegiance to “grass roots” home education. It was a challenging leap. The Council, during my period of membership, saw through the current Tasmanian Government Education Act (1994) which allows for home education as a legal option, as opposed to being a “legal loophole”, in the state of Tasmania. From initial meetings at the University of Tasmania (Launceston Campus) the Council set up an office Council base in Launceston, which employed and oversaw the work of the Home Education Advisory Council Secretary, and set a pattern of monitoring all registered home educating families throughout the state.

Had the boys been younger, taking on the role as a Council member would have been an impossibility, but as the secondary level years progressed and the boy’s levels of independent self-learning (Hase & Kenyon, 2001, 2007) increased and the older boys moved towards other study pathways, the time for Council meetings and activities became possible. Not ever having expected to become a politically active home educator, throughout those three years I was constantly thankful for my self-imposed grounding in the philosophy of, role-modelling by and “acquaintance” with Freire (1973, 2005). His insightful pedagogical philosophy provided a platform from which I could approach home education issues from a political perspective.

Through the many memories of that time I particularly recall calling by the Council Office in the city one day to attend to some business and, on emerging, finding one of the boys with a friend, who had happened to be passing by. Both were sitting on the road kerb with their

feet in the guttering beside Gertie our trusty vehicle. Oblivious to the passing city traffic and pedestrians, the pair were happily engrossed in playing duets – one on his violin the other on his trombone!!



Friends in fact and fiction

There is one thought that I have that underscores the Home School years and that is the overwhelming number of people from all walks of life who supported us, providing friendship, companionship and skilled advice to the boys and myself. That the boys had and continued to maintain friendships made with so many of diverse ages; from peer age cohort to younger and much older folk, could not have happened if they had attended conventional schools. My appreciative gratitude to all is truly immense. Our volunteer French teacher, the bagpipe playing Gaelic teacher, electronic project assistant, music teachers, dancing teachers, sporting teachers, horse owners, very respected bagpipe tutors and the boys “motorbike mechanic”. There was Grandma Lew - our wonderful stand-in grandmother when the boy’s biological grandmothers lived across the Tasman Sea - who looked and behaved exactly like Mrs Peppercot (Prøysen, 1956). With a wonderful sense of fun and dancing wisdom she was an ideal “grandmother” to have close by. I also think of the wonderful stalwart of early education who donated her library of children’s books to the Launceston Teacher’s Centre, a library that we regularly borrowed from in the early years. Ada Ball would often see us in town and even when quite frail, would always cross the street to ask how Home School was going. Although she herself had not been home educated, her mother had apparently home schooled her brother.

I think of the sports shop owner, Roger Sculthorpe, who, initially welcomed us when the four boys were pre-schoolers, often helping us to

explore the fishing and other goods displayed. He and his staff recalled those early visits, when the visits in later years led to the purchase of fishing tackle, fly-tying equipment and other sporting gear. The very real warmth and generosity of time spent with us by this quietly spoken store owner and his staff is remembered with special appreciation.

Having a “borrowed” grandmother in real life but an absence of grandfathers close-by, the boys readily “borrowed” a grandfather from narrative. The Old Man being very willingly shared with The Boy in Robert Ruark’s much loved book, *The Old Man and the Boy* (Ruark, 1957). Despite the strong north American language and dialogue difference, the storied adventures and philosophising became so real and absorbing.

... we ain’t goin’ to talk any, because fishin’ is a silent sport and a lot of conversation scares the fish and wrecks the mood. What I want you to do is set [sic] there and fish, and when the fish ain’t bitin’ I want you to listen and look and think. Look around you and don’t take nothing for granted. Look at everything you see and listen to everything you hear, just like you were brand-new come from another world, and think about all those things and how they got there. Now let’s fish. (Ruark, 1957, p. 129)

In similar form, big-brother role modelling, that normalised adventure and mischief was provided by way of Roald Dahl in his book *Boy* (1984), and also by Clive James in his *Unreliable Memoirs* (1980). Books were such an enriching part of our Home School life.



Research ethics in the bush

When beginning to write about the experience of being a home educator, to clarify my thinking for this study, I set about seeking out scholarly documentation of this form of education and was surprised to find there was little writing from the perspective of the “teacher-educator” or the “teacher-researcher” perspective from the era when our Home School operated. I did, however, uncover a paper, the work of an academic researcher who came to the state towards the end of our home school years.

I had been notified by another home educator of the researcher’s proposed visit to the state and wish to interview home schooling families and it was proposed that I see him. I agreed to see the researcher to discuss home education but clearly indicated that I did not wish to be part of his study. At that stage I already had concerns that ethical documentation and ethical procedures had not been mentioned, a concern that was heightened when I became privy, through another home educator, to the mail circulated information after the appointment with me had been arranged by telephone. The idea of a “researcher” gaining access to families and entry to homes, many in rural areas, did not sit at all well with me.

Having already agreed to the appointment, when I should have made a cancellation, the researcher duly arrived and was warmly welcomed. Although adamantly setting my boundaries from the outset, it became apparent that discussion quickly led back to my own practice. The visit was soon terminated.

As this incident occurred before emails, mobile phones and texting reached the bush, and as the networking of home educators was at a very initial stage of development, relaying my concerns was difficult. The incident continues to strongly remind me of the necessity of maintaining a binding, encompassing ethical stance in research.

Giving back

Home School was a time when many people gave time to and supported us. In return the boys were encouraged to give back to others and the community what they could, a philosophy that I deliberately strived to inculcate. We would become involved in many community events, often through the organisations to which we belonged and sometimes as the result of an idea or a local, national or international issue. Help with firewood for a family in need, helping on stalls to raise money for organisations, collecting goods to send to a small nation in crisis, making marmalade on the old wood stove and making lamingtons for stalls – we helped in so many ways. Collecting rubbish on the track to beautiful Wineglass Bay or along a stretch of roadside for Clean Up Australia Days – there were so many projects that we became involved in that gave opportunity for us to contribute to our community in some small way. It was important for us to give back to the community in return for all that we had immeasurably gained.



It seems to me, [the Old Man said] ... that it's about time you started teaching me something. (Ruark, 1957, p. 171)

And I am so fortunate that my 'boys' do just that.



Afterword

Stepping back from the Home School work in introspective, retrospective contemplation, I ask of myself what were my underlying aims and issues. Given that my students were my own children and that we lived in a 24/7 relationship it would have been all too easy to have applied pressure for academic excellence. Fortunately, being involved with the children in a range of activities outside the home and voluntarily adopting the roles of swimming instructor, and a leader within the Scouting movement, allowed me to be with many other children representing a broad range of cultural, socio-economic and ability cohorts. Exposure to such a range allowed me to consciously work to avoid any such expectations that I could have so easily entertained and imposed. My main focus was in allowing the boys to realise their own strengths, prove to themselves that they could apply themselves to commitments, be open to further learning and, most importantly, become caring citizens of the world.

Having retained an emphasis on music throughout the Home School period I was frequently asked if I was disappointed that none of the boys had become professional musicians. Many found it surprising when having it explained that the focus on music was aimed at long term, hopefully life-long, pleasure rather than employment.

Another question frequently asked in the decade after the Home School years was, “You must be proud of your boys?” Just like any family, there were moments when parental concerns arose and, despite loving them ever so deeply, I would always jokingly say, “Ask me again when they are over 30.” Now, over another decade later, I am well satisfied with the citizens of the world my boys have become and, although no accountability checklists have been undertaken, know they have assumed life roles most worthily. What more can education ask of its students?



In writing I now see parallel similarities in developing the Home School programme with the development of Hands On English (Buchanan, 2015), the class for the Hearing Impaired and the many other curricula and course projects that challenged me in the ensuing research years. Throughout the range of work I have been involved in, I recognise that my learning challenges of the Home School period contributed a solid grounding for work with adults as they too were finding their way in the world. In devising new projects, so often I have recognised the familiar feelings of doubt and moments of working out the supposed “right” move at the right time – perhaps not always the best match one would have hoped for necessarily but the best option, given energy and resources available within the sociological-political-pedagogical environment at the time (Coghlan, 2013, p. 350) – and always searching for better ways and new ideas worthy of consideration for better practice. Ashton-Warner astutely portrays the depth of engagement that became an unconscious working benchmark for me when she states, “Not just part of us becomes a teacher. It engages the whole self” (1967, p. 10), variations of which statement I continually self-acknowledge and hear around me from committed colleagues. Sartre, delightfully providing further emphasis advises,

Consciousness has been purified. It is as clear as a strong wind. There is no longer anything in it apart from a movement to flee from itself, a slipping outside of itself. If, per impossible, you were to enter “inside” a consciousness, you would be seized by a whirlwind and thrown outside, next to the tree, in the dust. For consciousness has no “inside.” It is nothing other than the outside of itself, and it is this absolute flight, this refusal to be substance that constitutes itself as consciousness ... [E]verything is outside, even ourselves – outside, in the world, amid others. It is not in I know not what inner retreat that we discover ourselves; it is on the road, in the city, in the midst of the crowd, thing among things, man among men. (Sartre, 1966, p. 111)



Chapter IV - Peripatetic Interstices

Gadamer claims that all understanding is embedded in a context of tradition and that it is impossible ever to fully transcend this situation of embeddedness. (Schiebler, 2000, p. 2)



New Beginnings

Thinking about and understanding the nature of a turning point requires a capacity to locate ourselves in an expansive, not a narrow view of time. (Lederach, 2005, p. 22)

With Home School drawing to a close, the family growing up and moving on to other studies, and my three year term on the Ministerial Home Education Advisory Council coming to an end, a change in lifestyle was obviously becoming imminent. What was it that lay in the future? What directions lured? After such an intensively engaged way of living for so many years, what was going to take its place? There were so many tempting options and new pathways called, particularly through workplace literacy employment. Eventually, despite holding little hope of gaining employment when overseas experience seemed to be a prerequisite, supported by the light hearted thinking that I could help others, even when in my dotage, teaching English as a second language proved to have the loudest call.

Emerging from the totality of engagement in the home school years and moving back to study engulfed me in new ideas and new thinking. With renewed engagement in study along with adult literacy teaching, I discovered that having recently worked as a practitioner in relative isolation meant that I had many years of reading and theoretical thinking

to catch up with – it was as if being engulfed with the bright sun of a new day. There was so much to think about and link with the past and push into the future, all infiltrating my understanding of life – understanding the possibilities of what I was capable of and what others were capable of doing. In many ways it was as if I was emerging from a two decade slumber. A further awakening occurred when working on literacy issues with some mining students and one disclosed an horrific mining accident of which he had been on the periphery. That disclosure in a class setting unsettled me, throwing me into, perhaps unfounded, thinking that I did not have the skills to handle such a classroom incident. I listened for a short time, then realised that others in the group were listening and adding details. As discretely as possible I drew the storying to a close and suggested that if anyone wished to discuss the incident further I would be happy to do so after class.

Having now trained and worked in counselling, I firmly believe I would not do anything differently now to how I handled the incident that day. Showing respect to the storyteller and the active listeners was sufficient, for as Lindseth, interpreting Løgstrup, advises,

By talking about spontaneous and sovereign expressions of existence, Løgstrup demonstrates how co-dependent we are as human beings. “In trust, in openness of speech and charity, we are moving towards the Other”. (Lindseth, 2014, p. 8)

That teaching and learning may be identified as social phenomena involving interaction with the environment and social contexts, Schutz (1967, p. 9) claims that by “living in the world, we live with others and for others, orienting our lives to them.” This statement giving the notion of a dialogic learning process, a concept supported by Malhotre in that,

... only through dialogue among people with the relevant identities can one achieve mutual understanding of their struggles and aspirations. (Malhotre, 2006, p. 82)

The incident certainly propelled me into further dimensions of living as I continued to “explore the realness of lived experience” (Lederach, 2005, p. 37)



Caring other power

Compassion, our direct understanding of somebody else's situation ... does not need reasons ... (Lindseth, 2014, p. 7)

Undertaking and completing two post-graduate degrees simultaneously, an undertaking not to be recommended, jostled my thinking even further. The combination of the two subject fields, however; teaching English as a second language and counselling/sport psychology, provided a broadly enriching, supportive background for the major part of this inquiry, work with former refugee adults. It also gave me a deep love of learning that I had not ever found before in my previous studies. Perhaps it was because I had a much clearer concept of where it was taking me or maybe, after more than two decades out of the “workforce” I recognised an urgency for updated qualifications. Whatever the underlying reasons, study became an enriching part of my being, but, with energy in urgent need of recharging and focus rapidly waning, the very last subject was agonisingly difficult to complete.

That I had a supportive fellow student as an informal study mate was most fortuitous. Most weeks for this subject we would take the three hour drive to Hobart, attend the lecture then, often singing opera at the tops of our voices, we drove all the way back to our homes through the night. Fortunately we had already discovered that we were opposites in our study patterns. I was a good ‘starter’, getting the bones of the work to be done well mapped out quickly and methodically. This meant that in our periodic phone contacts – before the range of mobile-phones and emails reached the bush – I would be coaxing him to start an assignment. We were both thorough in our research BUT for me the writing up and crafting of the work always needed more time and energy than I could find. With roosters crowing in the early morning hours I would still be working.

With energy quite sapped, if it had not been for my study mate urging me on and trusting me to finish I would definitely not have completed that last subject. It seems almost unbelievable now when looking back but I realise that, with my life already on the brink of change, his trust in me and care in ensuring that I completed what he knew I was capable of competently achieving, he pushed me, in a very ragged state, through to the next stage of my life. What a friend! Through land-line telephone contact he literally pushed me over a very, very fine line and I am ever so grateful. When self-will was insufficient to achieve what I wanted to achieve, in this instance, I learnt with no uncertainty that a caring other can make all the difference. Responding to my unspoken ethical demand, my study-mate's "expression of existence" (Løgstrup in Lindseth, 2014, p. 7), his trust and compassion was empowering.

So often I became aware of the strength of this compassion later with my students. To have someone willing to take the time to go out of their way to help negotiate just one of the never ending issues that arose in resettlement, whether a support-worker, health professional, teacher, volunteer tutor or caring neighbour, surely relieved some of the burdensome stress.



Climate of change

Along with study, two sojourns in Viet Nam, the first narrated in *A Solitary Journey in the Company of Millions* (Buchanan, 1998) and work through the Teacher's University in Hanoi – Dai Hoc Su Pham (1999) the following year, gave the experience I sought to prove to myself that I was capable of teaching within an environment that required total immersion in another cultural setting. In such a complete cultural immersion I was challenged linguistically, socially, physically, emotionally and pedagogically. It was as if I had been metamorphosed into an 'other' teacher.

With over sixty students to a class, all ranged along narrow wooden benches and seats, few books, dim lighting that sometimes faded altogether and winter chill finding its way into the classroom, teaching emplaced me in a pedagogical environment so different to what I had ever experienced. Perhaps my only comfort-zone in the whole cultural immersion was, with my background knowledge of the Maori language, I achieved almost passable conversational fluency with the Viet Nameese language – both languages having very similar pronunciation!

The two sojourns in Viet Nam prepared me well for working with my former refugee students in all of their diversity. It was a time that provided me with experience that shrouded me in multiple layers of humility, allowing me to become more acutely aware of and appreciate wisps of character, permeating generations of cultural philosophies and often, traces of traditions ingrained in other ways of life that I could never hope to gain full knowledge of and therefore never fully understand. Giving confirmation to my observations Greene writes,

If we teachers are to develop a humane and liberating pedagogy, we must feel ourselves to be engaged in a dialectical relationship. We are more likely to uncover or be able to interpret what we are experiencing ... if we can recapture some awareness of our own backgrounds. (Greene, 1995, p. 52)

In living with diversity, travelling, and meeting my students from varied cultures and traditions I also came to recognise the importance, yet fragility, of belonging (Butler, 2003, p.14). In sidestepping the sanitising, the “aerial or otherwise distanced view[s]” (ibid, p.9) depicted by the media I came to meet greater human diversity and more fully understand what it is to be other. My ever broadening world concept also confronted me with greater emphasis a question I had long struggled with. “As the world loses people and their living cultures and languages, what world riches are we losing as powers collude to sweep humanity into a miasma of conformity, into a commodity of dehumanisation even?” I wonder.



Places we call home

Our house is our corner of the world. As has often been said, it is our first universe ... (Bachelard, 1994, p. 4)

The concept of “Home” seems to have such varied connotations. When my mother decided that she wanted to leave New Zealand and come to live in Australia to be closer to her children and grandchildren she told me of her decision. Although surprised, I noted that she had clearly stated, “I want to leave the old *place*.” Incredibly, her home, where she had lived for over 70 years, since she was a very small child, she no longer claimed as “Home”. It had become a “place”. And, as we drove off to the airport two weeks later, leaving her home forever, she chattered away and did not look back. Already she seemed to have her concept of “Home” somewhere, someplace else. To me, extraordinarily, her new premise of “home” seemed to also include a connotation of change (Kasulis, 2002, p.140).

In contrast, for me the sense of home was like a badly entangled fishing line – coming to Australia and living in a city for the first time brought about cycles of homesickness. Great emotional waves of longing for the land I had left behind invaded the every dayness of living. Later, settling in the bush of Tasmania – it did not become “Home”, as in homeland, for quite some time. The dry sclerophyll bushland smelt and felt different – and there were snakes. It just was not “Home”. Much as I tried, how could I convince myself otherwise?

The intense longing for “Home”, as in “house”, was also pervasive and it took time before I fully accepted that my actual childhood home, where I had lived all of my life, was no longer “Home”. It was my homeland that was still “Home”. Eventually, though, I found that I could finally call Australia “Home” and my house home was also “Home”! How complex and confusing it had all become, a confusion also explored by Aristotle in his conception of *topos*. As Jones elucidates,

Because place can be assimilated neither to form nor to matter, Aristotle states, at the outset of Book IV of the Physics, that it confounds our intuitions about nature such that it is necessary to be at an impasse not only about what [place] is, but even about whether it is! (Jones, 2015, p. 15)

How does one explain the permeability of the notion of home, place and culture? I am sure that my layers of ingrained love of and deep longing for my own homeland are quite different to those of my siblings and others. What is it that sparks the difference within us all? The smell of the bushland – nearly approximated when I step out of my place of work in Hobart on a hot, dry day and, with a westerly wind, I can smell that rain has fallen on the rain-forests in the headwaters of the Derwent River. The ever changing wildness, and the penetrating pull of the land becomes enmeshed with the psyche, an enmeshment that is difficult to unleash.



Although the term ‘homesickness’ is seldom heard in the current age, in class, when identifying countries of origin, in self disclosure, I occasionally refer to the sense of longing for my own homeland with my students. Patting my heart and saying “Home”, the wave of nods and gentle smiles of agreement that accompany my word and body language appears to normalise our respective feelings for a homeland left behind. It is not just the family, the loved ones, the communities and the home – the presence of the land, the layers of generations and culture, the smells, the food, the way of life, the skills one acquired to live in that environment and the rhythm of existence all seem to contribute to the, sometimes painful, reminiscence and nostalgia (Bollnow, n.d., p. 5, Lived Space).



I dwell with a strangely aching heart
In that vanished abode there far apart

(R. Frost, 2009)



Belongingness

At its essence, home provides a sense of place. (Lederach, 2005, p. 167)

Accommodating a longing for a homeland, similarly how does one explain a strong sense of belonging to places on the globe? Apart from my homeland there are two places where I have found that I “belonged”. The first was on the island of Barra, in the Outer Hebrides of Scotland where the wildness, the dune-like, sand-blasting machair, the weather cragged hills and the precariously nestled houses all called and haunted. Stormbound by a wild Atlantic gale my stay on the island was extended until calmer seas allowed the ferry to call again but leaving was so difficult – and it was not the storm tossed boat that was the cause. My whole being seemed to be bound to the island. On returning to Tasmania it was with incredulity I discovered that my paternal grandmother’s family had originated from the island, having relocated at the time of the Land Clearance period in Scottish history. That the family, through the mists of time, had been hereditary pipers to the clan chief of the island, perhaps also goes some way to explain the continuing love of piping that repeatedly emerges in our family.

The other place that has exerted a feeling of “Home” on me is the beautiful old Norwegian city of Trondheim. Unexplained, the place is just part of me, giving a sense of quiet belongingness that remains accepted within. Maybe I will never know the reason. What is it that draws us, holds us to a place? Throughout our lives, from our own past generations, the linkages to our unfolding futures must be profound even when not fully conscientised for “there exists a force that pushes out and pulls in, and in so doing creates a “centre that holds”” (Lederach, 2005, p.76)

As habitation, families and social horizons change linkages from the past through the lives of our ancestors to the bonds of the present day surely convey more than is ever known. Looking back and looking forward

becomes a seemingly interminable, if sometimes fragile, endless chain. Derived from various cultural understandings, Lederach, in his explication of similar strands of thinking, brought more ordered meaning to my ponderings in his writing, “Time moves backward to those that have come before us” (Lederach, 2005, p. 137) – an understanding that has allowed me to more fully understand others.

When working on university studies in Tasmania there was a fellow-student from a Pacific island country – whose aunt had, coincidentally, been a fellow student with me at Ardmore Teacher’s College in New Zealand three decades before. Reawakening my very rusty Maori we were able to find some wonderfully shared snatches of language within our conversations in English. But one of the questions I distinctly recall asking her was “What do you miss most while living in Australia?” As it was the middle of winter in Tasmania when asking, I expected her reply to refer to the frosty coldness in comparison to the sunny warmth of her island home out in the Pacific, or perhaps the more limited range of tropical fruit available. I was so overcome when she replied that what she missed the most was not being able to go down to the headland to talk to her ancestors. A sense of clouding shame engulfed me. How could I have moved so far within myself to have lost touch with the enfolding life acceptance of the Pacific?



Ordinary home

... a home shelters not just the body, but the imagination ...It is coloured by reality, imagination, longing, actual and created memories. (Noddings, 2003, p. 33)

In teaching I do not dwell on the concepts of “home” and “family” because of the losses that most students have experienced but one day a very special cameo emerged

When setting up my first adult Preliminary level English classroom, suitable teaching resources were difficult to locate. Knowing of my problem a family member gave me some boxes of old geographical magazines, which, in small piles, I set in the middle of table groupings, to be browsed by the students as they finished their work. One morning, whilst we were all working, I heard loud, agitated exclamations from the other side of the classroom. Hastening to the student, thinking that she might be ill, I found she had a magazine open at a story about the capital city of her homeland. It emerged, through very limited vocabulary, “Father”, “House”, and gestures indicating herself as being smaller and much younger, she had recognised her childhood home in a photograph. She had actually recognised her old home, standing with other relatively unscathed houses adjacent to a section of completely war flattened buildings, on the crest of a hill. After questioning her, I understood that apparently her childhood home was long gone – destroyed in the ongoing conflict within her home-country. To me the situation seemed so extraordinary, almost unbelievable, but my student was positive in her claim. She was obviously so emotional in having recognised her old home but, with lack of English, she just could not find adequate communication to fully convey her excitement and joy. With emotion so choked but bursting to be released, she was bouncing and flapping her hands in excitement. In contrast, not understanding the excited outburst, the other students, with quizzical glances, tried to focus on their work.

In one of those decision-making moments in class management, with focus on work now interrupted, I called for attention. Referring to the class globe of the world and my stick pictures drawn on the whiteboard, I explained to the rest of the class, all from various cultures and customs, what this student had discovered. It was a sharing that touched us all deeply. Lacking a common language but with definite understanding, spontaneously sharing the moment, all of the students, with great smiles of empathy, began to clap. It was the only way that, as a group, they could share this student's incredulous joy, so definitely confirming the notion that, "[w]onder is an engagement to share and is enlarged in the sharing" (Carlsen & Sandelands, 2014, p.12). Special cameo moments such as this, so often made my teaching a journey of wonder. How incredible that, newly arrived in Tasmania, this student happened to choose and open a magazine, to then find her childhood home depicted in a photograph, taken about twenty years previously! Her overflowing joy overwhelmingly confirmed Bachelard's statement that,

[w]hen we dream of the house we were born in, in the utmost depths of reverie [sic], we participate in this original warmth, in this well-tempered matter of the material paradise. This is the environment in which the protective beings live. (Bachelard, 1994, p. 7)

Elaborating further Bollnow confirms,

Only when we have lost ourselves in the hustle and bustle of everyday life, when we are no longer 'at home' in our homes, when home has become the foreign to us, in this unsatisfying state of self-alienation the direct path to the renewal of our own nature seems to be denied to us, and then, in the fading distance, the image of our lost home appears to us. Longing for the distance is, in fact, a yearning for our lost origins when life was still genuine. (Bollnow, 2011, pp. 91-92)



Portability of learning

It is in the in-between of our relationships that each of us is transformed and becomes present. (Todd, 2010)

Having gained some notion of what the concept of “Home” means in our classroom – I now explore something of the “presence” I brought as the teacher, although “it is not presence or the present itself that is educational, but the contextual, relational aspects of it” Todd asserts (2010).

Working as a counsellor, recognising the readiness of a client to acknowledge and, more importantly, address a problem provided a challenge in identifying the timing along a very fine line. In an effort to avoid cathartic re-traumatisation, to wait and watch for client readiness to address an issue is, to me, a major skill in counselling (Gendlin, 1992). With this understanding, full disclosure of an issue may not be possible or even necessary, as it is the ‘being’ part of the “human” that becomes the focus of the work (Gendlin, 1992). Just sometimes, the issues are more complex and unutterable than a client is capable of fully disclosing within therapy, or ever maybe (A. Rogers, 2006), and to be responsible for precipitating disclosure in a brutally cathartic manner I consider to be an act of violence. Thus, although not counselling per se, it is through this lens, couched in this thinking, that I teach my students in a pedagogical setting.

That there may be wounds, both physical and psychological, with clients and students means that I work in an attempt to heal, to close wounds as cleanly and as neatly as possible, allowing scar tissue to take the place of a counselling bandage or band-aid – caringly working with that which is confusing and difficult to deal with.

For English speaking clients it is so much easier to explain the concept by likening trauma and the wound healing process to a childhood

mishap such as falling off a bicycle on a gravel road when learning to ride and having to be patched up. As the wound healed a shiny, silver scar took the place of a bandage, I would proceed in explanation, and at that point a client would often involuntarily touch or focus briefly on an old wound. I would then explain that the scar had covered a wound that happened in the past and although that happening, that experience, cannot be taken away, the shiny scar is a badge, a reminder that the client has moved on. The scar is a reminder that the body has the ability to repair itself so that new challenges in life may be confronted. That does not mean that one cannot be reminded of the incident, sometimes as painful flashbacks (Brewin, 2015), I explain, but gradually the feeling of being repeatedly knocked over by the issue will subside and the memory will become like scar tissue – a shiny badge of courage.

In a nutshell that is an approach I have used to work with trauma in counselling and it is with this underlying thinking that I have tried to work with my students. From such varied backgrounds and with no mutual oral language to communicate adequately, my approach, through everyday teaching encounters, linked oracy and art work with movement and body language. In caring for my students, although I could never fully know their stories or backgrounds – despite sometimes shuddering ever so deeply when some small clues emerged – my job was to help them achieve new skills in their lives, to support them as they journeyed onwards (Gadamer, 1975; Lindseth, 2014). It was my privilege to learn with them. It was as if we met on our respective camino, we would walk together and then part, perhaps to never meet again. For, as Buber iterates,

If we go on our way and meet a man who has advanced towards us and has also gone on his way, we only know our part of the way, not his – his we experience only in the meeting. (Buber, 1970, p. 55)

It was not my right to delve into the students' past lives. I was privileged by their presence and was concerned about their being in the present and their preparation for the next stages of their respective life journeys. Lederach, paraphrasing Arendt, eloquently supports my thinking in writing,

We live in a certain paradox as human beings precisely because we are beings that live by the meaning things have for us. ... We have the capacity to remember the past but we have no capacity to change it. ... We have the capacity to imagine a different future, but we have no capacity to fully predict much less control it. Try as we might nobody controls the future. The web of life is juxtaposed between these realities of time, between memory and potentiality. This is the place of narrative, the art of restorying. (Lederach, 2005, p. 148)

For me as teacher, not wearing a counsellor's hat and certainly not seeing all of my student's "faces of suffering" (Hovey & Amir, 2013), in engaging with and respecting them, it was only possible for me to invite them to channel their "storying" through a flow of art, movement and interaction within our mutual pedagogical journeying.

Each day I tried to remember that one student had a headache yesterday. Are they feeling better today? That one had minor surgery last week. Are they feeling better this week? For students, so many with families "lost", "gone" or left behind, and from fractured cultures, taking time to show I cared was important. Checking became part of the daily routine, a checking that incorporated reminders for appointments, meetings with settlement support workers and asking after children that had been ill.



Reacquaintance with Maslow and Piaget

Another conceptual construct I developed during time counselling victims of crime and others, but drawn from early teacher training, is a model derived from Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943; Koltko-Rivera, 2006) and Piaget's structure of developmental stages (McNally, 1975; Lourenco & Machado, 1996), a construct described briefly in *Teacher's Voices 8* (Buchanan, 2005, p. 41).

Early in counselling I noted that some clients, presenting initially with intense levels of trauma, were incapable of looking after themselves adequately and, as adults operating at a low level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, they needed care and supervision similar to that necessary for a toddler. The other aspect I noted, with many severely traumatised clients was that their cognition was impaired, sometimes profoundly (APA DSM-5, 2013). As a form of ontological caring, through a lens encompassing Piaget's developmental stages of learning I could, through interaction and observation, roughly place where each client was operating at. Thus, I worked with the two concepts simultaneously.

Within my counselling client-group perhaps the most dislodged client I can recall was an elderly, secondary victim of a complex assault case. Although having her own home and having previously lived with fiercely maintained independence, after her "loss", for some time she was "homeless" and was, uncharacteristically, without the ability to make decisions that affected her daily and ongoing life. With extreme passivity and reliance on others she was like an ill child. Her lost-ness placed her very low on my imagined Maslow scale for it was as if she had nowhere to go and was almost bereft of the will to live. Her cognitive level, as reported by family members, was also well below her usual highly independent level of operation. Having been subjected to such trauma, she was in a state of numbed meaninglessness.

Transferring the combined Maslow-Piaget model to working with my former refugee students allowed me, through observation of behaviour and their interaction with me and others, to roughly place each in a perspective of being. By placing both models on parallel but independent sliding scales, a torture-trauma victim may be at the most basic needs level on Maslow's hierarchy concept and perhaps temporarily, hovering somewhere below the concrete operations level on Piaget's scale. As basic needs were reappropriated and cognition moved towards a return to previous adult level, my memory pegging of the student's self-efficacy altered correspondingly.

This mental imaging usually had other contributing factors. I noted the way a student moved, how they related and reacted to others, what their concentration level was like, their deportment, and also how they drew and wrote. Without questioning and expecting answers, dialogical engagement which my Pre level students were unable to participate in, I was able to roughly gauge how each was travelling on the section of life's journey that had brought them to a pedagogical relationship with me. I had found an exceedingly useful classroom tool, an informal structure that gave me some understanding of each student over and above the few enrolment details that I was privy to. It provided a filing structure that could be updated instantly and one from which I could readily locate details, almost unconsciously, in class. If concerned about a particular student, in reflection I could uncover and draw on observations noted mentally over a period of time, observations that I had not been conscious of "recording" earlier. Although definitely not of research accuracy, the rickety model became a useful part of my teaching practice, allowing me to work more sensitively "with" my students.

When new students arrived in class I automatically, mentally, tentatively placed each within the Maslow-Piaget construct, giving me an estimation of the space in which each was operating. The flexibility of the model also helped me gauge shifts of equilibrium as resettlement

proceeded and the teacher-student relationship unfolded, for we all react differently to stress and trauma when side issues and recovery can follow very different patterns.

Supporting the model, in maintaining professional development, I have followed the continuing research associated with trauma and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) based around the updated APA DSM-5 (2013) and other guidelines which place greater emphasis on cultural and social issues relevant to the understanding of mental health issues on a global basis. Ongoing research, particularly in relation to PTSD in conflict and displaced persons, the ever changing crises and varying refugee-migrant populations (Drozdek, 2015) is of particular interest.



Being in the world

Anyone who attempts to make an emergency picture into a typical one, and who will measure all of man's goals and desires by his behaviour during extreme physiological deprivation is certainly being blind to many things. (Maslow, 1943)

With little knowledge of client or student lives in lifespan terms, either before or after our relatively brief period of working together, I had little insight into their life journeying although some confronted me with more of their past than others.

From my student cohort I would consider a group of torture-trauma victims as being the lowest encountered on my rickety assessment scale. All of the men, having what appeared to be bruised, sad eyes – this perhaps partly due to their becoming accustomed to daylight again – for a time seemed to be sadly robotic. Poignantly, almost certainly I would not have encountered them at their lowest point. One in particular, in my estimation, was the slowest in the group to respond to his new life in Australia. Walking with delayed, tentatively uncertain steps and downcast eyes, he tried to keep a damaged limb from view. It was as if he was wanting to be invisible, seeming to be in a world far from the classroom. Reminding me of tissue paper, he existed in the classroom as if a gust of wind would blow him away. Not seeming to want anything at all, in many ways it was as if he was a child but the men he arrived with, to their great credit, cared for him and each other very well.

This student's time in our class coincided with the time when there was a group from another culture that insisted on shaking hands on arrival at class and when leaving at the end of the day. Despite experiences of intense conflict prior to coming to Australia, with great smiles and energetic strides these students gave me the idea for modifying their very acceptable form of human contact (Todd, 2003a, pp. 31-44) to one that would hopefully help to draw my "lost" torture-trauma victim into the

class. Exchanging the formal handshake to a high-five hand slap meant that I could say farewell at the end of the day in quick order to all if necessary by using both hands. It also meant that my withdrawn student was compelled to look up to ensure that his hand would make contact with mine. Being part of the, sometimes exuberant, high-five was part of the fun and more importantly he began to make eye contact. It was an exceedingly slow process to get this student to leave his tightly shut shell to join class activities but several months after his arrival, when he looked at me and gave his first watery smile, I knew he was at last on some sort of pathway. For me that moment was very special, a moment that is well captured in Todd's statement that,

Learning ... occurs within teacher-student relation, where the struggle to symbolize and make meaning takes place within complicated dynamics of communication. (Todd, 2003a, p. 25)

From that time the high-five became a continuing signature move in our class. It was used as "congratulations" when someone succeeded in doing something they had been working on – maybe the whole alphabet in order, maybe the days of the week or maybe in number recognition. At the end of the day, when cheerfully administering farewell high-fives to the class I could remind individual students about an appointment or official papers to be completed, I could thank those that had helped me or other students, I could check on a headache that had bothered someone during the day and I could discover who still had freezing cold hands. Sometimes the high-five could be reworked as a clapping pattern with both hands and sometimes it was used for a farewell counting game.

When meeting past students in the street, some from years past, the high-five greeting and farewell has continued to retain the special, wonderfully genuine greeting reminder of our class community. Providing a lens of understanding Brockmeier proposes that,

We live our lives in a variety of cultural meaning contexts. ... Usually we do not have any difficulty acting in such multiple scenarios. Shifting between them with great ease and agility, we are often not even aware of this multiplicity. (Brockmeier, 2009, p. 214)



Chapter V - Borders and boats

The lessons of history are always relevant ... one goes back to go forward. We go to the past not to live in it but to create a future. (Strong, 1989, p.13)

Whilst exploring the concepts of wandering, travel and change, in an attempt to align the self to the evolving teacher role, this section of the enquiry guides the narrative, particularly by way of metaphor, into further complexities of lived experience to reveal aspects of authenticity (Guignon, 2008; Thompson, 2015) and meaning. And, in a continued searching for the “self” (Biesta, 2007 pp.42-45) I further pursue the quest to find what it is that is in me that I brought as teacher to my teaching.

That the metaphor of journey and the inference of travel underlies this section of writing is a purposeful choice. With a love of both travel and especially boats, memories of night watches, placing one’s life in the hands of others, coping with rigging failure and the vagaries of weather whilst inshore or offshore has instilled an empathic awareness of students who have endured so much. Therefore the metaphorical notion of being transported becomes a multifaceted *entendre* as I have explored the life and development of my tripartite “self” (Rogers, 2006).

As a reminder of travel and change, from the desk where I write, I watch sea craft come and go – pilot boats, tugs, Antarctic ships, fishing boats, merchant vessels, research vessels, enormous cruise ships, naval craft, pleasure craft and the yachts I love to sail on (temporarily forsaken to write).



Writing late I see the light of a kayaker and a streaming trail of the paddler's passage on a calm, clear, moonlit night

Rippling wake

 Moon trail.

 Human trail

 Sparkling

 Moonshine

 After-trail

 Dissipating

 Vanishing

On still water.

EB

Extraordinarily those words somehow enfold my work in the meetings and partings, the appearances and departures, as students come and go. Their onward journeying emplacing them in the world as I also follow my own pathways.

But I must return to writing for, rather like *Ping the Duck* (Flack, 1933) of the Yangtse River, the character in a favoured childhood storybook, our pathways in life are uncertain and not carved in stone, and

To be in touch with our landscapes is to be conscious of our evolving experiences, to be aware of the ways in which we encounter our world. (Greene, 1978, p. 2)

Choices are not ours alone, but what we make of ourselves within our life journeys and how authentic we are to ourselves and others is where our souls shine from (Løgstrup, 2007). I claim that true authenticity does not just happen, it evolves over time through life experience, self-reflective interpretation and identity choice much like, and perhaps simultaneously with the development of practical moral wisdom, *phronesis* (Gadamer, 1975). Thompson (2015, p. 603) charts the development of authenticity from the perspective of “self-determination of the messy interplay [of] being “true to one’s self” and being “in-the-world”.”

Biesta, in “Who is there?” (2007b , pp. 42-45), explores the concept of “self” through the writings of Levinas, Bauman, and Foucault, attending to self-knowledge (Shusterman), self-awareness, self-transformation (Foucault) and other concepts of self-knowing. Perhaps of greatest significance to my inquiry is his perusal and interpretation of Levinas’ writing where

Levinas ... leads us to an understanding of the self as *relationship* and more specifically, to the self as a relationship of responsibility. It leads us, in other words, to *the discovery of the other in the self*. (Biesta, *ibid*, p. 44. Italics in original)

Following Levinas’ thinking further, Biesta writes,

... that we should understand the self as a relationship of responsibility that is not initiated by the self but comes to us from the outside in the form of an interruption of our being. (*ibid*)

This, to my mind, is a notion that allows choice or an evasion or abdication of personal responsibility to others by, in effect, conferring responsibility to “*the other in the self*” (my emphasis). Concluding his paper with the statement, “The critical question ... is whether the road to

self-knowledge will allow for the discovery of the other in the self” (ibid, p. 45), he then assigns education with the responsibility for facilitating the link. Thus, being prompted, my quest to find what it is that is in me that is me continues on. Searching to align some aspects of my lived experience with perspectives of my students lives and my interaction with them, I now explore cameos that reveal unexpected incidents, interaction within cultures with an emphasis on mimesis and body language, and also the notions of landscape and “horizon” (Gadamer, 1975).



Linnaeus and a pear tree

Scientific thinking, a thinking which looks on from above, and thinks of the object-in-general, must return to the “there is” which precedes it; to the site, the soil, the sensible and humanly modified world such as it is for our lives and for our bodies ... (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 160)

In the midst of this study, but taking time from it, I was involved in a botanical exploration on the island of Crete, a journey during which I trampled over shards of ancient civilisations on deserted headlands and wild, dry limestone hill country, part of the uplifted floor of the once great, prehistoric Tethos Sea. Here shepherds tended their sheep and goats ran wild. But, one day, whilst botanising out on a dry scrubby plateau, coming upon a large trunked, gnarled, old pear tree (*Pyrus* spp.) beside a dusty, rocky track, it was as if finding priceless treasure. Possibly actual or close to species, this ancient pear tree had been made the host to graftings of several ancient pear selections, clearly evidenced by both the wide graft scars and the varied foliage and fruit with differences of colour and shape, differences that were highlighted in the intense autumn sunlight. In addition, the fruit of both, host plant and the

aberrant species or cultivars, although all different were quite small and relatively woody indeed by today's supermarket standards. That find was, for me, even more awe inspiring than observing the many incredibly ancient olive trees that continued production after so many centuries of tending and harvesting. That pear tree actually provided clear evidence of purposeful selection and husbandry. It provided proof of an historical lineage of orcharding techniques which, previously, I had not had any conception of, even though I had contemplated possible historical links on occasion when growing up on the other side of the world amongst so many grafted fruit trees. With this venerable tree I could only wonder how far those graft-stock cuttings had been transported and if, perchance, any of the original, donor trees survived. I marvelled at the prudence of the unknown, historical, plant selectors and imagined their incredulity if they could see for themselves the giant, juicy fruit growing on trees of the same genus today.

Then, leaping space but perhaps marking time, transported tardus-like to Sweden, I pondered on the work of the Swedish naturalist Karl Linnaeus (1707-1778) and his application of binomial nomenclature, the system of scientific identification applied to the plant and animal kingdoms (UCMP; Buchanan, 2007) throughout the world. Without the assistance of DNA testing I wondered how he would have classified those old pear cultivars. How would he have proceeded with identification? How would he have documented his findings? Recently reading some of Linnaeus' works, now curated by the Linnaean Society in London, his methodical, detailed note-taking from astute observation is an exemplary example of impeccable, scholarly research. I am in awe of his clarity and conciseness - the work of a scholar indeed. His clear alterations to data would have been so much easier to execute had he access to a computer. But for us, in this day and age, his meticulous attention to detail now allows us to track his research and changes of thinking on the grounds of new evidence.

I marvel at the two legacies of observation, skill and historical steps in human endeavour and it is those two examples of application to tasks that I hold as exemplary models of excellence to this present study.



Sleight of memory

Another journey found similarity in a story I have often told of the power of memory. But to the first story: In Tasmania lived a petit, silver-haired woman of European extraction who was born in China in the early 1900's. Following the enforcement of an isolationist policy, her family were compelled to leave the country when she was very young. After many decades, when foreigners were once again permitted entry, she returned as an elderly tourist to her birthplace. Returning to the location where her family had lived, she surprised not only herself but also the local people, by being able to converse in their dialect – a dialect she had neither heard nor used in the intervening years. It was when she began speaking in their own language that very elderly members of the community remembered this woman, as a child, and her family. As Fay claims, “individuals can be said to become through language” (Fay, 2005, p.19), a claim elaborated by Todd in that,

it is not simply that each of us learns to become but that each of us discovers herself and is discovered anew through our appearances to others and through the ways in which others reflect back to us a story of ourselves that we are waiting to claim. (Todd, 2010)

One can but wonder, what power memory has within us (van Deurzen, p.269).



In my own story I was probably equally surprised and amazed at the power of memory: The fulfilment of a childhood wish to visit the land of **THE** giant tortoise – singular in those days, for at 5 years of age I did not know there were a number of species – eventually took me to the Galapagos Islands. This wish emanated from the lonely tortoise kept at the bottom of a large aviary in the park near where my grandmother lived in New Zealand. Somehow this, big to me then, tortoise seemed to know when there were dandelion flowers or seed heads in the offing, tortoise food that I had searched for in the long, rain spangled grass under my grandmother's old spreading, apple tree.

Many decades later I now wonder if that tortoise knew by footfall, voice or some other, perhaps olfactory, differentiation, that alerted it to the presence of food, as it would slowly, almost mechanically, Jabberwocky style, stomp its way determinedly towards me as if an aged dog of Pavlov's experiments. Sometimes, perhaps already replete, or maybe dandelions were not its desired food of the moment, it would stomp forward then just stand and silently stare. It was then that my brother and I would have staring matches with the motionless tortoise. We would wait until the tortoise blinked, then, standing motionless, we would stare back. If one of us blinked before the tortoise did we were out of the game, but, it was very seldom that we outstared the tortoise. I had forgotten that game. Then, whilst exploring the Galapagos Islands, in a semi-open area, I was kneeling a short distance from a giant tortoise as it ripped and munched on grass. Quite suddenly, it stopped still, slowly lifted its head and stared intently at me, just as its miniature replica had done over 60 years before. Without any hesitation I immediately stared back. Unconsciously, automatically I was transported into the game rules again. Amidst our mutual staring the memory of that game from childhood slid into full consciousness with such presence that it was a definite distraction to my focus. Finally, after many long minutes, the

tortoise won the game but I was so overcome I wanted to hug the huge animal, instead, I quietly talked to it. The tortoise continued to stare and I backed away as it was time for me to move on.

That encounter was an incredible jolt to the psyche, inducing an indescribable flux of “alive and lively” (Bondi & Davidson, 2011, p. 19) emotions and wonder. That the game could be played out as if it had been played merely the day before was astounding, incredible even. That my wish to visit the land of the tortoise had not diminished in all the years since I was five years old, yet the memory of the game had not emerged in all that time, only to surface when confronted by the giant tortoise’s stare left me asking incredulously of myself as I walked away, “How did that happen?”

Memory is such a fickle and, at times, frustrating, frightening even, part of human existence. How it can surface, unseen, unbidden, and interrupt living in the present gives it enormous power – a power that I am constantly aware of as I work with my students (Keri, 2015; Olf, Armour, Brewin et al, 2015; Drozdek, 2015). Indeed memory is a powerful force throughout this narrative and as Lederach reminds me,

To live between memory and potentiality is to live permanently in a creative space, pregnant with the unexpected. But it is also to live in the permanency of risk, for the journey between what lies behind and what lies ahead is never fully comprehended ... (Lederach, 2005, p.149)



With my students, I often wondered what their memories held. What special memories did they hold and cling to? What memories intruded in an unwelcome manner – memories that were unfit for the work of memorial making but stubbornly remained as the students continued on their life journeying. As we worked together the light of the

eyes and a smile, or an offered word in another language helped me to understand just a little, as did a shadowy sadness, or a sense of aloneness. So many sprinklings of the past were portrayed as disjointed “dialogue”, allowing for tentative understanding only.

Signs of life

Pulling you this way and that, mimesis plays this trick of dancing between the very same and the very different. (Taussig, 1995, p.129)

Working with and travelling among people of different cultures and languages has frequently called on mime, gesture and body language to convey meaning and messages, so often resulting in well meant, amusing understanding and camaraderie, but occasionally there has been misunderstanding. Occasionally too, it has even interrupted courses of action. I recall the time when, sitting alone in a railway carriage compartment as the long train rattled on in a part of the world far from home, my overnight travel companions having departed at a dawn-stop station. Suddenly, unannounced, three exceedingly dishevelled men unexpectedly slunk in and, standing over me, with seemingly grunted orders and gestures, demandingly indicated that they wanted me up on the top bunk above me! Not understanding a single word (Heidegger, 2001, p. 187) I well knew what they wanted and what they were likely to do to me and feeling totally besieged I was, understandably, disinclined to comply! Still sitting on the bottom bunk, in a totally automatic reaction, I reached for my small day-pack. Clutching it with one hand, as if a security blanket, my thoughts began racing, whilst in strange contrast, my body remained utterly composed. Somehow, deep in my thinking I acknowledged that with my passport and money, that was secreted in several places on me – including in my socks, if I could extricate myself from the situation I could survive for several days. Thus, determinedly,

outwardly I showed no inclination to respond at the behest of my would-be assailants and my stoic behaviour created an impasse. In sacking clothes, with gaping gaps in blackened teeth and long, black, dirty, matted hair, two of the men settled side by side on the edge of the lower bunk opposite me and one stood, barring the doorway of the carriage compartment. By gesture, as I looked at each one in turn again, the repeated order was that I was required to get up on the top bunk. Horrors galore! Every time that message was given to me, by body language and grunting, I shook my head and each time my response became more and more haughty! My nose went up and up and my head shakes became more and more determined. As my nose went up my free arm gave more and more dramatic sweeping gestures of refusal and dismissal. Clutching my day-pack even more tightly, as if a life jacket, I then somehow became aware that we were going over rough patches on the railway track at irregular intervals. What a thing to notice in such a predicament! With my mind racing to find a strategic move and not finding one, incongruently to my inner state, I made my body relax more and more at each joggling of the train. With my upper body reclining lower and lower sideways, my pack acted as a lounge pillow but, in reality, I was retaining the position of a cat about to pounce. Acutely aware of the three men in my peripheral vision, I stared wide-eyed, although unseeingly out of the train window. Then amazingly, incredibly, the more I relaxed the more my visitors relaxed. All three mirrored my behaviour somewhat! My behaviour appeared to have caused contagious mimesis (Maran, 2003, p.194; Soni & Thakur, 2015; Taussig, 1993). They had adopted a form of mutated mimesis that, in the momentary realisation of, caught me by surprise. The two opposite me relaxed with their feet off the floor, against the back wall of the bunk and the intruder in the doorway, no longer filling it but still standing, relaxed and lounged against the door jamb. Finally, there came a moment when, in estimation, I felt that I had two seconds to move to the compartment door before the men opposite me could respond. That meant my biggest problem was the man who lounged in the doorway.

That door blocker would be my biggest obstacle in getting through the open door. Having made the decision to move, I then decided to wait until the train went over the next rough patch on the railway line, so, waiting like a “relaxed”, coiled spring, we rattled on. The wait was interminable, seemingly going on for ever. It was as if there were going to be no more rough patches. Almost giving up the wait, I was beginning to formulate a new plan when, finally, the next rough patch came. As the jostling, shaking and swinging of the carriage was in full spate, clutching my pack with both hands at chin level, to use as a buffer if necessary, I sprang from the low bunk and flew determinedly to the door where I leapt sideways as the door stopper seemed to cower below me. Incredibly, my move took all three of the intruders by surprise and I reached the carriage passageway without being accosted. But, still clutching my day-pack under my chin, with my back to the far wall of the passageway and with mind racing, in a split second I was in a space of indecision. Where could I go? What could I do now? I asked of myself. There was no one around who spoke my language. I was on my own. Urgently glancing left and right, up and down the passageway, I tried to decide what to do. Somewhat alarmingly no plan of action came to me, but, at that precise moment, three policemen, as if a wall of blackness, burst through the far carriage door just as the three intruders began to lurch menacingly towards me from the compartment. From where I was standing, it seemed like minutes in slow motion as the two parties converged and suddenly recognised the presence of the other. Then, amidst much shouting, and arms and legs waving in all directions, the drama escalated as my would-be assailants scabbled, rat-like, to escape down the passageway towards the opposite end of the carriage.

Now an onlooker, an audience of one, still with my backpack clutched tightly to my chest, I flattened myself against the passageway wall as the police, focussed on my compartment intruders, determinedly rushed past. In a flurry they all somehow crammed through the opposite carriage doorway, as if actors in an aged black and white comic movie, and

exited from view. What an experience! One that I have no wish to repeat and one that I would definitely not wish others to experience.

On reflection, as my pounding heart came back to a more even rhythm in the hour after that event I realised my biggest mistake in trying to get my message of non-compliance across had been making eye contact, individually, with the three intruders. In the middle of the drama, my mind just had not recognised what an absolute impossibility it is to take control in that manner, as Lederach so aptly reminds me of the futility of my action, “The more you try to speak to everyone, ..., the less you speak to anyone” (Lederach, 2005, p. VII). But, then again, by communicating with eye contact and gesture, with such dramatic strength of purpose had I imparted an impression of dominance against their pack-like behaviour (Westcott, 2010, in Todd, 2015, p. 57) It was as if one part of me had stopped existing or was somehow subjugated, yet another part of me had been operating as if in incident command. How long the whole drama took to be fully enacted I have no idea – it was as if time was lost – in fact time seemed to telescope in and out in both directions. It was as if I was letting life go where it would, as I perceived no real control at all. It was a “letting-go-ness” (Todres & Galvin, 2010, p.4), as if some part of me had relinquished whatever future there might be but conversely another part compelled my body into compulsive action.

Well after the incident, when more grounded I came to realise that the incident confirmed that one cannot control everything and that sometimes one just has to take strategic action as and when opportunities arise. In the incident described, by hastening a move could have spelt disaster but by waiting and listening, by becoming aware of self and others and of the total environment, by awareness of all reactions, relying on all of one’s senses and intuition, “... attending to ... things often ignored or seen as unimportant” (Lederach, 2005, p.121) was perhaps a prudent move. Choosing to move from the compartment after a specific sequence of moves was, I well knew, putting myself into another sequence of

unknown events but that was the risk I had to take. That the move fortuitously coincided with the arrival of the police was purely serendipitous.

Despite deliberately portraying outer composure, my frenetically changing states of internal being within had me puzzled until Bergson's writing provided some clarity. He explains,

That which I call my present is my attitude with regard to the immediate future; it is my impending action. My present then is sensori-motor. Of my past, that alone becomes image and, consequently, sensation, at least nascent, which can collaborate in that action, insert itself in that attitude, in a word make itself useful; but, from the moment it becomes image, the past leaves the state of pure memory and coincides with a certain part of my present. Memory actualised in an image differs, then, profoundly from pure memory. The image is a present state, and its sole share in the past is the memory from which it arose. Memory, on the contrary, powerless as long as it remains without utility, is pure from all admixture of sensation, is without attachment to the present, and is, consequently, unextended. (Bergson, 2002, p. 129)

Also providing some understanding, Morris, interpreting the Voloshinov/Bakhtin voice, states,

Individual consciousness can only take shape in the material of signs. If consciousness is deprived of signs, that is of the sphere of meaning, then nothing is left to it. Subjectivity is thus produced in the '*borderline*' where inner experience and social world meet, and they meet in signs [The act of individual understanding] is a response to a sign with signs. ... This borderzone of continuous action between individual consciousness, itself composed of signs, and an outer social world of signs is a dialogic one; a word from outside the psyche always provokes an answering word even if only within the inner system of signs. (Morris, 2003, p.12)

On a lighter note, the whole episode perversely reminded me of the children's fairy tale of the Three Billy Goats Gruff. In the drama, as an actor, I became partly my long-horned, shaggy old angora buck with his imposingly wide, convoluted horns, leading his harem of dainty does with their shining, swinging, creamy white ringlets, and partly a strange fairy-like anachronism with a magic, wide sweeping wand that had remote control!

Then, challenging my understanding further, I find Grudin's words confronting me when, accurately in this instance, he implies that delaying an action makes the present of greater importance than the future. As he elaborates,

There is nothing wrong with this, as long as we know what we are doing, and as long as the present indeed holds some opportunity more important than the task we delay. But," he continues, "very often our decision to delay is less a free choice than a semiconscious mechanism – a conspiracy between our reasoning awareness and our native dislike for pain. The result of this conspiracy is a disconcerting contradiction of will; for when we delay something we simultaneously admit its necessity and refuse to do it. (Grudin, 1982, p.101)

Incredibly, those are the very words and the reasoning that, had I been able to at the time of the incident, would have tried to say myself!

But, offering grounding wisdom, allowing me to move away from the scene are the words of Seng-t'san (1995/d. 606);

Pursue not the outer entanglements,
Dwell not in the inner Void;
Be serene in the oneness of things,
And dualism vanishes by itself.



That experience provoked intensely wide sweeping feelings of constriction and a confronting acceptance that continuation of one's life is definitely not certain. Memory of that encounter is held within, allowing me to bring an intense identification with survival and the sanctity of life to the classroom. Recognising, understanding and responding to students from situations that have precipitated trauma and profound shock was a process of ongoing awareness, for as I repeatedly reminded myself, no one person reacts to trauma in the same way and emerging from life threatening situations can be a long journey. As Ranci re advises me,

To emancipate someone else, one must be emancipated oneself. One must know oneself to be a voyager of the mind, similar to all other voyages: an intellectual subject participating in the power common to intellectual beings. (Ranci re, 1991, p. 33)



One sided conversation

... the so-called essences or eidetic structures of intentional objects are ultimately those of language. (van Manen, 2006, p. 716)

Involving much less stress, my most memorable use of gesture and body language, in a more delightful cameo, was when in a village on the border between Tibet and Yunnan. Over several days, in various villages and localities, I had admired the traditional, brightly striped aprons that the local women were wearing, so when our botanical group stopped in a market village I quickly located a store that sold them. Then, proudly wearing my new garment, I crossed the cobbled road to a store that sold beautiful scarves. On emerging with more purchases, I was met by a small, ever growing, group of women that I had already become very much conscious of. They had been congregating below the steps outside the

store, chattering and peering in – with a focus on me! On descending the steps I was immediately surrounded by the women who, through speech, that was unintelligible to me, and through body language, “informed” me that with just one apron on I was actually considered to be half dressed! With much gestural arm waving behind my body, they indicated, with sincere, womanly concern, that I should have an apron at the back, just like those they were wearing, to be correctly attired. Then, pointing out a business a little further down the street, I was cheerfully escorted there, amidst much cheerful chattering, by way of linked arms. But, much to the consternation of the women, the store was closed. Beautiful wooden shutters firmly screened the store front. After much anxious discussion amongst the ever increasing crowd of women, they conveyed the understanding that we should go in the direction of the high walled market, which they pointed out further along the road. Momentarily terrified, I called to another member of our expedition as I was gently escorted away, that if not back in ten minutes someone might need to come to look for me. Down the road and through the market I was bundled by an ever increasing procession of cheery women. Through the doorway of the open market, past the heaped market stalls we streamed, to a seamstress who operated her business in a tiny room that was set, almost inconspicuously, into the whitewashed market-place wall. Here, with women circled in the tiny shop space, more peering one above the other through the small, open window and yet more absolutely jamming the doorway, my new, offending apron was whipped from me! Then, with many hands and much discussion I was dressed in a traditional, thick, green woollen tunic and a traditional dark blue apron for my rear – the lack of which had been the cause of my predicament. My own, newly acquired, striped apron was then replaced at my front. All of this over my black trousers, white shirt and dirty walking boots! With the seamstress – a Tibetan replica of our family’s dear Grandma Lew, whom I felt I could trust implicitly – continuing to direct proceedings, a beautiful, hanging, heavy silver collar was draped over my shoulders and a single strand of

enormous turquoise and coral beads, retrieved from the dark depths at the rear of the tiny shop, was placed around my neck. There was then a long, silent pause as all surveyed their efforts of redressing their visitor. Suddenly, giving further instructions and pointing, the seamstress ordered the opening of a dusty box that was near my feet, under a wooden workbench. Placed on the bench beside me and on being opened, an incredibly beautiful headdress was revealed. Carefully removed from its box and, as if a crown, with several pairs of hands the fragile looking toque was gently placed on my head. Reminding me of a much enlarged basket fungus (*Ileodictum cibarium*), with each interlocking filament of the polygons having been tightly bound with brightly shining coloured silk thread, the headdress was exquisite. Its colours simply sang and glowed in the dusty, dim light of the little workshop.

Just as a shard of mirror was being placed in my hands for me to survey myself in all of the finery, through the cheerfully chattering, peering throng of women appeared our group leader with camera in hand, telling me that it was time we were on the road again. But, the women “insisted”, through language and gesture that his camera must be used to take photos of us both. Entering into the situation with good humour he responded most obligingly. Then, trying to make up my mind what to purchase in the hurry to return to our group was difficult. I knew that with more rough travel ahead I could not take the headdress home without great risk of damage and, much as I loved the heavy silver collar and the magnificent necklace, they were just too beautiful for me to own. Paying for the tunic and the back apron and still wearing my purchases, after thanking the seamstress and bidding all of my cheerful helpers and audience farewell, the group leader and I strode off to rejoin our group.

But there was more to the story. With longer legs the group leader strode on and disappeared through the market crowd ahead of me, whilst I, with two new, firmly wrapped aprons, front and back, struggled as if walking with a very tight, long skirt. Failing to keep apace I slowed with

shorter steps and was soon left far behind. Now on my own, totally out of my comfort zone, I was then clapped by all of the market folk and villagers as I wended my way back through the busy market compound and up the busy street, through the market day throng.

What an extraordinary situation. Through body language and gesture I had experienced something so wondrous but in addition had received attention that I had not been looking for! Although I smiled and waved through the clapping, I felt such a fraud. Through being my authentic self, my unintentional jump into presumptuousness by wearing the traditional clothes of the local people, left me feeling rather disrespectful. There was just no way that I could tell the villagers that I was only me and not someone special.



A concept that this cameo portrays so well is the one-sided “conversation” that the women engaged in with me as they took me into their culture. In the transcultural encounter I did not understand a single word and yet they all chattered away and included me and, despite an initial pang of fear, I felt at home. It was as if our mutual trust and respect for each other was in deep accord but how it evolved is a mystery to me. The women treated me as if I was one of them, as if I could clearly understand everything they said. Similarly, in a complete role reversal, within the classroom, it was I who chattered and taught the students. Engaging them and including them as if they understood everything, offering rich communication possibilities in our encounters. It was body language, and the elusiveness of emotion and mutual trust that provided underlying understanding, an important aspect in communication at all levels of difference and language proficiency, for

... ethical relations may rest in the teacher's own capacity to be receptive to the discourse of the face, to hear and listen for the meanings that the students work out for themselves. (Todd, 2003b, p. 31)



Ulyssian horizons

... one of the things we can't do, if we are to define ourselves significantly, is suppress or deny the horizons against which things take on significance for us. (Taylor, 1991, p.37)

In the final cameo portrayals for this section I wish to explore the notion of "horizon". Gadamer (2004) notes horizon as a metaphorical boundary that gives distanciation from a text or subject that is to be confronted in the hermeneutic engagement. And, derived from Husserl's concept of horizon, Gadamer describes the concept as being "the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point" (1975, p. 245), denoting that wherever we stand at any given point in time we all have varying perspectives and different horizons. For me the notion requires some exploration from a personal perspective before bringing the concept to the cameo texts in the following book. Thus, in exploring the notion of "horizon" and personal connotations by way of narrative I attempt to find my own meaningful understanding through lived experience.

As a very young child, the not too distant hills staged a scary horizon where imaginary wolves and unidentified beasties lurked in shadowy clumps of blackness. The distinctive Sugar Loaf hill towered, pock-scarred with old Maori defence ditches, the last visible clues as to where wooden, defence palisading structures would have stood as

strategic outpost fortification for the nearby pa. And, a stretch of jumbled, rounded, loping hills provided an horizon boundary that in one direction limited my perspective on the world. Later in childhood, climbing to the top of those hills there were new distant horizons in all directions. Out across the flat plain to Te Mata and the Havelock hills, north to the snow drizzled Kawekas. Out across the big bay to the arcing, golden cliffs of Cape Kidnappers and west to the spine of the Ruahine Ranges – all countryside that Ashton-Warner would have known of during her childhood time at Te Pohue – 1914 (Hood, 1988) and her years at Fernhill Maori School – 1951-1956 (Ibid).

Then my horizons broadened when tramping, skiing, climbing and travelling took me to new places. New horizons became firmly etched in my memory. The silhouette of an Hawai'ian island at sunset when, also on the wide, westerly, golden, watery horizon, a green flash of light put the sun to rest for the day as it disappeared under the sea. Expansive stretches of blue, glacial ice-cliffs at Svaalbard where an echoing, gun-shot like crack denoted the glacier calving into the sea. The majestic, toothed mightiness of icy Himalayan mountains. The extraordinary feeling when in a yacht off the south-west corner of Tasmania – where, on a relatively calm day, the mighty swells of the Indian Ocean and the Southern Ocean, crossing far rumpled horizons, their paths converged in discordant syncopation. With varying heights and ever changing time signatures, the powerful, jostling, impatiently turn-taking swells instilled a feeling of an intimate engagement with the momentum of a gargantuan, uncontrollable mobius (J. Polkinghorne, 1987, p. 95) of untameable liquid. It was as if being on the edge of the infolding horizon of a watery conveyer belt as it roller-coasted into unknown, unexplored depths.

Perhaps though, my most memorable horizon cameo depicts a forty foot yacht, with a small, heavy-duty, orange storm-sail hoisted and reefed pleats in the main-sail to pull it down to a much smaller triangular shape. She was “running” out to sea with the force of a storm. Off the Australian

Continental Shelf there was no land in sight – a circular horizon was claimed in all directions by wildly, heaving, confused water. The gigantic waves provided a tough, tiring challenge for the skipper to helm the yacht as she repeatedly sloughed off the angry, towering, grey-green waves into chasmous troughs, to then be picked up again and be surfed on a crest, then cast into yet another trough. Clad in wet weather clothing, with harness life-jackets on and tethered safely, as if dogs on leashes, the crew required on deck for the watch sheltered, sodden, in the cockpit, automatically ducking as great, green waves cast their contents over us. It was wild sailing in wild weather and as the storm just would not abate we continued to ride with the winds out into the Tasman Sea. It was far too dangerous to tack towards land. An occasional albatross, effortlessly, disinterestedly, gliding and skimming the waves would circle nearby then disappear beyond the foreshortened horizon. As the day wore on the wind began to weaken but the waves, yet to lose their momentum, continued to tower. Giving some relief to the seascape an occasional break in the skidding storm-clouds would allow a thin slice of sunlight to briefly spotlight the angrily stirred water.

It was late in the afternoon, through our isolation amongst the watery, shadowed mountains, that I suddenly noticed the presence of tiny, fluttering signs of life. In the midst of our isolation we had company. After a day of incredible violence, here were signs of contrasting otherness. Perfectly at home, as if children of the waves, tiny prion birds, unconcernedly, almost confidently defiant in the relative shelter of the ever-shifting, quarry-like troughs, hovered and pecked at the sheer walls of the raging waves. Their carefree, unconcerned ease as they fed and fluttered as humming-birds of the sea seemed so incongruously unreal in the midst of the stormy chaos. But for me, exhausted, physically, mentally and emotionally, after a day of extreme conditions, their presence and aliveness was like the enveloping, joyous, nearness of a loved one – a presence that words cannot express but is sung from within. With menacing, jagged waves as a 360° horizon encompassing us, an

“inescapable horizon...” (Taylor, 1991, p.31) over which we had no control and, for the moment, no escape, the presence of those tiny harbingers of greater calmness transformed the day into one of peace and contentment.



Through that brief exploration of “horizon” I can now see that my interpretation of the metaphor has become like that of tumbling, tossing waves, that of an uncount noun. Like the messiness of spilled sugar or paint, it is a noun-thing but it is a “place”, sometimes near, sometimes far, that belongs to me, belongs to us all, individually, alone. That understanding now allows me to more fully understand underlying “horizons” in the classroom encounters and cameos that are related in the next book. It is interesting, however, that Gadamer gives me permission to seek greater vision when he states, “to have a horizon means not being limited to what is nearby but being able to see beyond” (1975, p. 302). But what did he really mean by that? I wish I could ask, but Knotts assists in understanding when stating,

One’s horizon provides one with an initial point from which to view reality. Though it represents the limits of one’s understanding and one’s knowledge, it is, nonetheless, not completely fixed, but rather fluid. We move within our horizons, but we also move in such a way, that our horizons are shaped and moved themselves. (Knotts, 2014, p.236)

Weinsheimer (1985), further explicates, “to acquire a horizon means that we acquire a far-sightedness which, though limited, is not merely myopic” (Weinsheimer, in Knotts, 2014, p. 236) and continues by indicating that our horizons influence our approach to reality and “orientation” (ibid), adding that,

they are also influenced by our spatial and temporal situations and not just by the role these play in the formation of our hermeneutical frameworks [and] are in a constant state of flux ... [being] constantly assailed and challenged, whether by the alterity of the past or the alterity of other contemporaneous horizons. (ibid, p.237)

This understanding now allows me to more readily confront and negotiate not only my own prejudices, assumptions, values and beliefs, but also those of others as they come to inner or outer presence. Having formulated that understanding a cameo from the more distant past was conjured into focus – a notion of horizons that emplaced me resoundingly in the world of encountering otherness.



From my New Zealand childhood I recall an occasion that clearly showed the demarcations of three distinct reactions to beliefs, prejudice, cultural difference and the role of horizons (Gadamer, 1975; Knotts, 2014). In the local village one day in the 1950's, standing behind my mother, I was on the periphery of a small group of pakeha (white) women from our rural locality. A newly arrived immigrant woman, dressed well above the conventional, Post World War II, local village norm with a neatly pressed, white linen and lace handkerchief ostentatiously peeking from her smart leather handbag, was holding sway regarding her thoughts of our Maori population. So inwardly incensed by her attitude and denigrating words, the like of which I had not heard before, but biting my tongue hard, I wanted to loudly decry her blatant, racist oration and could not understand the passive, non-defensive stance assumed by the circle of listening women. Then, extraordinarily, politely allowing the woman to finish, without a sign of complicity or emotional reaction that I could detect, to a one, all of the local women assumed and maintained a wall of

cold silence. As if neither listening nor aware of the oration but being occupied with thoughts elsewhere, each mutely stared into space above the head of the woman opposite. The strength of this “attitude”, as a result, alienated the newcomer to such an extent that she was compelled to remove herself from the group, ducking as she left as if excusing herself. I remember then shifting the strength of my inwardly held shock and anger onto the group of pakeha women, for they had made no attempt to defend our Maori people – classmates, friends, and families that came to gather puwha (sowthistle) for hangi food that was growing under the fruit trees in our orchard. Although the incredibly passive power contained in the women’s attitude and their chilly silence (Hay, 1998, p. 115; Zembylas & Michaelides, 2004) was clearly influential, it took me several years to realise the tact and accuracy of the manner in which their message had been imparted. As Hay claims,

Like all significant ... concepts of Kierkegaard’s philosophy, silence is ultimately paradoxical: the moment of concealment is at the same time the moment of profound disclosure ... The action of the silent individual is a form of communication that surpasses the language of description. (Hay, 1998, p.117)

Mindful of that statement I wonder if the women’s behaviour was a security tactic instilled in civilians during the years of World War II or was it perhaps a deliberate, generational pakeha snub to the new arrival who was perceived as having disrespectful, outspoken ideas? Whatever the origin of the behaviour Lederach informs me,

Relational spaces and the patterns of how things are connected create continuous opportunities for addressing obstacles in new ways when finding solutions directly to those same problems appear as dead ends. (Lederach, 2005, p. 120)



Linkages

Is there room for a conception, an elaboration, which gives the conceptual and the experiential their due, which is not reductionist, but draws them both on to an expanding track, enriching them while critiquing them by one another? (Lefebvre, 2005, p.34 in Middleton et al, 2011, p.85)

From lived experience, the cameos narrated, those further explored, and the so many not included, all have provided me with the diverse background that composed the teacher otherness that I brought to the classroom. Observation, patience and allowing life just “be” were attributes I aspired to bring from my life, learning and training to the pedagogical part of my self. Being open and with freedom of spirit, searching for meaning meant that working within frameworks was an anathema. I cherished my work and the very lived sense of ‘being with’ a diversity of humankind.

As Linnaeus, Charles Darwin (Smith, 2010), Kropotkin had all found in their understandings, underlying differences emerged that belied conformity of standardised thinking. Having this understanding from the scientific side of my life and applying it to working within a caring, learning environment meant that in thinking and practice my work moved between and around theoretical models to support the multifarious differences that emerged. Just as heaping mice into a shoe box to contain them means that they will not be contained for long, so too working within frameworks and theories invited not only the breaking apart of rigidity but also the exploration of new parameters. Working relatively comfortably, exploratively, with the thinking of Aristotle, Montessori, Ashton–Warner, Freire, Buber, Lederach and so many others, my own approach to my teaching practice, and research has been a constantly evolving process (Maxwell, 1996).

Just like the one pair of shoes that all children in the family wore in turn, so too in life, no one size fits all (Palmer, 1998, p.16) for students, others and self, and, change is inevitable. But, importantly, through the uncertainty of the ongoing future, finding a fulfilling life is finding a balanced life, as Placido Domingo commented,

Childhood and adulthood, the worlds of fantasy and reality, of play and work are interrelated, and the fulfilled and adjusted person will keep in touch with aspects of both throughout life. (Domingo, 1986, p.37)

It is with this understanding that I work with my students.



Change

Change processes create a different horizon ... (Lederach, 2005, p.97)

Although denied or resisted through fear of change or fear of the truth (Bailey, 2001) change is inescapable. In confirmation Roth and Tobin (2002) claim, “structures are not fixed because an activity system and all its parts are dynamic.” Therefore one can acknowledge the inevitability that changing climate and physical environments will be synonymous with changing lives that will lead to evolving social environments.

In our daily lives, in the world, in the classroom, it is as if in a “mirror of reflection ... [w]e look at ourselves in and through the eyes of others” (Grøn, 2003, p. 92).



Book 2 Pictures from an Exhibition - New Pedagogical Axes



...knowing my students and my subject depends heavily on self-knowledge. When I do not know myself, I cannot know who my students are. I will see them through a glass darkly, in the shadows of my unexamined life – and when I cannot see them clearly, I cannot teach them well. When I do not know myself, I cannot know my subject – not at the deepest levels of embodied, personal meaning. (Palmer, 1998, p.2)



Chapter VI - Challenges Amidst Diversity



Exchanging ways of being

In a situation within which we as strangers meet, each with his own culturally conditioned horizon, how can we [begin] ... to make sense common to us? And in our reaching out for each other through gesture, silence and talk, how can we become aware of our reachings, knowing fully that our reachings never fully reach? (Aoki, in Pinar, 2011, p. 29)

Ever searching for what it is that is in me that I brought to the teacher role, the following section of the inquiry explores my observations, reactions, self-dialogue and, sometimes tentative, understandings over the duration, and beyond, working with the varied, ever-changing class cohorts of adult former refugee Preliminary level students. All had brought our own traditions and culture to our community of learning in our pedagogical landscape.



An invitation - Please come to meet my students in our classroom. Immediately you will be enveloped by their truly generous warmth of personalities, a warmth that permeates our allocated learning space. In meeting them I trust that you too will become part of the spirit of camaraderie in the cameos I now relate.

Loss and renewal

Finding a new identity means giving up an old identity, and quite often there is no way back ... (Biesta, 2006, p. 22)

There is a long history of teaching English as a second or other language to adults but that history was long based on students who had previously been immersed in a culture of education and had been literate in their own mother tongue. The group of students that accompanied me in this section of my inquiry had little or no knowledge of a culture of education and almost all were not literate in the language of their own culture. As adult former refugees, the students in their learning also accompanied me in the search to find pedagogical strategies more finely attuned to their learning needs. As a class we learned together.

Almost a decade ago, when initiating this enquiry, most students began class soon after emerging from refugee camps on mainland Australia or on various offshore islands. In contrast, as the study drew to a close, with United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) documents and visas in order, students-to-be were flying into Australia from overseas, and many, within a few days of leaving their place of departure had, amongst their many resettlement issues to be attended to, enrolled for English classes.

At any one time there were students from at least four to six, sometimes more, nationalities in the classroom, most speaking two, sometimes five or more, languages or dialects; usually their own mother-tongue and local languages and dialects as well as the languages of the host countries where they had sought refuge. Although less common in the latter part of the study, some students had been “boat people” having journeyed by sea to seek asylum in Australia. Others came as refugees from “hot spots” of the world through formal channels as sanctioned by the United Nations and international agreements. Frequently being of a

different culture or religious faith to the dominant power in their country of origin, many had spent time, sometimes more than two decades, in refugee camps based in countries or spaces, usually neighbouring their homeland, to which they had fled. So many had witnessed war atrocities, genocide, extreme violence and been subject to oppression and crimes against humanity including torture, trauma, religious persecution and forced displacement. Many had lost family and loved ones, and the lands and way of life that had been part of their family existence for many generations. Indeed, the word “lost” in our classroom applied to so many concepts ranging from lost pencil in the classroom; lost glasses, wallet or student card on the bus, or lost children and other family members as in unlocated in the world or lost forever. “Lost”, synonymous with “gone”, were the two words in which I sensed powerfully interwoven webs of emotion that lived with the students in their daily lives. When uttered, usually with a casual flip of the hands and an aversion of gaze, there would always be a silent pause, a mutual pause, and in that moment I always thought of what emotions and grief had not been uttered aloud and continued to be carried within. Annie Rogers, in her statement “only what is absent from its place can be symbolised” (2006, p.109), alludes to the issue. But reminding me of the emotional depth of the dilemma, Ruth Wajnryb claims,

by not naming it ...[it] is ... giving it more power. You're not exorcising it so it goes inside and gets stronger, goes into hiding, depletes you ... because a lot of energy goes into camouflaging. (Wajnryb, 2001, p.107)

Although having been subject to and having witnessed behaviours of violence, without a common language, my students were unable to tell me their stories or histories even if they had wished to disclose to me. It was very rarely that I learned something of their lives directly from them and equally rarely did I learn parts of stories from other family members or others of their culture or nationality – so many from their own communities having been through similar life experiences (Berry, 2005).

As teacher I was emplaced in the interstice, the interface (Praglin, 2006) of each of my student's past and their hopes and expectations for the future. Thus, with little knowledge and understanding of their past lives and even less about their futures my teaching, ever wary of unintentional "transcendental" (Derrida, 1978) and "ontological" (Todd, 2001) violence, of circumstance, was strongly present focussed with undefined, speculative, empathic hopes as a backdrop for their onward journeys in life. For, as Buber reminds me,

An animal's actions are concerned with its future and the future of its young, ... only man imagines the future ... (Buber, 1999, p. 6)

On very rare occasions a student joined the class as an international visitor on a travel visa, as a migrant spouse arrival, or as a migrant with a work entry permit or other type of visa. Over the study period such students would have numbered less than twenty. Most, although non-English speakers, were literate in their own language and having had previous experience in a culture of education generally accommodated the English language and quickly progressed to another level.



Following the initial intake International Second Language Proficiency Rating (ISLPR) (Ingram & Wylie, 2012) assessment and five – later ten weeks – in a Settlement class where they were introduced to hospital, banking, legal and other community systems, the students were then allocated to the class appropriate to their English ability. This was when students at the Preliminary (Pre) level were placed in our class. By that time, following health screening, most resettlement issues, perhaps taking some time for resolution, would have been addressed although dental, sight and hearing problems and other long-term health and mental health

issues could take much longer to be resolved. Housing, schools for children, childcare and children's health issues, bank arrangements and the government Centrelink agency, all aspects of settlement, also took time, often class time, to be put in order. Weeks and sometimes months after intake there may have continued to be issues that required attention and time taken from the school week. Taking time off class to attend children's school meetings and staying home to care for children that were ill were other common reasons for non-attendance.

Being the teacher of students who could not readily inform me of their concerns, I was very conscious of the period about six months after arrival. Although major settlement and presenting health issues may have been addressed, there was a marked period when suddenly new, or perhaps historical issues emerged. It was as if adrenalin had been the energiser and suddenly the resilience and coping strategies it had previously supported was finally depleted. So often, almost exactly six months after arrival, I would note marked changes in focus, health, energy and behaviour. After the settlement program (SPP) class was extended from five to ten weeks, the change in the students I looked for was more difficult to detect for, with less class time to get to "know" each student as an individual, it was more difficult to monitor the change and provide understanding support.

With the stress of past experiences and migration, the change of status of family members – including children quickly gaining command of the English language – often interpreting for parents and just sometimes older children managing family finances, brought new pressures on family dynamics. With the previous breadwinner in the family now no longer in employment, and the legal status and rights of women in our community – often as recipients of the Family Tax Benefit – perhaps creating contention, the possibility of family violence was, on occasion, a concern (Zannetinno et al, 2013).



Generational Teacher

[We]...are partners in an ancient human dance, ... [a] dance of spiralling generations, in which the old empower the young with their experience and the young empower the old with new life, reweaving the fabric of the community as ... [we] touch and turn. (Palmer, 1998, p. 25)

We are all in transitions – transitions from toddlerhood to childhood, adulthood to old age, from one culture to another, from one stage of individuation to another. Change is inevitable and greatly affects our lives. As we change we take our lived experiences and lived culture with us. And as we change we constantly confront prisms that reflect ourselves – we constantly confront our selves, not only through our own lenses of self-reflection but also through the prevailing values, beliefs and social norms in which we live – through the eyes of others.

The concept of being a generational teacher has dominated my thinking throughout my teaching career, a concept being particularly reinforced when teaching my own next generation in the Home School years and given broader meaning when working with my former refugee adult students.

Perhaps the concept of being generational became of greater significance and meaning as I moved into the elder generation of my own family, a time that coincided relatively with the years of this study (Bollnow, n.d.b, p. 14). I consider this transition in my own life also had ramifications in my work with students and others in my own community. Moving from the middle generation of my family to the older generation definitely gave me a new perspective on life, a perspective that entailed new ways of thinking and looking at existence, mortality even, and also the acknowledgement of new aspects of my own being and personal journey, especially in relation to my family and those around me.

Teaching at the Pre level, encompassing an adult student cohort ranging between late adolescence and some into their 70s, meant that I was working with students representing a broad range of the human life cycle. Thus, in the class cohort I was frequently relating to late adolescent exuberance, the issues of old age and all types of human and family issues, behaviour and emotions in between. In fact, sometimes I was the oldest person in the class but all of us, in sharing our learning found by

... living in the world, we live[d] with others and for others, orienting our lives to them. (Schutz, 1967, p. 9)

With such diversity I was occasionally confronted with behaviours, emotions, and demands for rights, unfamiliar to my culture and way of life, which, coming from outside my life context sometimes became challenging pedagogical situations and often wonderful moments of life learning. Difference and change was always a constant in the classroom and it is through recollections of some that had impact on me that I disclose in the cameos that follow.



Exchanging ways of being

... the whole point of pedagogy is that it is a way of short-circuiting the slow process of natural discovery and can make arrangements for learning to happen more easily and more efficiently than it does in natural surroundings. That is what schools are for, whatever subject we are dealing with. Pedagogy is bound to be a contrivance: that is precisely its purpose. If what went on in classrooms exactly replicated the conditions of the world outside, there would be no point in pedagogy at all. (Widdowson, 1990, p. 163)

Classroom challenges that confronted me included not only communication difficulties but also a dearth of appropriate teaching material, gender issues, health and disability issues and the, always ongoing, negotiation of cultural expectations and difference. Endeavouring to bring a program of learning to an ever changing group of adult students from diverse cultural backgrounds, who were also in the process of resolving their very own personal challenges, resulted in a complex pedagogical experience. In the negotiation of widely varying expectations from students, organisation and self, the teaching journey, at times seemed totally encompassing, requiring more energy, commitment and stamina than I would ever have previously thought necessary in teaching.

As learner, encompassed in the teacher role, engaging with others from varied cultural backgrounds, all bringing such varied lived experience and personal expectations, proved to be a transformational and frequently, a very humbling experience. As teacher I was privileged to share my workplace environment and share pedagogical pathways with very special others. In the role of researcher, the unravelling complexity and pace of the journey was, at times, almost impossible to keep pace with. It was as if a complex narrative, whereby scenarios and scenes evolved into plots within plots as traditional, colonial, post-colonial, modern and postmodern epochs and ideals, derived from us all, became

juxtaposed and diffused. It was a complexity of which Kearney, explicating Aristotle writes,

... human existence is a life of 'action' and that action is always conducted in view of some end – even if that end is itself. In other words, as human agents we are always prefiguring our world in terms of an inter-active life with others. (Kearney, 2002, p. 129)

Confronting and working with diverse ways of interaction, negotiating new ideals, new expectations, indeed, new ways of “being” was a daily exercise for us all – both students and teacher. In bringing generations of histories from diverse cultures to a learning environment, adult students and the teacher straddled incredibly varied past lives and futures unknown. Thus, the pedagogical learning environment became the platform for the ongoing present, the “here and now” for interaction and learning; a staging post where long held belief systems, especially of politics, religion, gender, culture and social values, were sometimes challenged.



The majority of the student population referred to in this narrative, originating from various countries or communities in crisis, had usually spent considerable time in refugee camps with the turmoil and experiences in their past, perhaps having suffered physical and psychological hurt as a result of their very lived experiences (Olf, Armour, Brewin et al, 2015). Finding themselves immersed in our classroom, a multicultural learning environment, must surely have been an additional form of culture-shock over and above their past and resettlement stress. To become immured in a classroom in a new country with new cultural expectations must have provoked bewildering confusion. Indeed, the word

“confused” quickly became part of their English vocabulary and was so often a word that students communicated voluntarily when seeking help with official papers or in understanding directions.

With such backgrounds, as the students settled to new class routines and cultural interaction, just occasionally behaviours associated with past experiences or perhaps strongly held views emerged (Berry, 1989, p. 2), sometimes becoming increasingly foreground issues that required support and understanding to allow for assimilation. Each change in the class population offered new opportunities for promoting mutual acceptance, resulting in special layers of trust, fellowship, friendship and respectful empathy that permeated the classroom.



Classroom setting

... only through dialogue among people with the relevant identities can one achieve mutual understanding of their struggles and aspirations.
(Malhotre, 2006, p. 82)

Lacking a common language, communication between students and teacher, strongly based on body language, very basic vocabulary, and signs, symbols and realia, was not only the basis for pedagogical interaction but was also sometimes the cause of frustration and imperfect understanding. The lack of a common language frequently also became the catalyst for delightful moments of “I-Thou” (Buber, 1970) dialogue and understanding and sometimes it was that I had no understanding at all.

During my first years of teaching at the Preliminary level, incoming students were mostly from areas where many had walked or travelled great distances attempting to find safety, some having walked and

travelled back and forth across their own country, across several borders and, sometimes by hazardous boat journeys. Their travelling usually having then been followed by varying lengths of time in refugee camps and detainment settlements.

When arriving in class, following a camp detainment, many were physically, emotionally and psychologically drained. Being a teacher new to this work I did not immediately fully recognise their state until this was pointed out to me by two drama teachers.



When our class was temporarily relocated to another school block, without my usual resources I planned to engage the students with the Aboriginal dreamtime legend of Tiddalik the thirsty frog, developing the story into a puppet play. Granted permission, we used the art room of the neighbouring secondary college to make the scenery and large, articulated puppets. In addition, we were also able to use the college's theatrette to perform our play for the rest of our school. The college's drama teachers came to watch the rehearsal and were delighted with our work but afterwards, taking me aside, asked if they had guessed correctly, that all of the students were refugees. It was then that they pointed out the composure of the students. With feelings of overwhelming humility, only when I looked at photographs of the class, taken the following day, the day of our performance, could I concede how perceptive those drama teachers had been. It was like having a door thrown open to reveal a shaft of blinding light, as if my blinkered horizons had suddenly been given greater distance. I could not believe that I had not seen the portrayal of engulfing human lost-ness before. Although much more aware following that wake-up, I was always conscious that, from my place of "between" (Lindseth, 2014, p. 15) awareness, it did not mean I could easily or

accurately “read” what students might be living with and were wearing on the inside.



Classroom environment

Any ‘social existence’ aspiring or claiming to be ‘real’, but failing to produce its own space, would be a strange entity, a very peculiar kind of abstraction unable to escape from the ideological or even the ‘cultural’ realm. (Lefebvre, 2007, p. 53)

Early in my work with Pre students there was very little suitable material available for adult learners of English and nor was there finance available for purchasing suitable resources. To build up a useful range of suitable classroom resources and realia I resorted to the town opportunity-thrift shops. Every few weeks I would visit all of the shops searching for books or games, looking for anything useful – with the exception of bunnies, fairies and teddy-bears – although I did keep a teddy-bear in the classroom for a period when there were many young mothers in the class, sometimes one wanting to know what a “teddy” was. The opportunity-thrift shop volunteer-shopkeepers were wonderful. Understanding my needs, many would see me come in the door and call me over. From under the shop-counter they would retrieve goodies that they had considered suitable for my classroom. “This came in last week. Is this any use?” they would ask. I continued to use many of those finds over a decade later and continued to wing grateful thanks to those supportive treasure hunters. I was so desperate for learning props that when beginning to teach my first Pre class I even used cast-off alphabet curtains from a child’s bedroom!

Over time the supportive material and realia (Buchanan, 2008) burgeoned and the students soon learnt that our class “belonged” to them and that they had the right to use it for their own study. They did not have to ask permission to explore and use the material. Gradually they got to know where books and items were located so that when they were “talking” to me or others, they knew exactly where to locate a picture or prop to help them in their “discussion”. Illustrating this so clearly, one day a student was telling me what he had growing in his home vegetable garden. Naming the vegetables I understood perfectly until he named a vegetable in his own language. After several guesses, seeing my lack of understanding he immediately walked in the direction where our basket of artificial vegetables was usually located. Realising the basket had been used by someone else and had not been put back in its usual place he began a circuit of the classroom. Locating the basket he returned to complete his conversation with the large, *papier-maché* cabbage held aloft triumphantly! With complete understanding our “conversation” continued.

Before class or after a lunch break I frequently found students with family members or friends chatting, sharing books or weighing each other with the class bathroom scales. For me the learning environment, like a landscape, must be open to the explorer. Ours had to be a place that meant “home”. The concept of “home” also extending to the paying of a “tax of care and goodwill” (Montessori, 1912, p. 59), by which the students were expected to keep our “home” safe and in good order.

From a safety, emergency evacuation perspective, chairs always had to be pushed in when not in use. Once I had explained, through drama and dialogue, the importance of this request it was readily understood and the issue became a situation where everybody gently reminded everybody else.

With painting, gluing, indoor garden work and other messy activities, we used protective plastic sheets on the floor and tables and any messiness that overflowed was soon wiped up. Our cleaner was always

grateful, almost in disbelief, as to how well we kept our room despite the great range of activities that we indulged in. To help us, she always kept us well supplied with cleaning fluid and paper towels. Of paramount importance, our classroom “live[d]”. It had a “soul” (Montessori, 2012, p. 68), a characteristic that heightened the comforting presence of our learning space and supported us all whenever we hit a challenging patch in our learning together.

Our classroom was not the usual formal learning environment of an adult classroom. Primarily it was a place for learning English, but it was also a workshop base from which to interact with each other and the wider community. It was a place with opportunities to foster self-learning and gain new understandings of self and being, for

experience has its proper fulfilment not in definitive knowledge but in the openness to experience that is made possible by experience itself. (Gadamer, 2004, p. 350)

It was a shared space where it was possible for the students to gain a vantage point from which to observe, perhaps to find trust (Hynes, 2003) and become involved in the culture of the country that had become “home” whilst also providing opportunities to share some aspects of the culture and traditional life of their homelands. Entering the classroom the vibrancy of personalities and colour from clothing, class materials and artwork was exhilarating.



Placating panic - vestiges from the past

There is no general rule how to respond to the Other's ethical demand. There is no recipe as to how to behave because you probably will have to behave differently from case to case. (Lindseth, 2014, p. 12)

Our first classroom was in an old, heritage listed building for which repairs and modifications were planned and for which workmen had been preparing. As a class we had observed the safety fencing being installed and we had "read" the safety signs and understood what was in progress. BUT, the very first morning the workmen began the deconstruction-reconstruction process, we had barely started class work when, without warning and at very close range, the sound of a jack-hammer began an ear battering, body trembling, floor juddering, machine-gun like rat-a-tat-tat. Instantaneously one student rocketed upwards from her chair, to then stand transfixed, bolt-upright, rigidly paralysed with fear and with wide, panicked eyes totally focussed on the door. Automatically, involuntarily she uttered as half statement and half question the name of the feared military group from the region that she came from. And, in those few seconds, most of the other students, having scraped their chairs back, were also standing, rigidly petrified. The few not standing were lowered into their chairs, as if pushed down with the weight of impending dread, hunkered in a similar position as an athlete readying for the start of a long distance race.

All of the students were as if poised for flight. The atmosphere was on edge. If just one student had flown then I'm sure all of the others would have followed. Having relatively recently left situations of extreme violence, many would have still been "running" in their inner being and it would have taken very little for the oneness to have become a mass exodus. But as their mutual chill of fear engulfed the classroom, it stirred me from instinctive, momentary, vigilant inaction.

Quickly trying to quell the fear and the smell of panic permeating the room, I clapped my hands up high to call for attention – not that I seemed to get it. Then, with both hands at shoulder height giving a gentle, but demonstrative pulsing “stop” sign I called out in a sing-song voice ‘Stop, stop - Stop, stop’. As I moved across the classroom to the side of the woman who had been the first to react, I interspersed, “It’s OK - Sitting down now,” to my repeated, “Stop, stop” requests and body language communication. Although seeming like minutes before they responded, amazingly the students heeded my gently, calmly, constantly repeated instructions. One by one, through the juddering clamour they focussed briefly on me, then those that had been standing sat down tentatively and uneasily, seemingly levitated above their chairs, with their eyes firmly focussed on the door. This was the point when it seemed to take so long for them to find some grounding, a point at which if they had not settled I sensed that they would have all jumped to their feet again. But, as they sat down, with immense relief I felt the tension begin to subside. Although still hyper-vigilant, with eyes like search-lights, they scanned around in 360 degree arcs with what appeared to be well-practised, sweeping, penetrating searches. Only then, one by one, did the students fully focus attention on me. Almost immediately, a fortuitous break in the jack-hammering occurred, so indicating with basic vocabulary and body-language that I was “going to stop the noise” – such an imperious claim – I walked out of the classroom with as much deliberately controlled serenity that I could muster. Then, out of the door, out of sight of the students, I raced outside. Explaining to the workmen that I had some rather frightened students in the classroom because their jack-hammering sounded like a guerrilla attack, I asked the men to stop work and added that I would bring the students outside so that they could see for themselves what it was that had so terrified them. Incredibly, wonderfully, without questioning, the workmen understood the urgency of my request. Obliging they stopped work immediately.

Returning quickly to the classroom I asked the students to stand up and bring their bags, explaining that we were going outside to watch the workmen. Then, as if it was an evacuation drill, we went out a side door and looped back to a place where we could see, across the yard, the workmen waiting for us. After a quick explanation to the students as to what the jack-hammer did, during which a few student's heads were ever so slightly nodding, I gave a wave to the workmen and they then proceeded with their work. Observing from a distance the students readily understood the cause of their fear but, back in class, for the rest of that day our work was not undertaken with the usual concentration and enthusiasm. Understandably, it seemed that in responding to the penetrating dread chills of memories past they were all still on edge.

The incident, from start to finish, probably took no longer than fifteen minutes but it seemed like an eternity. It was an incident that particularly challenged me. Was I scared? Being honest, in retrospect, I have to say yes although strangely I did not feel scared at the time. In retrospect I was very scared of the responsibility I had for those adult students. Well aware of my duty-of-care responsibility in a situation which had the potential to quickly move beyond my control, I was scared that I might make a wrong decision or do the wrong thing, precipitating the situation into one of heightened panic. At the time I barely thought about what the students might have been thinking and, besides, there was no time. In staying tuned deeply to and scanning the emotional tension, my focus was on the situation as I perceived it from moment to moment and being prepared to attempt to divert attention or any subsequent panicked behaviour as need be. Although the student's diverse past histories were not for my knowing, they all certainly had the potential to act as one in their reaction to what they assumed to be a threat to personal safety, for as Lindseth advises,

... expressions are full of crucial and important experiences. Even if they might seem odd, they deserve to be recognized and taken seriously.
(Lindseth, 2014, p. 16)

But, what was it that guided my reaction? There are probably several contributing factors. I was acutely aware that a panicked exodus in a direction away from the cacophony could have taken the students onto a busy, arterial road that ran alongside the school building. Being the offspring of a parent who had experienced a devastating earthquake, and, having repeatedly experienced uncountable minor jolts myself, when growing up, I was aware of the overwhelming fear that many have in response to such an uncontrollable force. Earthquake drill, regularly practised at schools in New Zealand, and internalised earthquake safety procedures in the home, provided a basis for, and ensured, a quickly calculated response to the presenting situation as I perceived it. I was also very aware of the power and fear that those with firearms and weapons can instil so, although not having experienced warfare, was able to be “with” my students somewhat in the recognition of their fear within their “unstated” interpretation of the situation. Even having had the experience of being “locked out” by my five year old students on the day of the moon landing, as previously narrated, helped me retain my separateness and not be hooked-in to the fear or assume a reciprocal mimetic modelling of the reaction that my students exhibited. In staying with the spiral of tension on the plane of my own horizon (Gadamer, 1975, p. 373), I attempted to read the “shared intentionality” (Brockmeier, 2009, p. 229) of the students and attempted to modify their projected behaviour. It was as if flying on a magic carpet of *phronesis*, *phronesis* being a notion which, in his interpretation of Aristotle and Heidegger, McNeill explicates, “ ... cannot be taught, but requires experience of life” (McNeill, 1999, p.117). Perhaps being so but it was a notion that was certainly not part of my thinking for it was as if I was on a precarious magic carpet that could have lost momentum at any time. Brockmeier sums up my whirl of environmental introspection by stating that,

from a hermeneutic point of view there is no doubt that we constantly interpret the world we live in, including ourselves and others. We

ponder alternatives, negotiate meanings, and form opinions that we then re-evaluate and revise when it seems appropriate. (Brockmeier, 2009, p. 223)

Could I have responded in a better way? I don't think so. As so often in teaching, there is no guidebook that tells us what to do – one has to take one's own initiative in a state of “wide-awakeness” (Greene, 1978), and react responsibly to what is presented before us, hopefully in the best interests of all. In support of this thinking Langeveld advises,

The realization that we will never be able to construct a form of knowledge which could tell definitively what we are to do in every conceivable circumstance has emerged only late as the defeat of an epistemological illusion in Western consciousness. (Langeveld, 1983, p. 6)

When confronted by such “on the edge” circumstances, whatever course of action taken, it is only in later reflection, when re-grounded and re-searching for possible, alternative, responses that an awareness of a gaping vulnerability to judgement and criticism by others becomes apparent.



Cross cultural exchange

Cultures can ... be conceived as elaborate exchange systems, with media of exchange as varied as respect, goods, loyalty, and services. Exchange systems ... are further legitimised by a complex symbolic apparatus of myths, statutes, precedents, ways of talking and thinking, and even uniforms. (Bruner, 1996, p. 29-30)

Working with adult students of diverse cultures meant that cultural difference continually permeated the classroom environment. The class population was constantly in flux as new students arrived, progressed and moved to a higher class or completed their allocated 510 hours, about 9 months of class time, and moved to another training organisation. Depending on the “hot spots” of the world, as identified by the United Nations, new ethnic or cultural groups would arrive.

Some students might be absent from school for religious festivals or family rituals. Language and food gave identity to cultural difference. Clothing, scarves, hats, jewellery all gave clues to cultural identity. Difference was cause for respect and open acceptance, beginning with greetings to each in their own languages at the beginning of each day. Although remembering greetings in other languages sometimes became a mnemonic challenge it was one that added warmth and camaraderie in the class.

Attending class became an avenue for engaging in the culture of their new home country and a way of seeing life anew. For many, much that had been taken for granted previously was given new or different meanings, often challenging acceptance when becoming part of the new environment. In class, by learning about each other’s culture, sometimes briefly focussing on each other’s language, periodically sharing food, by “discussing” manners, by learning to address people with appropriate greetings and by learning about classroom procedure the students became part of the microcosmic class culture. Building social confidence enabled

them to interact in their new environment. In what Bruner terms an “enabling” culture (1996, p. 77), we explored cultural concepts of sharing, turn taking and thanking others for help. Through my miming the concept of scissors representing an instrument of violence – a concept readily understood – we practised passing scissors correctly with all willingly participating amidst nods and smiles of understanding. We learnt that drumming fingers on the table to gain attention was not acceptable. Although sometimes difficult to put into practice, we learnt about moderating taking offered food and not piling up plates to overflowing at morning tea occasions. We learned about appropriate day and sleep clothing. We learnt about seasons and associated weather changes and the layers of clothing necessary for the temperature fluctuations in Tasmania. We shared “stories” and listened to others with respect. We all learned about accommodating the cultures and beliefs of others. In an atmosphere of reciprocity I endeavoured to inculcate understandings of the dynamics of classroom community tolerance, power (Lenski, 1984; Davis, Kliever & Nicolaides, 2015) and self-learning (Mezirow, 2003). In our own way, interacting as adult citizens of the classroom we were all discovering our ever-changing situatedness in ethical relationships as we negotiated inevitable tensions. Indeed, each one of us was obliged to negotiate and find adjustment for,

[a]s one enters [a] culture more intimately ... a profound sense of difference may emerge. Comparisons become more hazardous and may even seem impossible ... Finally, as one enters the culture still more deeply, it begins to make sense in its own terms. (Kasulis, 2002, p. 10)

There was so much to learn and understand and our journey was not always a smooth one but our classroom became a “home” (Todres & Galvin, 2010).



Reciprocal language learning

... our understanding of the beginning that emanates from the end is never definitive. It is not the last word simply because even the movement of reflection has its place within the context of beginningless and endless tradition. (Gadamer, 2001b, p. 19)

Encouraging students to speak in English, let alone speak in their own language in class was, at times, quite a hurdle, especially when new to the classroom environment. The first pieces of information most students gave me when responding to questions in English were usually in response to, ‘What is your name?’ ‘Where do you come from?’ and ‘What is that in your language?’ Answers to the latter question often being volunteered before being asked once the students knew I was interested in their languages, so that at times, streams of vocabulary were often shared spontaneously. Part of that game was also listening to how the teacher pronounced the words as I wrote their varied vocabularies in phonetic form on the whiteboard and then checked back to make sure that I had understood and had correct pronunciation. We all laughed at my attempts at, what seemed to me to be, “tz”, double rolled “r”s, deep-throated “ch” and other language sounds that clearly evaded my capability. Exploring and sharing vocabulary was an integral part of our interaction, a practice often extending into recognising and clapping syllables of words that caught our attention. For example the word “rainbow” would be clapped with two syllables, but in other languages there might be three or more syllables.



On one occasion when the class was thinking about animals I had put the word and picture of a camel in a vocabulary list. We explored the word for camel from the various language groups present and noted any

similarities. Prompted by this class sharing, one very retiring student called for my attention and quietly volunteered, “Camel.” “Milk.” “Yum-yum.” I was delighted that this student had found the confidence to speak out in class and had found the courage to volunteer this information. From my “querying” it was revealed that she used to milk camels in her homeland. As the majority of the class came from various parts of the world where camels would be well known, I “asked” if others had used camel milk. Sensing a strong undercurrent of disdain in the class-wide shrugs and head shakes made me quickly realise that many of the students at that time were of city origin. Only one, another gentle soul, of different cultural origin to the instigator of the “conversation”, volunteered that she used to herd her family’s camels and had milked the family’s goats and sheep. But no, she had not milked the camels.

In an effort to open the “discussion” further, in an indulgent burst of self-disclosure, I told the students that I used to milk my own goats. For quite some moments there was contemplative silence as they all stared at or almost through me, then, the information being absorbed, I was met with stark looks of incredulity by those that had been city dwellers in their homelands. In contrast, those from rural areas, including those from regions that did not have camels but where they certainly owned goats, were amazed and delighted with this information. Seeking confirmation they asked. “Goat?” “Milk?” “Liz?” With basic vocabulary, body language and stick figures on the board I explained that I used to milk my goats when my children were young – and that I also made goat’s milk cheese. By the almost incredulous reaction it seemed that the concept of their teacher being a goat milker, in Australia, was rather novel and did not quite fit their preconceived ideas of me as the teacher in their class. I wonder, did I challenge stereotypical thinking in my effort to engage the students in dialogue and, in addition, wonder what changes of thinking on identity and culture my disclosure caused? I wonder also, by purposefully opening the “dialogue” to include others, from an ontological and ethical perspective (Clandinin & Murphy, 2009, pp. 598-602), had I released the

camel milker from, what seemed to be, a moment of isolation and an element of scorn? Hopefully the realisation that others, including the teacher, had been goat milkers helped normalise the situation. And, once again I was reminded of Buber's words –

No encounter with a being or a thing in the course of our life lacks a hidden significance... (Buber, 2002b, pp. 38-9)



Clashing educational cultures?

To take a cultural view of education ... requires that one considers education and school learning in their situated, cultural contexts. (Bruner, 1996, p. x)

In a teacher role, the most emotionally confronting incident in the classroom I had ever endured spanned a very short period of chronological time. It involved a new student, who, in retrospective recognition on my part, would have been in the very early weeks of pregnancy. With a shining, caring soul, recognisable unusually early for a new student at Pre level, her personality already glowed in the classroom.



One morning, whilst busily working with a group of students near the back of the classroom, suddenly there was a plaintive gasp from the open door behind me. Whirling in concern, to face the direction from which the noise came, there stood the new student with a look of absolute terror on her face. With wide, fear-filled eyes she focussed on me. Then, as my attention focussed on her and our eyes met, she raised both hands to forehead level,

as if in supplication. Unbelievably to me, she then proceeded to throw herself prostrate onto the floor. Momentarily offended, aghast, indignant, other emotions ricocheted through me as I tried to fathom her intent and the meaning of her behaviour. Why was she doing this? What had I said or done to cause this? What meanings could I find? Not ever having experienced anything like this before it was all quite beyond my comprehension but as she fell to the floor, I immediately stepped towards her, thinking with concern, that maybe she was ill. But, just as I took the first step, still prostrate on the floor, she began to drag herself towards me by her elbows and forearms. Within me even deeper emotions flurried through in the sense of abhorrence, being repelled, disgusted even, but these barely surfacing emotions kept swinging back into ever deeper depths of concern, encompassing the possibility of a major health issue or a mental health incident. My wildly oscillating thoughts and emotions seemed completely at odds and made no sense, but, in absolute confusion, still with underlying concern, I stepped automatically to reach her.

Within a few of my paces we met, the student now stretched motionless and flattened on the floor with her face pressed downward, and I, bending over, concernedly offering both hands asking, with genuinely puzzled concern, “Are you alright?” “Are you OK?” There was a long pause of inaction during which I held myself attentive and still, then, with my support, somehow she staggered to her feet while I held both of her hands within my own to keep her upright. My continually repeated questioning had gone unanswered and my reassurances that she was not to be worried seemed to have had no effect as she again stared steadily at me with wide, terror-stricken eyes. After some silent moments, thankfully, the distraught tension melted from her to be replaced with incredible relief as her body lost its intense rigidity. Suddenly she pulled her hands from mine and immediately I was fearful that she would turn and run away, perhaps in fear or shame. Instead, so unexpectedly, she fell towards me with engulfing arms and claimed a great, childlike hug as silent tears washed down her face.

Maybe in her mind, setting aside the role of me as teacher, I had suddenly been given a “mother” or “grandmother” role. It all seemed so incredibly complex from her perspective as well as my own. How could I have read the situation? How should I have read it? As Bondi and Davidson warn, “Emotions, feelings and affects present us with messy matters to work with; they are tough to ‘see’, hard to ‘hold’, and even trickier to ‘write up’ (Bondi & Davidson, 2011, p. 595). So it was in this cameo. Working across cultures, without clear dialogue, and indecisive understanding, my scrambled mix of emotions and feelings was both “amorphous and [frustratingly] elusive” (ibid).

The student not having a command of English to respond to my questioning and I not having a command of her language, it was only in the moment of stillness when she claimed the hug that I located within my thinking a possible explanation for the incident. Several years previously I had been told by a teacher-helper, who came from roughly the same area of the world as this student, that if late for school, students were made to stand outside the classroom. In addition, not only were they made to stand outside in the hot sun, they were also made to hold a heavy rock or several books above their heads as punishment! It was only in that moment that it occurred to me that I could be interacting with tradition and the pedagogical customs from another culture; perhaps customs of expected student servility and teacher customs of power and control. Was it the fear of such punishment that had prompted this student to react the way she had? What had she experienced that made her behaviour necessary? With my personage quite visibly not placing me in the young teacher bracket, had I conveyed a stern, teacherly countenance that matched the power which had previously demanded the behaviour she had displayed? I sincerely hoped not. Perhaps I will never know what prompted her behaviour but the incident reinforced my awareness of the power and control that a teacher may be perceived to have. That my widely swinging emotions were stirred by this unexplained incident concerned me

intensely, for although being enacted for only a minute or so, the emotional vortex was so invasively powerful.

In this instance the immediacy of response necessitated by the situation gave no time for reflection or time for a carefully calculated reaction, but as with all teachers, on occasion, we have such immediate demands placed on us and it is only in the aftermath that we can literally stand back to critically assess how we responded. Just sometimes it appears that there is nothing to support us when decision making has to be carried out. I have never become used to such ‘flying on the breath of a wind’ as each situation is so different, but now quickly recognise a familiarity in the almost involuntary burst of wide ranging but tightly enmeshed reasoning that encompasses all of the senses, indeed, the whole body (Gendlin, 1992) and the whole environment. The aloneness in decision making and the heightened sense of responsibility becomes a demand of vulnerability, of risk on the self in isolation (Todres, 2004). Although possibly located in less urgent circumstances, such occasions could be likened to the demand of triaging in an emergency situation. It is usually not an easy place to be and could, perhaps, be equated to Langeveld’s “secret place”,

... where one finds oneself at home, a place where one is with oneself. ... [Where] one finds oneself in the unexpected presence of one’s own self without having tried to make oneself a project of study. (Langeveld, 1944, p. 183)



Chapter VII - Pedagogical Parameters

Preliminary pedagogy

The challenge is always to situate our knowledge in the living context that poses the “presenting problem,” ... The schoolroom situated in a broader culture. (Bruner, 1996, p. 44)



Planning and Curriculum

Even sympathetic and experienced literacy workers will have great difficulty in creating materials to which a large and diverse group of ... learners can respond with understanding and enthusiasm. (Gunter, Hoxeng & Tasiguano, 1972, p. 2)

On the pedagogical level, during the early years of this study there was very little appropriate resource material available for teaching English to adult learners who were not literate in their own language. As a consequence, to fill that need long hours were spent making resources appropriate for my students. With little access to a computer in the staffroom at that time, most nights were spent preparing material at home. It was demanding work in those early years.

Devising new work and reshaping old according to abilities became a never ending, constant round and tailoring or making material to suit each class cohort became the practical reality of the teaching situation. It was always an endless round of “unpacking” material to make it easier or revising it to make it more difficult according to student abilities.

Reading

... the experience of reading is a messy activity, through which the tendrils of stability and absolute coherence inescapably leak. (Lewkowich, 2012, p. 207)

Early a major concern for me was that there was no appropriate ‘casual’ reading material available to entice adults at the very beginning stage of learning English into reading. When many of the students had children in the school system already using and reading books, a major question was, how could I introduce reading at an adult level? Just as Ashton-Warner had faced a similar issue fifty years previously with her five year old, New Entrant Maori School students (Ashton-Warner, 1958, 1963), how could I devise appropriate adult material for pre-readers that encouraged left to right eye movement reading, page manipulation and right to left page turning whilst, simultaneously, introducing basic vocabulary? In responding to the problem, after consideration, developing themed “books” in plastic-sleeved display folders offered possibility. Using pictures from magazines and newspapers, advertising material, food packaging labels, seed packets, travel brochures, sales docket, anything that supported a theme was used. And, just as Ashton-Warner had established before me “an image is represented by a single ... word” (1963), the first few books were entitled “up - down”, “nose”, “eyes”, “foot”, “fruit” and “vegetables”.

Finally I had developed enough “books” to have one for each student in the class to “read”. Next morning, after some intensive literacy work, bursting with teacherly anticipation, I gave a brief introduction to the new “books” and began handing out one to each student to explore. Unexpectedly, just as I was about to pass a book to one student, still sitting but with emphatic force, she slid her chair back, folded her arms over her stomach and stretched her legs out determinedly whilst crossing them at her ankles. Then, with a defiant look on her face, she stared up at

me with challenging non-compliance. Hopefully I hid my surprise, for there in front of me was a mature aged person, behaving and looking like what I had sometimes imagined the children's storybook character, Pippi Longstocking (Lindgren), would look like as she got older. With red hair in two pig-tailed plaits, freckles and a totally defiant demeanour, she was the epitome of the fictional character from my childhood, who, having aged in the intervening years, exactly matched my own generation. It was as if both of us, after a wonderful childhood friendship, had gone our separate ways and had not seen each other for many decades. How surreal. "Pippi", still characteristically in defiant fine form, had apparently thought that the book I had offered her was going to be much too difficult to manage. Fortunately a neighbouring student, already engrossed in her book, soon broke the display of challenging behaviour when she nudged Pippi and invited her to "read". Very quickly Pippi was demanding a book of her own to explore!

How extraordinary too – the incident threw me back to the first day of my own schooling when the elephant jigsaw puzzle thrust upon me the challenging transition from multi-dimensional learning in the outdoors to two dimensional literacy tasks entailing the concomitant demands of fine motor control and changes to thinking in a classroom environment. From that incident I yet again took counsel from Buber, that "nothing in our lives lacks hidden significance" (2002b, pp. 38-39), a special spark of thinking that continually emerged and underlined my work.

That ever developing set of sleeve "books" finally numbered almost a hundred and included themes such as "where do you come from?", "my body", "small, medium, large", "water safety", "nets", "hospital", "animals", "farm", "cleaning", "beans", "house", "measuring", "supermarket", "coffee" and "chocolate" – the latter two of great interest to those who had previously worked on coffee and cacao plantations – and so many more. The collection also included books containing photographs and records of our special projects, such as Landcare work, the "traffic

signal box” that we painted in the city (Buchanan, 2015) and the “garden show” (ibid), undertaken in the wider community. Other books included excursions and employment concepts. Sometimes used spontaneously as “dictionaries”, for free reading or after set class work was completed, and often as “reference” material when discussing an issue in their own language with peers. Those “books” became invaluable tools in the classroom and often were also borrowed by other teachers.



In supporting learning the alphabet, numbers and literacy skills I always tried to make the learning into an interesting game, incorporating various levels of student understanding into the activities.

Working with calculators, devising games involving matching keypad numbers with those pointed to on a large drawn format on the whiteboard, following instructions in English, managing basic shopping lists, and reading digital numbers allowed those with very basic number recognition abilities to participate in this class activity alongside others with greater numeracy skills.

When initially searching for learning activities suited to preliterate learning, ignoring the oft jested accusation of “having 101 ways of introducing the alphabet” by colleagues, the challenge of previously making or locating games, mazes, word searches and dot-to-dot activities for my home school students became my guiding catalyst. With mazes, even simple upper-case/lower-case linear examples proved to be a challenge for some students with differences in spatial awareness and differences in learning style. In comparison dot-to-dot number and alphabet activities, usually focussed on a theme, became powerful learning tools. By calling out the numbers or alphabet letters in order, giving directions such as “up”, “down” or “across”, and by supplying semaphore-

like arm movements to give direction to the next letter or number as well as finger signing, the tasks proved to be popular learning activities. Although sometimes complex and challenging, whenever the last letter or number was reached the students all involuntarily clamoured in triumph, “Finish”. Then, immediately, I would watch as the students, fascinated, focussed in awe on the image that had emerged on the page in front of them, identifying it as something they knew. Similar to the children’s pictures that emerge when painted with water, it was as if they were looking at something they had created by magic. It was always a special moment watching the fascinated smiles around the class, as the students, looked up with beaming smiles as if they had been given a very special gift. Always taking some moments to return to class reality, the reaction of the students was as if magic for me too and, in anticipation, I always looked forward to their responses! Regular use of double digit numbers and the alphabet in such enjoyable activity tasks resulted in very marked student progress.

Sometimes, those just beginning class had great difficulty with the alphabet, especially beyond the letter “E”. “E” was the stumbling block for so many – just as “Thursday” is the most difficult day of the week to remember. To proceed past “E” one of the most useful tools in the classroom was a toy xylophone/glockenspiel. Playing notes from “A” to “G”, especially with coded tunes, was fun and usually the learning-block was soon overcome.





Elderly presence

Learning and thinking are most often situated in a cultural setting and most often dependent upon the utilization of cultural resources. (Bruner, 1996, p. 4)

Noting the number of students in class that did not have parents alive - perhaps due to malnutrition, health issues, extreme violence or other reasons for foreshortened life span – and the incredulous response when sometimes the age of my mother or others was discovered, I invited my sister-in-law's mother to visit our class. Then in her late 80s, riding on her battery-powered chariot, she arrived and was treated with undisguised awe by the students. To them all, both she and her age were quite unbelievable.

Having previously elicited questions from each student, and then having conveyed the list of questions some days previously to our visitor, with help, each student in turn asked their questions of her, some deeply probing. In turn, answering the assisted and haltingly read questions our visitor attended to each student and their questions with warm sincerity. The entire visit was so memorable for all concerned – students, visitor and teacher. On completion of the questioning, one student had been delegated to give a thank you “speech”, then after a brief time of socialising, without having been organised by me, our visitor was duly escorted in great decorum to the lift when she departed. What a memorable visit.

That visit has an exceptional place in my memory for the way that the students, despite their varied cultural differences, all found the courage to “ask” their questions and the confidence to interact so genuinely with our visitor, a stranger from another culture. Although we

have had other elderly visitors since that time, that visit was truly memorable.



Taking learning beyond the classroom

Around the living being, and through its activity, which may legitimately be described as “productive”, is constituted the field which the behaviourists call “behavioural”. This field comes into play as a network of relations, a network projected and simultaneously actualised by the living being as it acts within, in conjunction with, and upon its spatial “milieu”. (Lefebvre, 2007, p. 175)

With the self-assumed title of generational teacher, of importance to me was the presumed influence that my teaching had beyond the classroom, however, because of the lack of a common language it was very seldom that I learned of instances where this had occurred. Sometimes I learned of a mother or father reading our class material to a child at home. On occasion I was told that an older child had helped with a parent’s reading. Then, through very limited dialogue one delightful story emerged to show the permutations of generational learning, instigated within but taken beyond our classroom.

After many attempts at keeping plants growing in our classroom, because of the lack of sunlight and very dry conditions, each proved to be disappointingly unsuccessful and, as a result, short-term plant projects became the norm. Sprouting mung beans, hydroponically grown wheat, hyacinth bulbs, and other pot-plants all earned brief stays in the classroom environment. Other projects involved the planting of seeds that were then transferred to our class vegetable garden nearby or the student’s own home gardens.

On one occasion we planted snow-peas by following the simple, illustrated, procedural text I had devised:

1. Cut 4 holes in [the bottom of] the pot.
2. Fill the pot with potting mix.
3. Plant 4 pea seeds.

The procedural text continued and the seeds were duly planted and watered, then each student put their potted seeds into a plastic bag in order to safely transport their project home. As the weeks went by periodically I asked the students how their seeds were growing, each giving some oral statement, such as “Little, little” or “Up, up” and body-language estimates of growth.

On being asked, one student, bravely gathering her confidence and limited English, responded, “Garden little, little,” [indicating a garden space the size of a large kitchen tray]. “Boy” [indicating the height of her five year old son]. “Water, water” [and here she mimed her son watering the plants and then, miming multiple hugs and kisses, conveyed the understanding that her son cherished the small pea plants].

As the weeks went by the students’ pea plants grew further and began flowering. One week, on again asking the class, the woman whose young son was tending her plants indicated the height that the plants had grown to, but holding up three fingers, said, “No [sic] four. Three, three. Football” [indicating one pea plant being demolished by a speeding football]. “Son” [and here, indicating her son in tears, her gaze wandered and she tailed off her report with the wan, inwardly reflective smile typical of a loving mother].

For me, that one report explicitly confirmed that the effort of organising such in-class projects was so well worthwhile. One never knew how far or wide reaching one’s work had influence. The report also clearly showed initial stages of the process by which another “[l]anguage ‘gets

into' us by shaping the way we move, feel and express our relationships with people and places" (Fay, 2005, p. 19).



In and out of class

... it becomes clear that one of the key educational responsibilities is that of providing opportunities for individuals to come into the world. (Biesta, 2006, p. 28)

As teacher of students of such a diverse age range, many not having a clear understanding of either the culture of education or what opportunities such learning experiences could lead to, I saw it as being important that I tried to help my students set an example for their own families and communities by doing homework. My justification was that not only would undertaking tasks provide role modelling but also, hopefully, help the students build confidence to explore their own respective paths of independent self-learning.

Explaining the logic that their own children would be required to do homework for their class teachers and that it would be good for the children to see their parents doing homework too, most students soon understood the importance of homework and readily accepted the small tasks that were periodically assigned to be completed at home. Smiles and nods of understanding indicated acceptance of the notion.

Homework varied but was usually copying of letters, vocabulary or simple text from small booklets. Sometimes homework might have been copying an illustrated wordlist related to the current class theme that was pasted into their workbooks. Sometimes homework was the copying of

simple phrases in the picture-reading book, *Talk to me* that I had devised and which the students put together progressively and read from in class.

Students would often proudly show me their homework, but, just occasionally it was very obvious when others, with far better printing skills, had done the homework for them! And, sometimes, with scribbles across the page, it was evident that a child in the family had taken over the homework process! Gradually over time, the homework system fell into place and, as a result, it was amazing how much progress was made by those who made the commitment to do it regularly. Some really appreciated the tasks asked of them and asked for extra work, while a few avoided the work altogether. If children were ill or there were other family issues, such as shifting to another house, and homework was not done then somehow the students informed me. But one student was particularly averse to doing homework. “No homework?” I would query. “No,” was always the blatant response and, book firmly closed, with an outward flip of her hands, she would shake and tilt her head in an unconcerned, offhand manner. Then, with a downward cast of her mouth she would always say, “Busy. Busy.” With children in late adolescence, who were quite capable of helping at home, this mother appeared to be the willing workhorse. But one day this student showed her cross referencing skills.

In a bid to encourage oracy, most Monday mornings, with the aid of laminated pictures and vocabulary, I would ask students what activities they had engaged in over the weekend. With the activity “cheat-sheets” acting as prompts for those new to the class and providing opportunities to open “dialogue” further for those with more confidence and a larger vocabulary in English, all would respond as they were able.

One day when checking homework I asked the homework evader whether she had done her work at home. It was difficult not to show inner amusement when she hesitated, then, taking a deep breath reeled off the list of vocabulary from the weekend activity prompt-sheets. “Cooking, cleaning, washing, shopping, walking, visiting, driving” and at “watching

TVeeee” she breathlessly trailed off. I did note that she had not included “reading”, “homework” and “gardening”! Homework was not of high priority to this student.



Class issues

Education must ... be not only a process that transmits culture, but also one that provides alternative views of the world and strengthens the will to explore them. (Bruner, 1979, p. 17)

As students adjusted to a new life with cultural, sociological, political and civic expectations on them, settled to put past experiences into other perspectives, applied focussed presence to the work in hand and commitment to learning, all could sometimes become background focus when traditional customs and beliefs claimed priority. Occasionally issues arose that required strategic thinking and teacher resourcefulness when cultural boundaries became challenges to be negotiated.

As we worked alongside each other acceptance of difference and a feeling of harmony gradually replaced any aloof divisiveness, resulting in an empathic warmth that was frequently commented on by visitors and class volunteers. To me building a community of trust was a high priority for the students to rediscover purpose of life and self-esteem. My constant aim was to lift confidence and assist the students to find meaningful space in their new lives, although, negotiating some traditional boundaries was sometimes fraught with uncertainty.



Benhabib calls my attention to the differentness in us all when stating,

In the realm of personality formation, the development of individual identities becomes increasingly more dependent on the reflexive and critical attitudes of individuals weaving together a coherent life story beyond conventional role and gender definition. (Benhabib, 1992, p. 104)

As survivors, my students were amazing, so many were graciously grateful and accepting whilst struggling to adjust to a new life, but, just occasionally, some demanded more than I could give or allow in the classroom. Demands for attention and time, flagrantly setting alternative rules for turn taking, and claiming interruptive socialisation opportunities during lesson time sometimes disrupted class routine. Such measures of individuality and claims of power (Arendt, 1998, p. 203) could be demanding when, as teacher, I sought to attend to the rights of all.

I conceive that there are two kinds of inequality among the human species; one, which I call the physical, because it is established by nature, and consists of a difference of age, health, bodily strength, and the qualities of the mind or the soul: and another, which may be called moral or political inequality, because it depends on a kind of convention, and is established, or at least authorised by the consent of men. This latter consists of the different privileges, which some men enjoy to the prejudice of others; such as that of being more rich, more honoured, more powerful or even in a position to exact obedience,

stated Rousseau (1754)

I recall the situation where an older student was a difficult one for me to work with. Frequently calling for individual assistance with class work, I would carefully go through what he had indicated was problematical for him with a flipping hand movement. But it was patently

obvious that he was not focussed on what I was showing him. Lounging back in his chair he would look about the classroom paying no attention whatsoever to what he had called assistance for.

Also, several times after lunch break I found this same student sitting in the front row of desks where those with deafness and sight issues usually sat. He was clearly not pleased when, with patient explanation, I asked him to return to the seat he had chosen at the beginning of the day thereby allowing the deaf or sight impaired student he had displaced to return to their seat. Having been in the class for some weeks I felt sure that he understood that the students sat in the front of the class because of their particular needs. Not only that, the students that usually sat in the places where he had moved to were always sitting further back in the class with strange looks on their faces. I could not understand what was happening until one afternoon, out of the corner of my eye and not being entirely sure of what I had seen, I discovered his method of chair appropriation. Walking behind a student, and without any communication or warning, he firmly joggled the chair that he wished to commandeer! When the startled student occupying the chair looked up in surprise, with no uncertainty, clear body language indicated that their chair should be vacated immediately! I could not quite believe what I had observed but ensured that the deaf student stayed in their seat.

Then, without him realising, I happened to be close by when he repeated the behaviour another day! Absolutely certain this time, with stern teacherly direction he was firmly sent back to the desk that he had occupied during the morning!

Just maybe the students he had displaced were considered not to have the rank and rights that he presumed. Just maybe he was testing my acceptance of a claim for status and veneration. Whatever his reason it was behaviour I was resistant to in my efforts to maintain a respectful learning environment. It was such behaviour that compelled me to take a teacherly stride to control and caused me to reflect on Maslow's hierarchy

of needs from a different view point. Without full understanding I wondered what this student's needs really were.

It is quite true that man lives by bread alone — when there is no bread. But what happens to man's desires when there is plenty of bread and when his belly is chronically filled? At once other (and 'higher') needs emerge and these, rather than physiological hungers, dominate the organism. And when these in turn are satisfied, again new (and still 'higher') needs emerge and so on. This is what we mean by saying that the basic human needs are organized into a hierarchy of relative prepotency. (Maslow, 1943)



Class temperament

Temperament arises from our genetic endowment. It influences and is influenced by the experience of each individual, and one of its outcomes is the adult personality. (Rothbart, Evans & Ahadi, 2000, p. 122)

A part of the classroom environment that I constantly monitored was the ambience or mood. Sensing the level of well-being as I walked into class or during class activities told me how we were operating as a group. Previously, as an itinerant physical education teacher working at inner-city schools around Melbourne, I could sense immediately from the street, before I entered each school's gate, what reception I was likely to get from staff and what response I could expect from the children. On the first day, when reaching a school with a map-book under my arm, as if a sea-mist, the mood of the school exuded out of the buildings and the school grounds. In the same manner, as I walked into our classroom every morning I sensed the atmosphere, the 'timbre', which is sensed in any home. Sometimes the industry of self-work may have covered tension that I had not grasped immediately but generally it seemed that the busy-ness

and industry brought the multicultural classroom to a working cohesion – a sense of communicative working togetherness and an anticipation and preparedness for the day’s class work to come. With so many individual, adult personalities involved, promoting and maintaining working cohesion, or “properly tensioned chords” (Aoki, 2005), and a high level atmosphere of co-operation was not always easy. Although any low points were always wonderfully offset in greater proportion by memorable highs.

From my journal I quote,

Another miracle moment – derived from but certainly not part of planned work – a most wonderful happening today. We were looking at the numbers 1 to 10 on the whiteboard, working forwards and backwards as I fingerspelt each for the deaf students. Then, some students having managed it individually, in the brief pause after we had finished and were about to move on to a related activity, one student retained the momentum of our work. With a quick glance and smile that sought permission from me, reading from the digits written on the board, she voluntarily gave the numbers 1 to 10 in her own language, finger-spelling as she went. She finished with a proud, sweeping smile of satisfaction in her accomplishment. After we had applauded her effort, I took her lead and invited another language group to give the numbers in their language. We continued on until all language groups had given the numbers in their own language and had been applauded. All listened intently for any similarities to their own language, smiling and nodding when they recognised such. Coming to a full-stop when all had contributed, assisted with body language, I indicated myself, and “asked” permission from the class to give my contribution. They all nodded so I proceeded to count to 10 in Maori. As if confused, there was a pause of contemplative silence, then, with smiles several asked in unison, “Australia?” Shaking my head I said, “No. New Zealand. Maori.” Many having relatives resettled in New Zealand, the students were delighted.

The whole sequence was as if we had shared our lunches. It was as if we had shared cultures as a “family” beyond the English language classroom – a very brief magical interlude that no fastidious work-

planning could ever have set in place. Although without the magical spontaneity, Bakhtin captures our language sharing when he states,

[t]he period of national language co-existing but closed and deaf to each other comes to an end. Languages throw light on each other: one language can, after all, see itself only in the light of another language. (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 12)

I frequently elicited mother-tongue vocabulary, by asking “What is that in your language?”, and encouraged the students to contribute aspects of their language and culture, but that occasion was a spontaneous sharing and respectful listening by all, as if a gift to each other. How I wish that I could contrive such moments on a whim. What are the ingredients that act as a catalyst? Is it such moments that magnetise me to teaching? Perhaps Bollnow suggests some understanding in his words, “When fear departs the world spreads out and opens a larger space for action in which man can move freely and easily” (Bollnow, n.d., p. 7). Palmer also allows me to find some meaning when he states,

... the openness of a learning space reminds us that the destination we plotted at the outset of the journey may not be the one we will reach, that we must stay alert for clues to our true destination as we travel together. (Palmer, 1998, p. 75)

Is it the elusiveness of such an occasion that compels me onwards?



Issues of intent

Teachers may accept overall responsibility for trying to minimise the difficulties their learners face, but the learners themselves play an important role in the process. They can create unnecessary difficulties for themselves ... and can create unnecessary difficulties for each other. (Allwright, 1986, p. 51)

What exactly do my students face? It seems there is so much – trepidation and self-expectations, new routines, cultures and a legal system to accommodate, new monetary and educational systems to understand. Respect, access and equity, cultural diversity – there was so much for the students to internalise and understand in a new culture.

Mostly class cohorts worked very hard and with enormous effort engaged in the learning processes but every so often diverse issues became confronting challenges. I particularly recall the occasion when I felt instantaneous internal anger when being covertly shown a very well executed pencil drawing of a scorpion-rodent like animal in his exercise book by a male student during class. In jovial, collaborative secretiveness he indicated by name that it represented a student from his own culture who was not present in class that day. Responding in an instant to counter the conspiratorial inclusion of me in a slight against another, my effort to reprimand him and set a firm boundary to such behaviour of inappropriate, manipulative power despite the lack of a mutual language was an automatic reaction. With basic English, strongly explicit body language and facial expression, in a western cultural context, I clearly showed displeasure towards the malice and assumed power. With expansive arm movements to strongly reject such behaviour and demanding class inclusiveness of him, I assumed the role of a teacher in authority to reject the derogatory, discriminatory behaviour. Then instantaneously, in complete reversal of stance, I continued with the class lesson as if normal. But the few seconds of responsive outrage left me

feeling as if I had been involved in a prolonged, heated debate. The few seconds that it took to take in the drawing within the furtively opened exercise book, interpret the manner and intent of the student, and respond was so compacted in time that the other students in class were almost certainly not aware of the issue, yet, I felt absolutely drained in the aftermath. The strength needed to filter, moderate and set instantaneous boundaries whilst dealing with internalised, seething rage of that magnitude was a new classroom experience for me.

My message appeared to have some immediate effect for as I turned away I observed the student's hand reaching for his eraser.

Panic attack

The It is the eternal chrysalis, the Thou the eternal butterfly except that situations do not always follow one another in quick succession, but often there is a happening profoundly twofold, confusedly entangled. (Buber, 2000, p. 31)

Although not for my knowing, the past lives of so many of my students have involved them in extreme traumatic events and, as a result, coping mechanisms sometimes became evident in class. Constantly endeavouring to impart understanding, just sometimes behaviours became a baffling challenge.

After one class incident in my journal I noted,

Being humanly human today worked a wee bit in reverse – every now and then M... has a panic attack. Today it happened again – I asked her if she would like some water – blurred, rapid shakes of her head said “No” – I managed to get her to undo some jacket zips as she was far too overloaded with layers of clothing and was far too hot. Then I encouraged her to do deep breathing but, with a shake of her head, this

time there was definitely no co-operation. With concern I asked if she would like to lie down – more shakes of her head said “No” – or did she want to go to hospital. The latter suggestion, so eagerly agreed to last time when, with complications, she was provided with attentive ministrations from the ambulance officers, this time was a notion she vehemently dismissed. With shakes of her head she languished, dramatically waved her arms about and then, threw her head back and began rolling her eyes. Failing to gain any further co-operation from her, I reassured her that we were in the class with her then moved my focus away and began organising the whole class to do exercises, including the deep, controlled breathing that was part of our usual exercise routine – hoping in vain to entice M... to participate. Discretely I let our first aid officer know that he might be called upon, then moved the class onto another learning activity so that, ignoring the panic attack issue yet including M... by providing her with the class material as an invitation to participate, the rest of the students became totally focussed on some number work. Keeping a corner-of-the-eye watchfulness I noted that without attention M... slowly emerged from her attack to take on a disengaged presence BUT her eyes retained an almost unwavering, unblinking stare on me. Did I represent some powerful personage from her past or was her staring telling me that I was not sufficiently diligent in attending to her or taking responsibility for her needs? Or was she asking something else that I could not understand? Soon, lunch time came around and ever so suddenly the panic attack was gone. M... seemed to have recovered remarkably well and went off for lunch chatting with her, seemingly unconcerned, friends. Chasing teacher understanding can tug us unexpectedly in strange directions!!

Throughout her time in our class, by attempting to maintain interaction with M... as one of openness I continually “invited” her to take some accountability, some responsibility for herself and her learning. But what other deeper issues were there that I could not define and was not recognising? What otherness (Lanius, 2015) should I have found in myself with a teacher’s hat? In acknowledging M’s “vulnerable self-expression and nakedness of human life” (Lindseth, 2014, p. 16) I wonder how I could

have better responded to her yet not be caught in what Lindseth terms a “vicious circle of a failing expression of life (ibid)?

On occasion this same student, soon after beginning exercises or when setting out on a class excursion would suddenly begin limping badly claiming a sore leg, or, doubled over, she would claim a sore back. But, as soon as her attention was taken with chatter or an activity where she was fully engaged she would recover remarkably quickly! What a difficult job teaching sometimes is!!!

On reflecting and acknowledging the pedagogical relationship within the cameo above, M... was one of few students that I consider to have not nearly understood or encompassed learning needs. It was as if she was constantly knocking on my front door whilst I was responding by opening the back door, thinking that she was there (Todd, 2003b, pp. 104-105). Through very basic English and body language, unclear and confusing as the communication was, what could I have done better? What other possible possibilities were there to have explored? Recognising confidentiality issues in instances such as this, perhaps cohesive support within a wider, caring team just might have promoted a smoother passage for both student and teacher in the classroom. Also, thinking along the lines of Kropotkin’s notion of mutual aid in survival (1902), was this a case exacerbated by M... seeking help to accommodate her family responsibilities as she negotiated historical issues? As part of her “family system” (Minuchin, 1974; Johnson, 2010) was M...’s behaviour, in part, her attempt to include me in her “family”? Was part of her panic that I was not responding to her invitation asking that I take the responsibility that she was so frantically, powerfully offering to me (Bowen, 1975)? Was her intense staring admonishment because I was just not heeding her invitation to join her complex circle dance? Finlay opens the picture further when he states,

In phenomenological research, layered understandings emerge from a complex process of experiencing and reflection, engaged in by both

researcher and participant. Researcher and participant engage in a dance, moving in and out of experiencing and reflection while simultaneously moving through a shared intersubjective space that is the research encounter. (Finlay, 2006, p. 1)

Indeed we were involved in a dance but not knowing the participant's, manner of "reflection", the encounter appeared to be one of great, inconsistent confusion. Was it that she was still in an individuation adjustment as a widow with great pains of loss and emptiness, and was she overwhelmed by family demands and responsibility that were compounding her grieving? In evading her entanglement was I not sitting still enough to listen to or see her greater issues of disquiet? Almost certainly her disquiet was derived from her past as well as incorporating immediate issues and I wonder if she was trapped in a between state of places, experiences and times and that our shared intersubjective space was merely a shared viewing platform, for as Brockmeier advises,

[L]iving a human life means inhabiting a particular place and time, with particular relations to other particularly situated individuals. (Brockmeier, 2009, p. 229)

Was her pain of such intensity that it was "blotting out all other experience" (Arendt, 1998, pp. 50-51)? Perhaps van Deurzen, in her interpretation of Sartre, provides some illumination on the issue when she states,

One of the most difficult factors is that people need to learn to confront the facts of socio-cultural reality in which they are caught before they can understand themselves. (van Deurzen, 2010, p. 89)

And in supporting that notion she asserts,

Need is what defines our right to satisfaction and with it the possibility to take free action in order to achieve that (ibid)

Indeed, M... was clearly broadcasting her needs and her “voice” was clearly powerful enough to call on and claim my empathic attentiveness. But I worry that within our layers of intersubjective space (Finlay, pp. 1-11) and “relation ethics” (Lindseth, 2014) I did not find or give what she was so powerfully asking for and I worry and wonder, who else will try to understand?

But what was missing in my work? What was the missing link between this student and myself AND could I have provided it? Or, as teacher, do I find solace in Palmer when he advises,

Identity and integrity have as much to do with our shadows and limits, our wounds and fears, as with our strengths and potential. (Palmer, 1998, p. 13)



Worldly technology

The task for us is twofold: to be true to ourselves and to understand that the ways of technology are as much a part of ourselves as our bipedality and self-consciousness. (Gotz, 2001, p. 75)

How technology impacts on our lives. In the 1960's, when a student at teacher's college in New Zealand, I recall accompanying a fellow student to visit her 90+ year old grandmother. Grandmother, in a great armchair, was propped with knee blankets and pillows in front of a black and white television set, but, turning to us, she earnestly claimed that there had been a bad accident involving a bullock team and dray down the street that afternoon!! That crossing of generational memories is highlighted by Lederach (1995. p. 23) in his reminder of Elise Boulding's notion of a “two-hundred-year-presence” in that we can so often touch four

generations in our own lives. In that time so much can change and so much does and, in my own two hundred year presence, so much has.

I grew up in a house without ever having a telephone and recall a washing machine being installed inside the house to replace the old wood-fired “copper” in the wash-house outbuilding that my grandmother had used. In the orchard, replacing the draught horse, our first tractor was an old, but very reliable, iron-shod, crank-start Austin. Even in my own children’s lifetime technology has developed so rapidly. In the mid 1970’s I recall seeing just part of the University of Tasmania’s office-sized mainframe computer!

Constantly struggling with modern technology, I consider myself technologically disabled. My progress is slow but gradually I am mastering further intricacies of my smartphone and enjoy introducing my students to computers and iPads. Very occasionally I am able to help other colleagues locate a relevant icon on their desktop or show a technologically competent colleague my shortcuts for developing class worksheets. But my overall mastery is sadly lacking. Out of range of internet and mobile phone access until becoming a city dweller my technological skills have lagged.

Ten years ago, for the majority of my students when arriving in Australia their technological encounters must have been life changing experiences that they could not tell me about. In resettlement, after perilous voyages or flights to Australia, with washing machines, vacuum cleaners, television and fridges in their homes, the barrage of new technology must have provided challenging new learning experiences. Access to social media was definitely not of the level it is a decade later, so, in their relatively isolated cultural pockets, they grieved and lived anew as microcosmic communities. Experience with escalators was also frequently lacking and on class excursions into town it was essential to ensure that all had the ability, or, when necessary, the support, to use this technology. Some avoided, even feared the school lifts, preferring to use the stairs.

But, with modern technology and digital competence having rapidly made global inroads, a decade later, when given mobile phones and introduced to the ubiquitous power of computers, most of my students were within seconds of communication with family members around the world – although many had no idea how to turn their mobiles off!

In class, emotions often appeared to have an infiltrating nature, frequently appearing to be highly contagious. The whole class might be affected, as when there was sympathetic sadness in support of a middle aged mother grieving for her adult daughter who, with no access to a doctor or medicine, was ill in a country far away. Or, a comforting wave of mutual concern flowed across the class when fire swept through a large refugee camp elsewhere in the world and some students had not heard from relatives there. Today, with the aid of modern technology, news and information permeates the world instantaneously. Unlike the months of news delay in the form of ship-transported letters, as my grandparents experienced, when a baby was born or a family member passed away in their countries of origin a century ago, when a letter arrived, celebration or grieving had been long acknowledged in the place from whence the news had emanated. In contrast, as I write, with news travelling instantaneously by mobile phone, skype, facebook, email and other social media students are able to accordingly, rejoice or mourn with their family members or cultural groups simultaneously around the globe. Technology now allows an emotional nearness to others yet it can also accentuate the physical distancing. It is the virtual “living with” yet “distanced from” aspect that became apparent in the classroom, as was emphatically portrayed by the tearfulness of a mother whose adolescent son had been attacked a few hours previously in a city almost half a world away. We felt the reverberations in class.



On occasion something initiated from the outside world and being confrontingly presented via the media, melded the class together as one. I think particularly of the incomprehensible occasion of 9/11, 2001, an event, which being graphically portrayed through media channels, the students certainly knew of.

In the aftermath of that catastrophic event, returning to class after a short excursion, we were walking past an old, convict era Christian church where there was a candle vigil being held. Unplanned, I paused and with words and body language explained about the vigil and “asked” the students if they would like to go in, adding that I did not mind if they did not wish to. From diverse faiths, after a little discussion in their own language groups there was a mutual nodding of agreement to my proposal. Then, ensuring individually that all were comfortable to enter, as a class we walked into the church where we were warmly welcomed before being directed to the inner sanctum. Without others around in the dim light, immediately the warmth and flickering, golden glow of the many candles enveloped us. Proceeding to light a candle myself, I indicated to the students that they were welcome to do so as well. Without hesitation, one by one, all lit and placed their candles with gentle care, then, after some moments of silent, personal contemplation, we moved slowly away. Outside, as if activated by the bright sunshine, we reverted to being our separate selves once more but the shared solemnity of the occasion still linked us. What memories were stirred, what emotions were evoked as a result of that visit I will never know but I sensed that the experience held profound significance. I suspect it was an “intermingling of the individual and private with the political and historical” (Brockmeier, 2008, p.17) within multicultural layers of memory and respect that were compounded by the occasion.

Our closely shared togetherness of that day that was so short in actual time and so strongly contrasting with the events that had led to our

experience, exuded a timelessness of people without difference. It was a solidly existed oneness that is impossible to describe. Although the atmosphere dissipated somewhat out in the sunlight there remained a lingering sense of fragility. Or was the sensed fragility, in reality, my own? In having taken the students into a place of worship not of their own faiths, and the event being commemorated having resulted in such loss and immediate, catalytic outcomes around the world, without words, the shared experience was one of inexplicable unity. Perhaps it was another dimension of the “gap between how one experiences trauma and how one communicates such an experience” which Brockmeier explores (2008, p. 19). Although our sense of oneness evaporated as we left the church, the bonded web of closeness and engendered inclusiveness was pervasively present as we walked back to class. Furthermore, it was a presence and exuded atmosphere of community cohesiveness that was retained thereafter within that student cohort. A comforting presence that was very noticeably felt and observed in our daily work together and one that I have continually striven to replicate since but, within that class group it was of such an extraordinary calibre I have not experienced such a level again.

In recalling that cameo and thinking of the life histories of the students, I ponder over Brockmeier’s questioning,

Is there a language at all to talk about such experiences and feelings? How are we to understand the border zone between experiences we can articulate, communicate, and narrate, and those experiences we believe we cannot articulate and that seem to remain ineffable. (Brockmeier, 2008, p. 17)



Since that candle lighting experience I have often wondered how many of those students had known-others caught in the catalytic 9/11

aftermath elsewhere in the world and what support that unplanned visit might have given. Butler externalises my thinking in her statement,

I think that public grieving is a good thing. People need to be grieved: loss needs to be acknowledged publicly, [not only] because it helps to confer a sense of reality on the loss but also because it makes it known that th[ese] w[ere] ... real li[ves] ... life doesn't simply get erased. It gets imprinted and remembered. This strikes me as a dignified thing to do. (Butler, 2003, p. 15)

For me, that cameo became a poignant counterbalance to therapeutic work, in my other role as counsellor at that time, with secondary and tertiary victims of the same catalytic incident. Again my notions of virtual “living with” but “distanced from” became contributing issues to the distress.



A broader picture with narrowed focus

We are moving into an Information Age in which technological competence is central ... [and] workplaces will have to change quickly to accommodate new technologies ... The number of jobs requiring no literacy or low levels of literacy skills is declining and will continue to decline. (Fingaret, 1990, p. 360)



When involved in workplace education I had witnessed the focus on and the increasing use of computerised technology in industry; in hospitals, in the mining industry, in the forestry and timber milling industry and new technology arriving in Australia for the food processing industry. That workers throughout the workforce were increasingly required to work competently with computerised technology opened my eyes to the need to provide a good introduction to, understanding of, and some skill, in computers and technology for the students.

At the time I also recognised that most of the families of my students would eventually have access to computers at home, providing opportunities for my Pre students to further develop their computer skills outside the class environment. Having these notions in mind I wanted my students to gain some understanding of the technology, eventually having enough mastery of keyboard skills to not only assist in English language acquisition but also allow for private communication with widely dispersed family and friends around the world, even if I did not see the latter goal eventuate during their time with me. With that understanding, in their first week in class the students were introduced to computers – which in the early days often had to be shared. Each lesson began with keyboard practice based on worksheets that, incorporating the vocabulary of each current class theme, had been used as study material in class.

When I look back at the early examples of those worksheets I can but laugh at how basic they were.



Technology, conceived in the broadest sense and in its manifold manifestations, is taken for the plan which man projects, the plan which finally compels man to decide whether he will become the servant of his plan or will remain its master. (Heidegger, 1969, p. 34)

Early in teaching Pre students there was no material available to introduce computer and keyboard work to students not literate in their own language, let alone those embarking on learning the alphabet and beginning to engage with communication technology. Searching for suitable material to adapt, simple jig-saw puzzles, from web-based Public Domain sites, provided a few useful activities for developing mouse skills and click and drag practice. After demonstration most students readily adopted the strategy of finding the four corner pieces, constructing the four sides and then filling in the body of the puzzle.

One day I was helping a new student as she began working on a simple jig-saw. As with the other students, I helped her to click and drag, and showed her the strategy of finding the four corner pieces and putting together the frame of a puzzle to provide a foundation. Shortly after, I was amazed to find that my suggestions had been completely disregarded and that she was using a sophisticated 'sort and match' strategy. From across the room, I could see that, ignoring my modelling, she had chosen a middle piece of the puzzle, seemingly at random. With increasingly deft mouse skills she then began drawing in surrounding pieces, one at a time, to scan the four sides as she looked for a possible match to the chosen piece. Coming from a place in the world with wide open spaces I was not

totally surprised at her demonstration of an example of visual-spatial difference in learning style (Gardner, 1993, p. 8) and individual difference (Klein, 2003, p. 45). Each successive week she chose more and more difficult jigsaws and her click and drag matching became rapid motions of flicking arcs as she continued with and refined her centre-out strategy.

That student's difference in learning and understanding continued to be the ongoing model to which I held my understanding of difference in learning styles as I tried to reach and work with each student (Hanafin, Shevlin & Flynn, 2002).



Exercises

Our bodies sense themselves in living in our situations. Our bodies do our living. Our bodies *are* interaction in the environment; they interact as bodies, not just through what comes with the five senses. Our bodies don't lurk in isolation behind the five peepholes of perception. (Gendlin, 1992, p.344. Italics in original)

Having trained and worked in both education and counselling fields, both strands strongly underpinned this enquiry whilst providing broader parameters to my teaching practice. Although at no time did I become involved in therapeutic counselling with my students, that background training certainly assisted me to perceive student needs and construct classroom learning activities in such a way that, hopefully, gave support to one student yet allowed others to benefit from the learning focus. Particularly through exercises I could address individual needs when the students were encouraged to relax, and, in gaining greater confidence, explore and extend their self-awareness with the understanding that Gendlin claims.

If we think of the living body – not as a piece of merely perceived machinery, nor as *perceiving*, but as interaction with its environment, then of course, the body is environmental information. (Gendlin, 1992, p.349. Italics in original)

Other aims, such as greater freedom in movement, finding concepts of self-care, being challenged by mnemonics and following instructions were also of importance.

In class, through themed topics such as “my body” and “health”, by drawing on and working with relevant verbs and other vocabulary the students became versed in and confident with naming a range of body parts, physical activities and conditions. The confidence and understanding established in using the vocabulary and concepts,

particularly during regular exercise sessions, could also be usefully employed with support workers, in medical or even with counselling agencies beyond the classroom.

One early experience in which I witnessed the benefit of this work was with a hard working widowed mother. After over 25 years in refugee camps, with bubbling personality she retained incredible focus and cheerfulness in life. Having children studying interstate she made every cent work for her and went to great pains to support her own ethnic community. One day in class this student became quite ill. Suspecting a heart attack from the symptoms she was indicating I quickly called in our first aid officer and she was immediately taken to hospital by ambulance. As I was teaching class another teacher went in the ambulance with her, but, there was the usual long wait in the Emergency Department. When I finished class she had still not received attention and, as the teacher who was with her was required to take a later class, I exchanged places at the hospital to be with our student-patient.

Arriving in time to support this student, at her request, we were eventually ushered into a cubicle, where I was privileged to witness how beneficial our regular exercise sessions in class had been. The attending doctor, seemingly working to discount a heart or stroke issue, put my student through a battery of tests and exercises. I was like a proud parent, for with virtually no interpretation from me, she well understood most of the sequence of instructions required of her. “Turn your head.” “Stretch your legs.” “Take a big breath in.” The instructions went on. In my eyes she responded to the requests with flying colours.

Fortunately this student did not have a drastic illness. It eventuated that being so frugal she walked everywhere to save money and, with lack of fluid, was extremely dehydrated!



We did exercises regularly, for as with fingerspelling, no other aids such as music or long, memorised sequences, were required. Those with clothing from head to toe, those with disabilities, from all ages, we did exercises. Sometimes we took a break from iPad work to do exercises, sometimes after an intensive learning activity. If we had not done exercises for more than two days there was always a request. “Sise?” was always the reminder query.

For many new students, doing exercises was hard work – so many were, initially, incredibly stiff and rigid. For some extending arms outwards could not be achieved for several sessions and were held close to the body. For a few, doing exercises initially brought forth uncontrollable mirth and it sometimes took several sessions before there was ready participation, but soon, those few were part of the class activity. Was it that their lives had previously had such a huge focus on immediate survival that energy spent on exercises was seen as irrelevantly wasteful? Did the idea of doing exercises seem unseemly? Was it that watching other class members intently focussing on their apparently inane flapping of arms and balancing of bodies seemed so ludicrous to them?

One of my lasting memories occurred near the end of an exercise session. We had bent, rocked, swung and balanced and had stretched our arms forwards, upwards and behind. Then, just as I gave the instruction to push arms out sideways there was a knock at the door. Turning and responding to the visitor, I then turned back to the class. What a wonderful sight met my eyes. All of the students were arrayed as in a horseshoe around our long, work-table setting. All with arms outstretched, all pushing each other’s hands gently, all with great smiles on their faces, all with eyes focussed on me, anticipating my surprised response. Our student with a disability was at one end of the horseshoe and I was being invited to take the other. What a great multicultural group. It was a very

special, unstaged moment in teaching that caught me with tears in my eyes. A moment for which I draw on Juschka's remark,

In magical realism, agency is available to those who would enact it while causality is a mere question mark: causal links are wishful thinking (Jushka, 2003, p.94)

Just like the magical coffee cake that multiplied, how does one find the recipe to replicate such a sparkling moment?



Perplexing encounters within intersecting trajectories: a confronting classroom journey

Power is actualized only where word and deed have not parted company, where words are not empty and deeds not brutal, where words are not used to veil intentions but to disclose realities, and deeds are not used to violate and destroy but to establish relations and create new realities. (Arendt, 1998, p. 200)

On occasion, as the teacher of adult migrant students and those of refugee-humanitarian entrant status in particular, I confronted instances that resoundingly impressed an awareness as to the remoteness of the classroom from the wider world – particularly the worldly reality of adults with an unimaginably infinite diversity of cultures, life experiences and beliefs. Just sometimes, welcoming and accommodating some of that diversity of fellow humankind provided unexpected, demanding challenges.

Generally, from observation, emerging communities that settled and flourished in post-migration phase included two or more generations

of family units, along with elders and others representing broad cultural demographics. Mutual support (Kropotkin, 1902) and cultural pride appeared to give these communities resilience and the strength to accommodate past memories as they managed the ongoing challenges that loss, displacement, transition and resettlement brought. Those without such community support managed in their own way. Transplanting a less dominant culture into a dominant culture is generally not a comfortable fit at any time but experiences of violence, loss and trauma may sometimes have considerable effect on the settlement process (Berry, 1997, p. 11).

Based on interaction with one class cohort of adult, former refugee students enrolled to learn English, the following cameo explores my reflection on the teaching and evolving reactive patterns within a classroom culture that extended over several terms. Approached through an intuitive, phenomenological methodology particularly grounded in *phronesis*, this study, drawing on teacher-lived experience, assumes even greater historicity. Within the unique and complex relationships encountered, I endeavoured to negotiate presenting behaviours to bring a semblance of order and consistent pedagogical authenticity to the class. Whilst grappling with challenges to role and identity, the trajectories and evolving interactive experiences hinged on balances of power. Dynamics of tension unfolded throughout the duration of and beyond the class cohort study.



In a class setting, the most challenging cultural grouping I ever experienced was from a devastatingly conflict-torn pocket of the world where extreme violence had ravaged their country, spilling back and forth across borders over several decades. Before taking over the Pre class, my first at a new campus, behavioural difficulties had been mentioned but,

deliberately, I had not pursued the information. In dual careers of teaching and work with victims of crime and others, I had always endeavoured to remain impartial, allowing space for layers of trust and understanding to evolve, a notion corroborated by Biesta when he states,

we should not try to specify what students ... should be *before* they arrive. We should let them arrive first (Biesta, 2007, p. 34. Italics in original)

The new term began. With good attendance, putting student faces to names on the class-roll was soon accomplished but it was within an atmosphere of palpable, foreboding tension that our class work proceeded. It was merely days before diffidence broke into waves of surly, uncooperative passive resistance. My journal records, “My presence is barely recognised – do I represent the power that was so distrusted, that brought such loss and hurt? I am invisible but reaching out – marginalised.” That was just the beginning. I could speak to my students but at preliminary level of English they were unable to converse with me. Equally pertinent, they certainly did not fully understand me, although, as Buber states,

... for a conversation no sound is necessary, not even a gesture. Speech can renounce all the media of sense, and it is still speech. (Buber, 2002, p.3)

Through a period of intense involvement, despite continuous reflection whilst searching for threads of understanding, I gained little insight into the perplexing situation that was unfolding. But, by attuning assumption making and responsive behaviour through a lens of *phronesis*, “a contemporary interpretation” (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 370) of the writing of Aristotle in *The Nichomachian Ethics*, this teaching journey staggered tortuously on. *Phronesis* involves judgements and decision making in the manner of a “sole actor” (ibid). It is an action oriented, moral form of

knowledge which allows an holistic, reflective interpretation of lived experience. Aptly encompassing the tenor of this cameo Halverson states,

The distinguishing characteristic of phronesis is the ability to size up novel situations that cannot, by definition, be specified in advance. (Halverson, 2004, p. 10)

A statement that succinctly captured the narrative of this class as it evolved, although I definitely make no claim to have adequately “sized up” the experience!

The class consisted predominantly of unrelated widows, mostly mothers of school-aged to adolescent children. There were two men, husbands of two of the women, and there were also three elderly widows from three other countries and cultures who spoke diverse other languages. Always choosing to seat themselves strategically at desks opposite the door, away from incoming or outgoing traffic, the older women were not involved in the challenging behaviour. They merely looked on intently with expressionless demeanour.

Soon the next phase of our class relationship emerged. One morning, in mid-lesson, from the group of younger women, one erupted from her chair and stood with powerful (Flyvbjerg, 2003, pp. 319-325), matriarchal presence as she stared intently at the door. Almost in unison, all the other women in the grouping arose, stood briefly without a word, then clatteringly moved chairs as they gathered up their bags and belongings. Without a sideways look they then all proceeded to shuffle noisily out. The two husbands muttered to their wives, or perhaps the group as a whole, in their own language but quickly hung their heads as they were completely ignored in the eerie exodus. Dumbfounded by the spontaneity and the seemingly choreographed *corps de ballet*, self-admonishment decreed “Be still and listen to the turmoil.”

A few days later, when the next exodus occurred instigated by another woman, I attempted negotiation. Politely questioning the leader of the move by name, I asked, “N... . Where are you going?” whilst using body language to exemplify meaning. With eyes intently focussed on the door she physically brushed me aside as she passed and determinedly departed with the group. Again, the two husbands commented to the women in their own language then hung their heads. My journal records,

Exodus again – over two thirds of the class out the door! My query ignored. Total lack of control with this issue – some teacher! Have no idea where they are going. Issues here that I cannot see – something that is not available to me. Do the older women feel as isolated as me?

Searching broadly for catalytic possibilities I pondered,

Is this a reaction to new-found freedom? Is it an unconscious quest for lost or unfulfilled childhood or adolescence? Are the women testing me as the “oppressor” to find liberation through rebellion (Friere, 2005, p. 64) or are they merely testing the new teacher (Josselson, 2004)?

Early the following week yet another woman instigated the class interruption and departure sequence. Again I respectfully queried, “S... . Where are you going?” With eyes remaining firmly riveted on the doorway and the disappearing backs of her friends, she hesitated, then responded, “Poimen [sic]”, before moving on smartly to file out behind the others as they disappeared. The group mindset was like a solid wall and I soon acknowledged to myself that despite lack of negotiation these women, as adult learners, had the right to make their own choices. Departures from the classroom continued on a regular basis, usually two or three a week. I ceased questioning but occasionally one of the women would mutter, “Doctor,” or “Appointment,” but mostly, totally focussed on the door, they mutely trooped out and disappeared for the rest of the day. For a while the

husbands commented with their heads lowered but, eventually, they merely hung their heads as the women rose to leave.

In an effort to deny attention to the drama and allow the husbands time to regain some composure, I would turn my back to clean the board or gather up papers or equipment as soon as the “leader” for the day rose to leave. Then, having had a lesson truncated I would begin a new activity with new focus. As the throng departed and shuffled down the corridor, leaving the door wide open, those of us remaining would immediately set to work again.

With no extended family linkages within the group and no elders or cultural role models in the wider community, the group of women seemed to sway with the influence of sometimes strident voices and almost pack-like determination. Frequently when walking to class, at the beginning of the day or after lunch break, I would hear shrill conversation reverberating along the corridor that immediately hushed as my presence became known – and uncannily they always sensed my presence before I appeared at the doorway! Within the group there definitely was voice but not a voice to communicate with me.

To accommodate the behaviour, which was accompanied by surliness and ambivalent cooperation, even defiant resistance on occasion, I consciously changed my teaching style to one erring toward that of the proverbial school marm! My journal indicates my dilemma,

So many selves – so many roles to play. Self as teacher, parent, guide and mediator. Self as caring neighbour. Feel so stretched.

All of us: the younger women, the older women, the men, and teacher, all seemed to be living in the class world with trajectories distantly converging on a far “horizon, though visible ... [but seemingly] permanently just out of touch” (Lederach, 2005, p. 29).

The two men worked diligently and progressed well with their English. When the women left class the change in lesson focus appeared to

give them renewed enthusiasm and an opportunity to sidestep the behaviour for which they obviously felt some responsibility. Statue-like, sitting so still like stone monoliths, with only eyes moving, the three older women maintained expressionless faces throughout the displays of seemingly truculent behaviour and abrupt departures from the classroom. They tried so hard with their English but, as with many older folk learning a new language, they had difficulty retaining information and progress was slow. Then, through the willingness to learn by the men and the brave efforts to respond by the older women, I found a way of avoiding defiant resistance during class lessons. By choosing one of the older women or one of the men to respond to initial questioning, the response – whether correct or not – invariably provided a mimetic (Maran, 2003), modelled challenge for the younger women to become involved. The flow of lesson procedure when the younger women were not present automatically included them when they were.

But the challenging behaviour continued and my journal records,

It has become a strange reciprocal dance of ... power and strength (Arendt, 1998, p. 203) – I am the teacher, tolerating but exhibiting enough facial expression and consistent body language to clearly give the message such behaviour is unacceptable in our classroom. Paradoxically I am also the parent-teacher (in that order), discreetly meting out concepts of home rules whilst barely retaining a level of control. BUT there is change!

As the long weeks ticked by, almost imperceptibly, the intensity of attitude and behaviour began to slowly dissipate and my teaching style softened reciprocally. Then, one day after a morning exodus, together with the other students, all of the women trooped back to class after lunch. Chattering cheerfully they came in toting bags bulging with vegetables, celery sticks protruding antennae-like. This marked the turning point. What an anticlimax! Had the women made a Kierkegaardian “leap of faith”, “a transition between radically different ways of life” (Ferreira, 1998, p. 207)? Had they moved to recognising “possibilities” for the future (Grimsley, 1973, p. 95)? Like the calm after a storm, the schism between

one reality and the next unexpectedly left me in a state of genuine shock (Schutz, 1967, p. 22). Extreme demands on management and coping strategies suddenly became obsolete. Anticipating a relapse of previous behaviour, for a week I remained on high alert but, unusually for a preliminary level class, we all seemed to be working on the same page! Consciously I then permitted myself to remain on an elevated level of awareness for a further week, a decision that allowed me to find a new normality in our class relationships. Surprisingly at the end of the second week I was aware of feeling exceedingly torpid, as if in a vacuum, as unbelievably, reality settled to grounded equilibrium. Even more surprising was the feeling that, like a child on the high end of a see-saw after an earth shuddering jolt, I was the one that had flown into the air and was now the last one back to join the fun. Just as I could not have hastened the journeying of the women students, so too, I could not have hastened my own.

In settling, we all came to a congenial working understanding, in fact, it was as if nothing had ever been out of the ordinary! At last we adopted a regular class routine. I became the teacher, abandoning the parent-teacher role. Attendance was excellent and “Appointment” or “Doctor” meant just one or two women left the classroom.

All too soon it was with genuine sadness when the group finished their allocated hours and moved on. Since that time, however, I have often wondered how I could have managed the situation better – keeping pace to monitor and negotiate the perceived intensity and power accompanying the behaviour had been incredibly hard work. As my journal repeatedly indicated, lessons and interactive literacy activities frequently seemed to be deliberately sabotaged. Computer work, art work, cooking, singing, dancing and exercises were the only activities that appeared to stimulate genuine interest and enthusiasm. Keeping the pedagogical curriculum afloat and managing the class as a whole was largely based on intuitive practice incorporating extreme levels of patience, whilst personal ethical

standards and pedagogical practice were exactly tested. The profound intensity had been exhausting both mentally and physically. Constantly I had sought links from diverse disciplines in an attempt to gain some insight to the scenario in which I was acting but, being embroiled within the maelstrom-like journey proved to be a situation in which scholarly texts were of little or no immediate support or practical assistance.



Whilst writing this cameo and listening to Australian Broadcasting Corporation's Radio National on June 12, 2014, news from London reported on the global summit convened to seek further endorsement from the world community for the United Nations Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict (2013).

Prompted by the news and reflecting yet again on the student group, it occurred to me that there was a highly probable reason as to why the women in the group had behaved so strongly, with such enmeshed solidarity. They were survivors. As women, they had adopted their own strategy for survival. The united front they had displayed in class would, in all likelihood, have been an habituated response enacted for their individual as well as their collective protection in the tumultuous happenings encountered in their previous life experiences (Maslow, 1970). I had long pondered on the contribution of Kropotkin's notion of mutual support in survival (1902) and how strategies of cooperation might relate to my former refugee students. Belatedly, I saw the behaviour of those women as perhaps displaying very strong alignment to his thinking.

That the women behaved collectively when in a new, supposedly safer environment may perhaps be accounted for through the adrenalin-driven complexity of their past lives. In addition, an aspect I had certainly failed to interpret as deeply as I should, despite my training and maybe

because I was too closely involved, was their collective body language. As former refugees settling into their new home country, they would have been reacting with ingrained spontaneity to perceptions of power and domination (Hynes, 2003) at a time when they had yet to emerge from the traumatic, highly charged circumstances they, their grandparents, their parents and their own children, had experienced previously. Arriving in their new home country at a time when comparatively high levels of discrimination were reported across varied minority cultural groupings throughout the wider community may also account for continuation of a collective survival response. As Gao, himself a former asylum seeker and Nobel prize laureate, perceptively notes,

Consciousness is not like reason; it is far vaster, and to a certain extent, it includes reason. Whereas reason progresses through reflection, relying on language and logic, consciousness shines at the heart of the chaotic self and is immune to the rules of cause and effect ... (Gao, 2002, p. 28)

In retrospect, I also wondered about the older women. Although unable to communicate linguistically between themselves or with any other class members, in bearing statuesque, silent witness had they shared an understanding with the younger women? From different time, place and circumstance had each identified aspects of their own reactions to past experiences as they impassively looked on? For, as Lederach states,

... presenting issues connect the present with the past. The patterns of how things have been in the past provide a context in which issues ... rise toward the surface. But while they create an opportunity to remember and recognize, presenting issues do not have the power to change what has already transpired. The potential for change lies in our ability to recognize, understand and redress what has happened, and create new structures and ways of interacting in the future. (Lederach, 2003)

Having uncovered lapses in my thinking, reflection and interpretive possibilities, again the question arises – how could I have better managed the situation as it presented? With new lines of thinking prompted by the Global Summit along with my discovery of the writings of Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (1994), and mindful of re-traumatisation, how could I have better nurtured the silent, inner voices of those women in an “ethic of care”? Also, having applied a lens from the perspective of western culture to explore the study, how significantly different and more meaningful might my interpretations and understanding have been if examined through the philosophical traditions of the students’ own culture or through the emerging lens of multicultural-intercultural psychological (Drozdek, 2015) and philosophical (Kimmerle, 2010, p. 39) understandings? For, as Kristeva advises, as quoted in Kimmerle, “Foreigners are we to ourselves” (ibid). In addition, by wearing a mandatory teacher’s hat and not a counsellor’s hat, being “there” for the students was made more difficult for me. Although I had recognised that there were issues of grief and pain, they were issues that almost certainly required long-term therapeutic work. Internally I felt a sense of guilt that I could not reach out to the women in the way I would have done in another role.

Memories of that class cohort continue to linger, leaving opportunities for further revelation but as the world blunders on with widespread atrocities, conflict and turbulence, I plea for the cessation of violence against humanity, particularly that perpetrated against women and children and other undeserving victims.

Indicating a sad indictment on humankind, there is an enormous, gaping void in literature and history that should hold untold stories of the countless women such as those enveloped in this study. In research to support this narrative, I could locate little literary documentation of the information I was seeking to clarify my thinking (Kalra & Bhugra, 2013, in Conclusion). Is it that perpetration of acts leading to guilt and shame (Lal,

2003, pp. 4, 75) must not be divulged in the histories of conflict, war and genocide? Is it that women's voices recounting violence and atrocities are of inconsequence and must be silenced? Where are our exertions to reverse dehumanising behaviour and antipathy? As Victor Frankl cautioned,

If we are to bring out human potential at its best, we must first believe in its existence and presence. Otherwise man, too, will "drift"; he will deteriorate. For there is a human potential at its worst as well! And in spite of our belief in the potential humanness of man we must not close our eyes to the fact that *humane* humans are, and probably always will remain, a minority. But it is precisely for this reason that each of us is challenged to *join* the minority. Things are bad. But unless we do our best to improve them, everything will become worse. (Frankl, 1979, pp. 88-89. Italics in original)

And so, for the group in this cameo-study, our class relationship came to an end. The students finished their allocated hours and progressed to another level. We all felt sadness with their departures from our class community as friendships, connectedness and bonds of trust beyond language and culture, built during our time together were loosened. For them, as always when students depart, it was my sincere hope that new understandings, skills and learning acquired or reshaped during our time together would assist them in their ongoing settlement journey. Above all I hoped that the time we had spent together had engendered confidence, dignity and pride in abilities to continue participating in the wider community allowing them to move onward on respective life journeys with renewed courage.

Leaving the empty classroom, I reflected in depth on what the students had taught me for as Heidegger reminds me,

Everywhere, wherever and however we are related to beings of every kind, we find identity making its claim on us. (Heidegger, 1969, p.25)

Specifically I also reflected on the rights of all of the students. How much had I violated or over-managed personal and cultural rights? With teacher “power” (Flyvbjerg, 2003, pp. 319-324) how much had I unwittingly, politically, unethically imposed an identity (Delpit, 1988, p. 288)? What could I have done better? Briefly assuming the role of teacher-parent (now in that order), I wished my family of students well.

We are all the same but different.



Written some years after the actual class experience, the cameo portrayed above has been adapted from a presentation given at Chartres, France, July, 2014 (Buchanan, 2014). Of note also, the following year, at a professional development presentation in Hobart, Tasmania (October 12, 2015), the student group referred to in the narrative above was claimed to have been an exceptional challenge to work with by a member of the local medical profession. Learning that others had struggled with the very same cultural group has allowed me to internally claim veracity for my own narrative. Then, yet another year later as I complete this study, in following some of Kropotkin’s thinking and related work (Padovan, 1999) I referred back to his reference to the French philosopher, Jean-Marie Guyau, in another of his works (Kropotkin, 1924). Looking further into Guyau’s work I came across what may well shed light on my search for some meaning behind the behaviour exhibited by the group of women – *anomie* – a concept that was further elaborated by Durkheim (Oruru, 1983). Drawing back from the current connections between *anomie* and criminal behaviour, I wish to return to Guyau to continue this exploration, perhaps to find links to behaviours of interest or some learning issues. My

questing in this direction continues and I look forward to learning more in further study.



Workplace

We are moving into an Information Age in which technological competence is central ... [and] workplaces will have to change quickly to accommodate new technologies ... The number of jobs requiring no literacy or low levels of literacy skills is declining and will continue to decline. (Fingaret, 1990, p. 36)

Early when teaching the Preliminary level it became obvious that because of age, health and the level of English acquisition very few of the students would find ongoing employment. With the thinking that most of the students were parents or elders in their own cultural communities I devised a programme that investigated the vocabulary, basic work skills and Occupational Health and Safety relevant to several workplace jobs. My logic behind this was that by introducing vocabulary and background understanding to workplace concepts might not only eventually lead to employment in several skill areas (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2016) but would also give insights into the culture of Australian workplaces, and particularly provide insights into Occupational Health and Safety issues, concepts alien to many coming from regions of conflict where emphasis had been on escape and survival.

Equipped with some knowledge, experience and understanding I felt that the students, even if they failed to gain employment, would be in a better position to support family members and members of their own communities in work focus education, training and employment.

My journal records,

At the moment am trying to incorporate an awareness of job options and work obligations as a major focus in the flow of teaching - has been an interesting journey I approached the content side with great trepidation, mostly because so many jobs have such long 'names' eg bricklayer, supermarket worker, hairdresser etc and also because simplified job descriptions can be difficult to get across. With pictures the enthusiasm and will to communicate has been absolutely amazing. Some, wishing to know about jobs outside the parameters of this theme have struggled to make their queries known! The catalyst of this focus has been quite extraordinary as the students "enquire" of each other and support each other in their attempts to articulate. I can see more clearly how I can link it all to simple job applications, procedural texts etc. It has been a bit of a journey in the dark



Aged care

The first work focus area we looked at was Aged Care. Despite critical opposition, as it was felt that pre level students would be highly unlikely to gain entry to, let alone complete Aged Care Certificate courses – a goal which I had not entertained, we proceeded. To counter the criticism I pointed out that positions for those with Pre level English could be available in the aged care industry in cleaning, laundry and kitchen work.

During the "course" we visited a day centre under the auspices of a home for the elderly. The students, as requested, wore their traditional costumes and served morning tea to the elderly. Even though several orders were confused – some having ordered coffee being served tea – nobody seemed to mind. The students played bingo with the aged clients and very briefly, with support, they told the group where they came from.

We learnt vocabulary and concepts such as "walker" as in mobile aid, "wheelchair", and "crutches" but, perhaps the highlight of the course was being able to use wheelchairs from the hospital. With shrieks and great mirth the students learnt the intricacies of unfolding and preparing

the chairs for use. Then, taking turns in pairs, they tried the wheelchairs for themselves and after some further safety training we set off in convoy into the city. Passing a cycle shop gave me an idea, so later, on our way back to the hospital, we stopped by the shop where the owner readily gave us a quick, impromptu lesson about wheelchair wheels and tyres. Our previous class learning well supported the understandings so the visit was well worthwhile.



Hospital corners on bunk-beds

Cleaning and housekeeping were the next work skills that we explored. Again classroom work prepared the students for a visit to the hospital, this time to watch the cleaners and the housekeepers at work with cleaning chores and linen management. A wonderful teacher from the hospitality section of TAFE, communicating well at the level of the students, also gave the students several lessons.

Two local businesses very kindly allowed the students to have some practical experience. The first was a small hotel where, on several occasions, the students cleaned the bar and dining room and then set the dining tables ready for patrons. The other business was a back-packer hostel where in groups of five the students cleaned three rooms, preparing three sets of bunks in each. My journal records,

The effort the students put into this was amazing – fantastic team work and all took great pleasure in doing the job to the best of their ability – and – although self-imposed – trying to do hospital-corners with bedding on the bunk beds. A challenging effort!!!



Farming and Horticulture

This “course” entailed classroom projects such as growing wheat hydroponically – that was fed to the ever-ravenous class rabbit, growing vegetable seedlings, a visit from a chicken breeder with some of his exhibition stock, and an in-depth look at bee-keeping with a visit from an apiarist. Class excursions included visits to two agricultural suppliers, a visit to the TAFE Horticulture section and a visit to a rural school farm that had a range of animals including deer, cattle, sheep, goats, rabbits and guinea-pigs.



Handy skills

Incorporating many home handy-man tasks the Handy Skills “course” included how to change a tap washer, how to use a power drill and plaster holes, how to fix an electrical fuse, and how to use a battery powered hedge-cutter. The highlight was a visit to another TAFE campus where, giving more of a trades-man’s perspective, we observed many building skills – glazing, brick-laying, plastering and carpentry. As a finale the students made a coaster of laminated Tasmanian woods to take home.



Overall, reaching to adult students this focus on workplace skills proved to be an invaluable learning initiative, with much progress in literacy being made and several students subsequently gaining

employment. From the perspective of the teacher, it was hard work entailing much organisation in devising learning material appropriate to the student level, organising visitors and arranging excursions. In an effort to relieve some of the intensive management pressure I have since followed sections of the course in isolation.



Expectations and stored knowledge

And the mind whirls and the heart sings.

(R. Frost, 2009)

Reaching to engage some students can be difficult when mind and body are elsewhere for although having voluntarily enrolled to learn English it does not necessarily mean that there will be focussed participation and progress.

An older woman had been a willing participant in learning activities throughout the several months that she had been in class but retention of the alphabet and numbers was just not happening. One lunch break, I found her seated in front of one of the school computers, quietly and sadly looking at the screen as tears trickled down her face – she was looking at a film clip of her homeland. Soon after, in class one day we happened to look at the word “donkey” in our evolving, self-made picture dictionaries and after questioning it emerged that she was the only student in class who had actually ridden on one. Her body language, sparkling eyes and knowing smiles clearly indicated her experience of riding on a trotting donkey. The very next day we briefly looked at the word “wool” with its double “o”. Drawing some sheep’s fleece wool from a bag and distributing staples for all to handle and smell, this woman immediately began teasing

out the wool fibres, spinning them into thread with her fingers. After lunch-break I was presented with a superbly crafted length of 2 ply yarn, most suitable for fine rug-making. Shining eyes and animation absolutely transformed this student – it was as if she had found a “space” and was finally becoming part of the class. At the end of the day she was so excited when I offered her some more fleece to take home. Her scramble to find a non-existent plastic bag was soon allayed when another student offered one to hold her precious gift. Interestingly she scorned the carded wool that I had prepared for her – fleece wool, straight from the sheep’s back was preferred. That student’s parting with me that day was a high-five with a real meeting of the eyes.

After the following weekend this student returned the fleece-wool to class. Incredibly, it was all carefully spun and neatly wound around a large, flat, smooth pebble with a toothpick holding the spun wool in place, the pebble and toothpick having taken the place of a spindle. Lacking a rug-loom in the classroom I moved this student on to knitting and she subsequently produced, from memory, an adult sized bootee with a very complicated traditional pattern. My hard-to-reach student was at last participating and taking some ownership in her own learning. As Ashton-Warner had found – it was a matter of finding the right “key” (1963) and, as so often in our class, until that key is found teacherly hopes and anticipation are set for failure.



For the students, particularly the men, most coming from outdoor work to sit in a classroom, attempting to absorb and foster English, must have been incredibly difficult. Tending goats and cattle all day, working on coffee plantations or in orange groves, being part of a busy market thrum or plying one’s tools as a carpenter - all had brought skills that mostly

were found to be redundant for employment on arrival in Australia. But, very occasionally some skills become known to me. On one occasion I dragged some unwieldy, scraggly branches to school, to be later “clipped” with a battery powered hedge-clipper. Dumping the branches in a heap on the classroom floor I went off to retrieve the day’s work from my staffroom desk. On returning I was amazed to find the branches neatly sorted and bundled with some of the smaller, outer, twiggy branchlets tightly entwined, as if cord, holding the bundles together. The bundles had then been neatly stacked upright in a corner of the classroom. The skill with which this task had been accomplished evoked a genuine upwelling of awe within me and later, trying to undo the tight twining was difficult.

Another day the class was working on a procedural text of planting bean seeds in pots. Combining the reading with practical engagement, we duly followed the planting instructions then took our pots of soil and bean seeds outside to be watered. Demonstrating with a small watering-can, I was taken by surprise when, with “No. No.” admonition, the watering-can, without a shower-head, was gently jerked from my hands. The commandeering student then demonstrated a more caring watering of the seeds. I had merely poured water onto the soil but the correct way was to allow the water to run through one’s fingers of the free hand, allowing it to “shower” onto the soil.

Several times I have been astonished to observe a skill that has been reduced to clumsiness or perhaps lost altogether in our western culture. When cleaning up after painting over the graffiti covered, stone arched doorways of an old church hall I watched mesmerised as a student rinsed and wrung out dirty cleaning cloths in a bucket of cold water. Her dextrous, rhythmic skill, no doubt from years of experience of hand washing, was like that of a skilled puppeteer. Although she was squatting beside the bucket, her focus, fingers, hands, arms and whole body were flowing in an incredible dance. I just had to stop and watch.



After a seed planting lesson during which broad beans had been planted in small pots by following a basic procedural text, a new student surprised me. Displaying a big, knowing smile and holding up five fingers he caught my attention, then he repeatedly said, “Five, five. Five, five.” In response to my look of confusion he repeated again, “Five, five. Five, five.” With my brain racing to catch his meaning, thinking he had planted five seeds instead of three, as specified in the text, I queried, “You planted five seeds?” “No. No. Five. Five.” he insisted.

Rapidly brain searching it finally dawned on me. He was telling me that it took five months for broad beans to produce edible beans from the time seeds are planted! By describing the growth of the bean seeds verbally and with mime I verified the information and then congratulated my informant for his contribution to the lesson. What a great effort to participate in the class by a now classroom bound farmer. He was so delighted that I had understood what he was telling me but it had not been an easy task to deduce his meaning!

So often I wondered what knowledge and skills were stored within my students that I just could not access.



Another day, before the long summer holidays, we followed a text and duly planted pea seeds. After the weeks of holiday, in the New Year, with the addition of new students we began new class interests so it was with incredulous surprise on my part when a student with a profound disability, without a word but with a big beaming smile, proudly thrust into my hands his now well grown pea plants. As small seedlings they had not been planted out in the student’s garden as I had suggested. Instead, as the pea plants had grown, the small pot in which he had planted the seeds in class had been firmly taped to a plastic soft-drink bottle from

which the top and bottom had been carefully removed. As the little plants had continued growing in the miniature, hand-held greenhouse yet another trimmed drink bottle had been added! With the small pot and two plastic water bottles firmly taped together, providing a very sheltered environment, the pea plants had grown further. Thus, I was given a cylindrical, plastic greenhouse with four somewhat sunlight deprived pea plants emerging in a tangle from the constricted mouth of the second drink bottle!! What ingenuity! I was delighted with my gift and the student was so modestly proud of himself.

Although we gently hardened the plants and transplanted them out in the class vegetable garden-beds, sadly they did not survive the transition.



I learnt so much from my students, but knew that no matter how hard I tried, because of lack of both verbal communication and immersion in their cultural settings my understanding would not ever be what I wished it was. So often I was reminded that

... folk knowledge is a vast and valuable body of very practical information ... [being} a well-spring of human values ... [that] once gone [is] irreplaceable. (Martin, 1992, pp.8-9)

Reflection on the past and reflective immediacy on the present

Continually throughout the school day I constantly came back to my springboard of reflection. “Where are we at?” “Is all well?” “What is next?” “How do we go about ... ?” A sweeping reflective act not dwelt upon but offering space for a brief grounding to assess lesson and student progress which then allowed me to quickly devise a new strategy, respond to immediate needs, or prioritise actions accordingly.

The notion of reflective thinking has received much attention in pedagogical and other fields (van Manen, 1977; Ross & Hannay, 1986). Usually attributed to the work of Dewey through his theory of reflective thinking as outlined in his first edition of *How We Think* (1909) and further clarified in the revised edition (1933). Having worked with such a model for some time I find that it is problematic in that it is founded on a problem identification/problem solving perspective when not all issues in the classroom are problems.

More recently I have found my version of Kierkegaard’s notion of reflection and immediacy (Grøn, 2003) to have much lighter, empoweringly practical connotations that, similar to my Maslow/Piaget structure (Buchanan, 2005. p.41), has provided a platform for a quick, informal assessment of student wellbeing and class management in the pedagogical sense. Reflective immediacy has allowed for a quick, informal assessment of class process with the possibility of modifying, inserting or extricating aspects as class work progressed. Such a tool providing balance in my work whereas reflection, as in-depth problem solving, stemming from “perplexed, troubled, or, confused” issues (Dewey, 1933, pp. 106-107) required a more ponderous investigation that, to me, suggests a process that is more interrogative than it is reflective.

Assessing progress

As teachers ... we must be held accountable for our work. But measures of this work cannot be determined by narrow conceptions of teaching quality and student learning that focus exclusively on test scores and ignore the incredible complexity of teaching and learning and the institutional realities inherent in the accountability context. (Cochran-Smith, 2003, p.4)

That most of my students were operating below the zero level of the 12 point rating scale of ISLPR® (Ingram & Wylie, 2012) for English literacy when they were placed in our class and barely managing the first modules of the current Preliminary CPSWE curriculum (NSW AMES, 2013) meant that with the majority of students I was constantly working on basic literacy skills. Constantly devising 101+ ways to introduce the alphabet and numbers and, of great importance, practising language. Working every day at this level was demanding, although each new cohort was different with different levels of learning ability, and different needs. There were speech/pronunciation issues, learning issues, health issues and disability issues to be accommodated. There was always so much to take into account every day. As teacher, along with my students, I too was propelled along a course of transformative learning (Mezirow, 2003).

The Preliminary level curriculum (CPSWE, 2013) being set at such a level that did not accommodate basic learning skills, it was seldom that students at my Pre level completed modules. Unfortunately there was just no formal recognition for the acquisition of basic learning and literacy skills, which for many students to accomplish was, for some, an unattainable, challenging hurdle. Recognition of most letters in the alphabet and recognition of numbers to 100 was where formal assessment of achievement began.

Many of those that had not had previous schooling quickly learnt how to cut with scissors, how to handle a book or maybe how to use a lift

or escalator. For some the starting point required a lot of learning alongside participation in learning activities.

For some, using an artist's paintbrush was also a first. Frequently I watched paint brushes being pushed backwards! Gluing, turning pages, holding a pencil, measuring and ruling lines – there are so many things that we take for granted. Learning to learn was quite a journey for some. Then, incorporated with the skills of using classroom tools was the challenge of literacy. Copying from the whiteboard is so much more difficult than copying modelled letters in a workbook. Learning for many was dauntingly complex.

For many students within their first weeks of class my mental checklist, as opposed to formal assessment, might read as:

Scissor cutting with reasonable precision – nearly

Pencil manipulation – progressing

Sharpening own pencil – no

Ruling off with pencil – nearly

Measuring from the zero point – no

Can count to 10 - nearly

Knows the alphabet – O, S, T, W and Z only

Knows the days of the week – confused

Can copy from the whiteboard – with difficulty (sight problem?)



One year, as the academic year drew to a close, I conducted the final student assessments – my most unfavourite teaching task. One student, diligent both in class and with homework, after three months of work with me was a particular surprise. Apart from two vowel letters of the alphabet

being transposed she was confident. With numbers to 100 her recognition was perfect.

After farewelling the class for that day, heading in the same direction as them all, I followed this student as she departed. But, opposite the staffroom door, where chairs were lined up for those awaiting interviews or for those waiting for others to finish their classes, sitting there was a group from this student's country of origin, including her husband and a student whom I had recently promoted to the next class. After our mutually cheerful hellos and high-five greetings, in front of the group, my student's husband asked me how his wife was "going". A little taken aback at being asked in public, and concerned about confidentiality issues, by using exactly the same adjectives and commendations that I had used when complimenting his wife earlier in the day in class, I replied that she was "going really well" and that she was "working very hard". Indeed, without divulging my inner thoughts regarding this student, she had excelled in my estimation. On top of past issues and family resettlement, living with a chronic illness and a physical disability, in such a short space of time she had made exceptional progress, especially after she began using spectacles.

The husband seemed proudly satisfied, then, after a brief pause, in front of all present he disclosed to me that his wife had previously only been able to sign her official UNHCR documents for refugee status and her Australian visa papers with a thumb print. That she had progressed and could actually write her own name was, to the husband and her cultural group, an achievement which all were very rightly, genuinely proud of. I was so humbled and being rather emotionally choked would have had difficulty answering any further questions had they been asked!

So undemanding, this quiet worker had, academically, already achieved so much in my eyes, but her progress was even more exemplary when I realised the exceptional progress that she had made. The justified pride that her husband and her compatriots showed strongly brought

home to me the divergent values that individuals, institutions and others place on curriculum, assessment and learning in general. I was in awe of her tenacity and will to succeed. Her progress was all the more remarkable as it occurred during a period when the class was operating with the constraint of another student's very demanding behaviour.

For me, as teacher, to understand the extent of her progress despite the tension that had existed in the class gave me cause to acknowledge that learning was still taking place. Was it possible, I wondered, that sufficient space had been maintained "in which ... community of truth ... [could still be] practiced" (Palmer, 1998, p.90)?



Musical interlude

At the end of what had been a particularly challenging year we had our usual classroom party. The desks were all pushed back against the walls, we shared food and enjoyed each other's company. Giving further ambience, in the background I had a CD disc of ethnic music playing. Suddenly, withdrawing from the group, one of the older women fetched a homemade drum from the music box. Tucking it under one arm she then proceeded to beat the drum and dance with great skill and inwardly focussed enjoyment. Quite oblivious to our presence, with long, dark robes flowing she was a special spectre as she twirled and, with obvious expertise, beat in time to the music. As we all watched, a younger, tall, dark classmate also raided the music box, then with circlets of bells tied around her ankles and wrists she too began dancing. From totally different cultures and a generation apart their dancing and joyful interaction soon involved the whole class. What a memorable, unplanned sharing to celebrate the end of a class year – and our togetherness – extending Buber's "I-Thou" (1970) into I-Thou-Thou and Thou.



Power and class dynamics

Tolerance to difference in the classroom was an absolute must for both the teacher and the students within the learning situation but on occasion I had to almost admit defeat when behavioural issues persistently impinged on the rights of others. Behaviour, like colour and beauty, is as it is perceived in the eye of the beholder but finding the fine line to differentiate between wants and needs or mischief and behaviour unsuited to class atmosphere was, at times, difficult to distinguish and mediate. In addition, it was when the difference between persistent attention-seeking behaviour clouded perceptions, confusing my boundary setting and decision making, that I found the most difficult. The close, clasping, body contact hugs sought by one student (that even alarmed a policeman when he had a leg hugged!) compared to constant calling for attention to attend to a student's work or needs made working with Pre level students interesting. Teaching sometimes became demanding, for, as I found, "The self is not infinitely elastic – it has potentials and it has limits" (Palmer, 1998, p. 16).

But, it was impossible for me to fully analyse personal chemistries and because of a lack of a common language frequently I could not gain deeper understandings of my students. I just had to work with each person as I found them, always working on what seemed to be tenuous thresholds of possibility. Although there was an element of flexibility in my "orientations of integrity and intimacy" (Kasulis, 2002, p. 135) in general boundary setting, when challenging behaviours impinged on the rights of others, the tolerance bar became more firmly set.

Vegetable-snatchers

Learning ... neither dislocates nor interrupts; it merely gives definition to what is already there. (Todd, 2003b, p. 38)

One experience which drained my energy and challenged my role as teacher for many weeks evolved around the little vegetable garden beds that the class had “ownership” of and tended in a nearby churchyard. Other classes and teachers sometimes came with us, sometimes for time-out from their classwork or sometimes seeking vegetables and herbs for class cooking. As well, the church congregation was welcome to help themselves. One other group, The Choir of High Hopes, based in the church hall, also gathered from the garden to supplement their weekly luncheon. Our garden was a catalytic gem. Composed of three relatively small beds, the little garden produced so much in the way of food, friendship and interaction with the wider community, outcomes that were immeasurable. Indeed, we were so fortunate to have been accorded such generosity by the church allowing us the use of their land.

At the beginning of a new term, with the addition of a new set of students, we set off to our vegetable garden. As we walked along the pavement, suddenly a group of women, newcomers to the class, knowing where the gardens were situated, suddenly sprinted ahead – their clothing streaming and handbags flapping from their shoulders. On arriving at the garden with our trolley of tools, the rest of the class and I were shocked to find the women scrabbling under the bird netting as they, willy-nilly, helped themselves to vegetables.

Restraining and redirecting that behaviour took quite some energy on my part and it took several weeks before the snatch for vegetables was fully curtailed. Unfortunately, the curbing then resulted in a definite reluctance to do any work at all in the garden. Those miffed by the call to participate stood about talking together, with handbags over their

shoulders and their backs to me and the working students. Soon enthusiasm came alive again at the end of the garden sessions, after the garden had been watered, the nets had been replaced over the beds, and tools cleaned and put away. The non-workers, still with bags over their shoulders, would manoeuvre themselves into a circle, surrounding me and the vegetable produce that was to be divided amongst the class members! The workers, most having their own highly productive home gardens, hovered at the back and were the first to be offered a share of the vegetables, much to the obvious annoyance and huffy displeasure of those standing in the front row. Being encircled so tightly, focussed in eagerness, expectantly waiting to receive their share of the vegetables, it took a number of gardening sessions before the vegetable-snatchers came to fully realise that the workers were not taking any vegetables at all and that their greedy behaviour was not respected by the other students. The workers, from other cultures, stood back quietly observing although on one occasion an older matriarch in the worker ranks, maintaining a blank countenance, quietly clucked an almost inaudible “Tut tut” in her own language – the tilt of her head and her half closed eyelids said so much.

That my repeated requests and invitations to the group to participate on a caring, sharing basis and take some ownership in the privilege of using the gardens went unheeded for some weeks was a difficult and energy draining time for me. Despite efforts to advise the vegetable-snatchers, there seemed to be no way that I could bring the message to their understanding that their behaviour was not accepted by others of other cultures in the class. Sadly, initially it seemed the focus on food and survival strategies were so deeply internalised that the concepts of collaborative work, fairness, justice, respect and responsibility held no meaning. In addition, it appeared that the generous peer modelling by the rest of the class initially had no effect. Giving some understanding to the situation Todd states, “We learn how to survive in circumstances beyond our control and how to alter those circumstances in order to survive” (1997, p. iv).

Despite my belief in the value of gardening as an outdoor release from in-class activities, the opportunity to learn new vocabulary through instructions and providing a chance to learn new work related skills for some, the challenge given to me by the vegetable-snatchers was so draining that I was very close to relinquishing the gardens altogether. The energy required to engage with the power and mediate the disrespect displayed to other class members was immense and more than I, as teacher, cared to negotiate. I do wonder, though, had I been a male teacher the situation might never have arisen?

Through my own love of gardening and belief in its benefits for all, despite the disappointment and a large dose of self-doubt in my ability to maintain respectful class interaction, perseverance was finally rewarded. As if reading and understanding Bruner (1986) and Brockmeier, the women seemed to finally accept the “idea that humans are able to create and understand meaning in a variety of cultural contexts (Brockmeier, 2009, p. 214).” Eventually, gardening and sharing became a reality. The vegetable-snatchers settled to work as part of the class team, readily sharing the produce, and, just as Lederach predicted, when,

cycles of violence are overcome, people demonstrate a capacity to envision and give birth to that which already exists, a wider set of interdependent relationships. (Lederach, 2005, p. 34).

Garden wraith reprieve

... culture and traditional values strengthen livelihood resilience and ... while the impulse for change may come from external influences, adaptation comes from within, through dynamics, which are specific to values of the people. (Daskon, 2010, p. 1080)

Out of the weeks of disappointment, angst and stern self-control in curbing the vegetable-snatchers I was more than compensated by a delightful cameo, a spark of mystical narrative to treasure.

In the first year of tending our vegetable garden the students, as well as harvesting for themselves, had harvested and prepared vegetables and herbs for entries in several flower shows. Pleased with our successes we spent our prize money on more packets of seed. On one occasion, as an additional prize, we were also given a sack of extremely strong smelling fertiliser pellets. A very useful prize but the odour was so overwhelmingly intense that the pellets had to be repacked into small, press-sealed plastic bags in order that the smell might be contained and the contents more easily scattered.

With a new influx of students, during a gardening session at the beginning of our second spring, soon after a snow fall and heavy frosts, while the warmly clad students were planting out and watering-in new seedlings I began to scatter the pungent fertiliser. Suddenly the youngest, tallest student in the class was beside me, pleading, "Yes, yes? Yes, yes?" as he gently, respectfully but determinedly tugged the bag of fertiliser from my hands. The only representative of his country in the class, quite unselfconsciously, he then began graceful, swooping, dipping, swan-like movements as he scattered the pellets over the garden beds in fountain-like arcs, as if from a bird's bill. Throughout his scattering routine, oblivious to us all, he very softly, almost inaudibly, intoned a melodic incantation as his dark, shining eyes followed the arcing flight of the brown, smelly pellets.

As if choreographed by some innate, beating pulse, with dirt encrusted trowels in hand, all of the other students, seemingly automated, stopped their work one by one and stood like garden statues to watch. The performance was so unexpected. It was as if one had caught a glimpse of a wraith moving through a secret garden, but then again, on reflection, one was not quite sure if the sighting had been a figment of the imagination or light and shadows passing the side of the old sandstone church. Coming back to be one of the group, the performer finished scattering the bag of pellets and his smile of concentration transformed to a big, sweeping smile of pleasure that encompassed us all at the end of his brief performance. His smile and sparkling eyes showed utter, self-contained joy. Then, still as if part of a staged performance, and still bound in awe, all the other students and I gave a spontaneous standing ovation.

Being witness to that performance, was one of very few occasions that I could recall, when, as class teacher, I had been in a situation where I had been privileged to be a student at the exact level of learning as my own students. Way beyond the equivalent of autotelic flow state (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), it was an occasion that I was so privileged to be part of an experience of “magical realism” (Juschka, 2003), with “reality and magic operat[ing] side-by-side, like the past, present, and future” (Ibid, p.96).

In retrospect I wondered of the provenance of that mystical performance. From what chain of memories, and from whom had the student learnt the choreography and the incantation that was so refreshingly valid far from where it had originated? I wondered how old that whole routine was – how far did it go back in history? The performance conjured so many wonderings. Had the performance been a ritual for casting seeds and not smelly fertiliser? Where and when would that student have occasion to repeat the performance? As if in the telling of a fairy story, the performer’s and the observers’ memories had been held in tension as we all, from varying cultures, became part of the drama.

In the aftermath, as we all resumed our owned reality, I wondered what memory associations had the performance stirred in the performer and the other students? Like the memories of the children at the school camp and the day of the moon landing, what were their stored memories, memories that I would never come to know.

The performance once again brought me back to the strength of memory and the power that “remembered history” (Lederach, 2005, p.142) must hold in the lives of my students. Many, with a surfeit of memories too difficult to narrate, I wonder what special, cherished memories might find a way to be narrated in some way. I think of the houses, the mountains, the flowers, plants and people depicted in the student’s paintings and drawings and wonder what memories were evoked and particularly, what silent narratives accompanying their art work might have been “lost in translation” (Bondi & Davidson, 2011). Restored memory holds such a strangely powerful place in our being, in our narratives and understanding.



Disproportionate power

The crucial problem ... is the problem of challenging what is taken-for-granted: ideas of hierarchy, of deserved deficits, of delayed gratification and of mechanical time schemes in tension with inner time. (Greene, 1978, in Playfair, 2014)

Soon I was faced with a challenge of role testing proportions. Shortly after the “vegetable snatchers” episode and while those students were settling to accept a different, sharing way of being, the next challenge confronted me – in fact the toughest I have ever confronted from an individual student. Although there have been several students over the years that have initially had difficulty in accepting mutual sharing and turn taking, after a short space of time all have soon readily become part of our class learning experience. This new student was an exception *par excellence!*

From her first day in class it was clearly obvious that the other students and I were definitely not of the social structure that this student had been accustomed to or wished to be associated with. With loud, interruptive rapping on her desk and loud, insistent calling of “Teacher, teacher. Teacher, teacher.” across the room, at a time when I was working with others, this student persistently clamoured for attention. When working from the whiteboard or doing group work, when other students were invited individually to respond to questions, this student just could not restrain herself. She was compelled to respond to every single question in a loud voice, unfortunately frequently giving incorrect answers! Gradually, over several weeks, after innumerable requests to allow others to respond to the questioning she finally curbed her responses to loud stage whispers, which in many ways had worse effect than the shouted responses. In the slow, careful building of confidence to respond to questions in English, many students were on the “verge of knowing” and almost taking the risk to respond (Buchanan, 2005, p. 42) but to be prompted with an incorrect answer, just as they were about to speak, was very unsettling for many and their confidence was severely undermined.

My nurturing of a caring, sharing, learning environment was being rapidly eroded. When politely asked to wait and take her turn, or had it pointed out that she had not been invited to answer the question, there would be a sweet voiced “Sorry teacher. Sorry teacher”, then she would drop her head and mutter quietly in her own language. But, within the same lesson, within a short space of time the same student would be repeating the same behaviour.

Her pattern of class arrival also displayed a claim for individuality. When students, even those having to put children into childcare or Pre-school arrived at school before 9 o'clock, the time we started work, this student would consistently arrive an hour later. With loud knocking at the open door, our lesson in progress would be interrupted then further shattered when she called out, “Sorry teacher. Sorry teacher.” Making her way to a back desk, as the front ones were already occupied, she would rustle noisily through plastic bags to find workbook and pencil and then sit expectantly, waiting to be brought up to date with whatever we were doing. Woe-betide me if I had handed out material prior to her arrival and she did not get a copy immediately! She would start rapping her desk loudly and impatiently with a finger as if trying to dislodge a constantly stuck piano key.

In a bizarre criss-crossing, folding and refolding of time (Jushka, 2003, p. 96) warps, roles and multiple cultures, the situation put me in mind of the old, echoing church at Tallinn, in Estonia, where, as an interloper in the peace and coolness, I had imagined myself (C. W. Mills, 1959, p. 6) as a newly-rich, mediaeval chatelaine in the beautiful, old walled city! Surrounded by the gracious dignity of my imagined neighbours as they sat listening to the liturgy, I imagined myself sending my maid, holding her long skirts, up and down through the narrow alleys and lanes to fetch ribbons and laces to bedeck myself as befitted my new status. Flitting back into the classroom, despite the gold and fine, but

fading fabrics, it seemed I was being demanded of as if I was the mediaeval handmaiden from my imagination! A role I could not accept.

The frequent loud rapping for attention was very distracting and despite my continual requests to her to refrain from doing so, she continued on. Weeks went by and finally the behaviour became intolerable for another student. One day, I was kneeling in front of a desk working with a small group of students when the rapping and calling for attention began across the room. Just as I was arising, to yet again attempt to rechannel the behaviour, another student – usually a hardworking, placid soul – at a desk close to her turned and with powerful speech snarled at the attention seeker. Not from the same culture, whatever was “said” in dialogue and body language was clearly understood by the persistent attention seeker. Like golf balls, her eyes were popping out of her head and she was speechless with her mouth wide open by the time I had clambered to my feet. As the student who had unleashed the tirade turned back to her work I also briefly caught sight of her face – it was absolutely congruent with the tone she had used in her voice. After that episode there was no more rapping! A development Todd succinctly underscores when she states,

Conversations are not just about people speaking to each other, but about the nature of listening, of receiving, of being open to something or someone outside of myself. (Todd, 2013)

That initially this student thought the class was well below her estimated ability level was also frequently thrust on me. Often in the middle of a lesson she would trill, “Teacher. Me. Me know ABC. ABCDEF ... ,” until she realised that I was politely listening but working with another student. Her reality check came, when during assessment time she certainly showed me that she knew the ABC in sequence but could not identify individual letters. For her this realisation was difficult to accept. That there were others in the class able to accomplish the tasks more ably

than her AND were being promoted to the next class was not a comfortable notion. For once I was thankful that evidence based assessment procedures were in place! For a few days she scowled and allowed turn taking to again be part of class procedure but that reprieve was short-lived.

It seemed that it had not occurred to this student that her attention seeking might be considered disrespectful for her ingrained, apparently insensitive behaviours were not to be easily checked.

Months went by. Occasionally this student would be in class by 9 o'clock and that fact would be quickly brought to my notice. While I would be in the middle of the usual round of cheerful morning greetings with the students and asking after those who had returned after illness, her loud voice would be insistently saying "9 o'clock, 9 o'clock" as if reciting a well-practised counterpoint to some obscure mantra. But, slowly, ever so slowly, this student began to participate agreeably in class proceedings, although never fully immersing herself in the learning give and take of the classroom. Day by day, I had felt tension within me as I walked into the classroom and the students, although not hostile towards her, retained a noticeable distance. The "matrix of effects" (Dilthey in Gadamer, 1998, p. 23) in the classroom certainly showed that others did not care for her habitual, boundary-pushing behaviour either. The classroom was clearly a contested space. As Palmer points out "teaching is a daily exercise in vulnerability" (Palmer, 1998, p. 17) and in this instance I knowingly adopted a "self-protective' split of personhood" (ibid) in attempting to protect the rights of all my fellow learners.

In retrospect, I can see that the divisive interaction with this student was never fully erased and I have some lingering guilt in that. Perhaps, partly because of my continual boundary setting, she never became a fully integrated member of our class. Although I consider that I "place[d] behaviour modification in a culturally compatible context" (Tanaka-Matsumi & Higginbotham, 1996, p.277), I do wonder how I could

have managed the situation differently. I cared for her, in fact I cared very much, but I could not locate or “read” her anger, her pain or grief or her needs with certainty. It was as Todd claims, “We need to develop tools for “reading” or “interpreting” meaning” (Todd, 1997, Introduction). Through my inability to reach this student I had to let her “hold” her own issues in the class environment and allow her to find her own time to set them free on the “values platform” (Morgan & Guilherme, 2014, p. 109) of the classroom. In my teacher role I could not accept total responsibility for her behaviour. Perhaps allowing some clarity, after reading Kasulis, was the recognition that in an aim for greater class “integrity and intimacy” (Kasulis, 2002, p. 135) amongst all of my students and it being reciprocated by such power from this student, had led to deep disappointment in myself. My having to let her go – my giving back to her her own responsibility for self-management, was, to me, a retrograde action that challenged my internalised sense of professional integrity. Kasulis has, however, allowed me to accept my own self more gently with his explication of “cultural integrity” (Kasulis, 2002, p 137). Now I recognise more clearly, although not recognising it at the time, that we were both holding ourselves intact to re-evaluate our stances in a space of mutual acceptance, in an “integer” (Pope, 2004, p.511), a space of negotiation and possibilities but for me, in this case, the space seemingly stretched to infinity and fallout was having a decidedly negative affect. For,

... we frequently find ourselves dealing as never before with our own prejudgements and preferences, with the forms and images we have treasured through most of our lives. What we have learned to treat as valuable, what we take for granted may be challenged in unexpected ways. We find ourselves stopped in our tracks. (Greene, 1995, p. 188)

Fortunately behaviour such as this student displayed was exceedingly rare and usually intransigent as students adjusted to their new lives, but unfortunately, prolonged behaviour such as described can take its toll on teacher confidence and enthusiasm, as well as class morale.

Reflecting on the power of the overall behaviour exhibited by this one student I was so thankful that I had not been in the early years of my teaching career. To have confronted such strength of purpose as a young teacher could have so easily destroyed a commitment to and love of teaching. Indeed, if a teacher, cat-like, had nine lives then I'm sure this student would have taken at least two!

In narrating this experience, and searching to find myself I also recognise that,

[w]hile narrative is ... clearly not always on the side of angels, it does disclose dimensions of otherness. And it is ultimately this power of disclosure which marks the basic ethical ability to imagine oneself as other. (Kearney, 1998, p.255).

This cameo also particularly illustrates the encompassing role of the interchangeable, triangulating multiple-self lenses that supported the teacher through this study when the narrating of cameos opened opportunities for multi-dimensional self-critique and deeper understanding of others. Removed beyond the teacherly stance and cycled through lenses of interpretation the teacher was gifted with new perspectives and insights allowing the teaching journey to continue - enriched.



Humour

Laughter destroyed epic distance, it began to investigate man freely and familiarly, to turn him inside out, expose the disparity between his surface and his centre, between his potential and his reality. (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 35)

Thinking of power from another dimension, it has always been my goal to promote acceptable situations for humour and laughter in the classroom, but, it took so long for me to recognise opportunities and promote them well. The impetus to focus more closely on humour came about when a student with a disability, having difficulty communicating with others, including those from his own culture, joined the class. That he would regularly withdraw into his protective shell for long periods seemed to me that, amongst other possibilities, perhaps being ignored and excluded had been a long accepted reality for him. I soon discovered, however, that his sense of humour was always close to the surface and made a pledge to myself that I would try to make him laugh at least once every day. To do this when his understanding of English was virtually non-existent and communication in his mother-tongue difficult, meant that, to convey a message to him, a reliance on gestural expression, body language and mime was essential. Gradually shedding self-consciousness and drawing on skills particularly developed when a physical education teacher and when working in Theatre in Education many years previously, my pledge came to reality. This student's laughter was infectious. Once his distinctive laughter began, heads would turn and quizzical smiles would indicate a willingness to be part of the hilarity.

The notion of developing a community of trust and care within the class was also one that I continually worked towards but as each cohort was different, with different mixes of nationalities and cultures, different personalities with different life histories, the level of community spirit varied considerably (Ennis & McCauley, 2002). Often laughter would

begin when a student openly laughed at their own art work, then sharing the picture for others to laugh at. Extraordinarily, on occasion this sharing then became a tentative use of English. “Children?” one might ask, with maybe a response such as, “Four. Four.” Said with four fingers held up. Gradually cultural insularity would fall apart.

Over time I found ways to make laughter a regular part of class sharing. It became a way of laughing with others as opposed to laughing at others, initially requiring confidence and a regular willingness on the part of me, the teacher, to laugh at myself and my own mistakes. If I made a mistake and laughed at myself while pointing it out to the class, often in mock shock, the students soon learnt that it was permissible to laugh at my mistake but that life in our classroom needed to be respectful. From that model the students soon realised that if mistakes were made or something did not succeed it was usually not of great importance. Just sometimes I might have made a deliberate error, as when writing on the board, “Today is Tuesday”, when in fact it was Monday. There would generally be a pause, as if each student was conducting an internalised reality check, then someone would find the courage to challenge me. Very soon there was a general chorus of “No [sic] Tuesday. Monday. Monday.” All would enjoy my “shock” at realising that I was wrong and was having to correct my “error”.

Our plastic-sleeved ‘readers’ were also catalysts for humour. With pictures gathered from diverse sources, some had immediate, humorous connotations. I think of the advertisement that depicted an overweight cat stuck in the cat-flap of a door. I think of the picture of a toddler who had tipped his bowl of spaghetti onto his head. Perhaps because of difference in perceptions of humour or there being a possibility of hurting cultural feelings, absurdity and humour often needed to be pointed out. Only when “permission” was given for humour to be made explicit did many students allow mirth to emerge.

In contrast, I wonder, was it perhaps as a result of determination for survival in the past that some cultures found it all too easy to openly laugh at others? When an incorrect answer was given or when someone did something differently, as when an older person may have had difficulty recalling the days of the week, sniggering laughter sometimes broke out, especially from a new cultural group when joining the class. If not checked that group form of responsive behaviour could have quickly become a general reaction and have taken time to modify, particularly if there had been a big intake of students from the same culture.

Quite differently, one cultural group that had undergone decades of persecution in their country of origin seemed to have an incredibly strong vein of shared humour. No matter how small a mistake or slipup in their daily living or class work, without a trace of malice they would laugh at and with each other. I often wondered if perhaps that form of ready humour might have been developed in response to and been instrumental in their survival through prolonged ethnic proscription. For a period it was difficult for me, and in turn the students from other cultures looking on, to identify a level of personal affront then to find, that incredibly, there was none. The problem was when the same humour was directed at others from other cultures. To their credit, however, with strong cultural ties within their community, this group learnt very quickly how to modify their humour in response to broader cultural norms.



With care, bursting out freely at times, mostly a readiness to laugh bubbled along just under our class working ethos. When doing exercises and someone could not balance for the count to 10, that person laughed and others would smile – it was not an embarrassment. When a missed word in a scanning exercise was discovered, with a big “Ohhh!” that

student laughed at their omission. To have laughter so bound into our work gave the whole class a permeating sense of lightness – an extremely precious commodity.

Since one incident in a pedagogical setting I now sometimes wonder if one can have an overdose of laughter induced endorphins and, in that wonder, recall a story my mother told of a time when she was young. Probably set in the 1920's, she had been in the audience watching her first Charlie Chaplin movie at the village town hall in New Zealand. What had always appalled me about her narrative was that the audience had been so engaged with the humour of the movie that there were people actually rolling in the aisles, some kicking their legs up as they were so overcome by the actor's ludicrous behaviour. Since hearing that story, it had always given me feelings of almost disbelief and grotesqueness that people were unable to control themselves and had displayed such an amazing loss of dignity.

Many years after hearing that story, attending a performance in Melbourne by a world-famous comedian, I laughed so much that my sides and my face really did ache for two days but I did not feel compelled to roll on the floor. Then one day, unintentionally, I became part catalyst for such behaviour.

I had organised an excursion to the botanical gardens for my class and invited a new teacher and his class to accompany us. There we had looked at and discussed the vegetable and fruit gardens, we had explored the chilly Antarctic house and had enjoyed poking into other nooks and crannies. Then, as was usual on excursions, all with early hunger pangs, it was deemed to be lunchtime. Choosing an open, grassy space with both sunny and shaded aspects we chatted and shared our lunches. While the students continued eating and chatting, the other teacher and I shifted to one side of the group to discuss the final pathways we might explore before we departed from the gardens.

But as we sat talking, unnoticed and without forewarning, a heavy-duty garden sprinkler arose from the grass behind the other teacher and me. With great power the sprinkler then projected a forceful, pulsing stream of water directly at the pair of us. Immediately we were quite saturated. With shock all over our faces we both reached for our backpacks, in the process getting drenched even further. Then, scrambling to our feet we moved quickly to a safer place beyond range of the water.

The instantaneous response from the two classes of students was one of unrestrained hoots of intense laughter. Some began rocking about, some clung to their friends, all with uncontrollable tears in their eyes. Some were rolling on the grass quite overcome with laughter. Some were not only rolling about on the grass but were actually kicking up their legs in paroxysms of laughter. Then, as if by some silent alarm system, they all took a barely respectful, momentary, guilt encumbered pause and looked towards their two bedraggled teachers, checking to see how we had reacted to our soaking.

Totally drenched, we were both still in fits of laughter, so the two classes of students from a number of cultures, returned to their previous levels of mirth. Gradually becoming more grounded as the sprinkler steadily pulsed a long, strong arc of water closer and closer to where they were sitting, the students realising their own impending dousing, were able to retrieve enough levity to pack up their lunch remains and move to safer ground. We then explored the gardens further but there was little concentration and we soon wended a wobbly path back to the city. As we walked, bouts of contagious laughter kept erupting spontaneously keeping the mood simmering and small groups, as if intoxicated, paused to support each other. We must have looked like a group that had overindulged in party revelry – as indeed we had but in a way only possible through shared camaraderie.



From that occasion I discovered believable veracity in my mother's story. Indeed, people can become so overcome with mirth that they do roll on the ground and yes, some do find cause to throw their legs in the air. In this case believing had to be in the seeing! Even as I painted these words into a cameo several years after the event, I had laughter welling up and tears in my eyes in recollection of such a spontaneous, multicultural reaction. What I do find incredible, with such a happening is why has it been reported so seldom? Is it from a legacy of socially formulated normativity, as in my own childish puritanical attitude, that we do not allow ourselves to fully experience humour? Surely the world would be a different place if reasons for healthy laughter took the place of reasons for unhealthy fear. In addition, perhaps the occasion was one in which the two teachers and the two classes found an equanimity of pedagogical friendship as basis for the extraordinary level of mirth. Derrida, interpreting Kant, gives some explanation by stating that,

In its perfection ... friendship supposes both love and respect. It must be equal and reciprocal: reciprocal love, equal respect. ... For though friendship does not produce happiness, the two feelings [sympathy and communication] composing it envelop a dignity; they render mankind being worthy of being happy. (Kant, 2005, p.253)



OH&S

... each comes ... to feel, as far as conscience genuinely infuses his vocation, what it means to be concerned with the needs and anxieties of men, and not merely ... with the satisfaction of their wants. (Buber, 1999. p.17)

Devising ways to emphasise Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) understanding for Pre level students in the many situations that such knowledge and procedures may be required in the pedagogical and local community was a necessary part of student induction and ongoing learning. Having come from places in the world where human life was constantly in threat and where escape and survival had been the focus, for most students it seemed OH&S concepts and procedures were formalities that at first appeared to be unnecessarily restrictive.

In assisting one older student to understand and inculcate safety measures both in class and on excursions proved to be particularly demanding and I never fully succeeded in heightening her notions of safety awareness. After a workplace visit, where she had particularly overstepped safety measures – when it could have been, but fortunately was not life threatening – we spent yet more class time reviewing safety procedures and safety signs. Later, on a follow up excursion to observe a major construction site from a safe, specifically allocated viewpoint, armed with worksheets and pencils we counted hard hats, we ticked off examples of various safety signs and identified aspects of safety on the work-site. As the end of the lesson coincided with home-time we were going through our usual high-five farewell ritual on the pavement when I realised that the endangered student was missing. Instructing the other students to stay as a group and quickly running to the corner of the building site I located her. Apparently having decided that it was her home-time, she had walked off. Having managed to circumnavigate several safety barricades that firmly stood across the pavement and

walked past a large notice displaying the words “NO ENTRY” – not that she could have read it! – there she was. Completely oblivious to the shouts and gesticulations of a number of workmen dressed in safety clothing and hard-hats, she was blithely walking directly underneath the heavy, dangling chains that hung from the site’s gigantic, multi-story construction crane! When I appeared on the scene demanding my student to return, it was obvious from the workmen’s reactions that they considered me to be in the category of an irresponsible mother of a wandering toddler!

For the remainder of that student’s time in class our planned excursions were very straightforward, simple events – as Biesta firmly reminds me, “In this sense responsibility is *unlimited* ...” (2006, p.30. Italics in original).



Knives and forks

One very memorable OH&S classroom incident also comes to mind. In preparation for a cooking session in which sharp knives were to be used for chopping up cheese and celery we learnt the words “cut”, “knife”, “blade”, “handle”, and “sharp”. We looked at knives both sharp and blunt. We practised passing blunt bread and butter knives correctly. We learnt to put knives down away from the edge of the table so that they did not fall and skewer feet. Then, in the next lesson, after reviewing all that we had learnt as part of knife safety, I set the celery and cheese choppers to work before turning to supervise another group preparing other food. Then, on turning back to the cheese and celery choppers I was horrified. All of them, having completed their task, had pulled chairs to the table and seated, were cheerfully engrossed in conversation. But, as they chatted, they were all casually spearing the cheese and celery that they had just finished chopping and were rapidly conveying morsels into their mouths in quick succession! What I had failed to teach was that sharp knives should not be used as forks!

It is said that old habits die hard! And certainly I failed as a teacher there.



Hands On English

To open up our experience (and, yes, our curricula) to existential possibilities of multiple kinds is to extend and deepen what we think of when we speak of a community. (Greene, 1993, p. 354)

After teaching at the Pre level for a number of years, fluctuating levels of student progress became distinctly apparent and I also became aware that there also seemed to be fluctuating cohort starting points in class ability. Concerned, I just could not identify any particular cause. Perhaps it was that a high proportion of students were of an older generation, or maybe that many came from remote areas where previously, the students had little contact with literacy concepts was a possibility. Other thoughts included possibilities of trauma related issues, perhaps childhood malnutrition or other health issues, perhaps related to not settling well to a formal learning situation after a lifetime involved in another lifestyle. That more than one issue could have been contributing to impeding the learning process, despite evidence of a will to learn, also contributed to my thinking. For students with any of these possibilities, conforming to a classroom routine must have been quite a shock. Sitting indoors, attending to academic processes and responding in appropriate sharing, caring, turn taking formats must have been an incredible imposition on many long-held personal and cultural ways of being.

As a result of several discussions with the head of school at that time, and with the support of the Department of Immigration (DIAC) and other agencies, a Saturday morning meeting was convened (14.5.2011) with invited English speaking elders and representatives from the various refugee communities. A series of questions asked of the group probed for information on the perceived needs of and expectations of those with lower levels of English and the older members of their communities.

A distinct issue that emerged from every representative group was that it was so difficult for the students to remember what had been taught

in class and there was a general plea for teachers to hear that message. Another issue that emerged from most cultures represented that day was that so many students missed tending their chickens in their respective homelands. Thinking back to the Pacific island fellow-student during my TESOL studies who, without realising, shamed me by honestly answering my question as to what she missed the most while studying in Tasmania, I was not entirely surprised to learn of the stated loss reported at the meeting. Pondering broadly, I wondered if the term “chickens” could possibly also refer collectively to the loss of homeland, loss of a way of life, and perhaps the unspeakable – loss of family, loved ones and community. Were chickens the nameable salvaged link to a past, the understanding of which, no matter how hard I tried, I would never be able to fully comprehend?

Within days of that meeting I was given permission to begin what became Hands on English (Buchanan, 2015). For two days a week we pursued more formally structured English studies and for the other two days we worked to a focussed, but less structured programme – Hands on English. As Pre level students from the wider community were also permitted to enrol through the initial funding arrangement, increasing numbers quickly necessitated the running of another class. Although clearly needed, the extra class, with extra preparation, created a rather full teaching load for me! But somehow it all worked.

With lead in time for planning and preparation so short Hands On English began on the run. That the programme began at all as a response to perceived community needs was a miracle but I was placed in a state of responsive immediacy to ensure that an underlying learning structure was in place. As with our home schooling situation, it would have been all too easy to have wandered enthusiastically into a well meant learning situation with ill-defined goals that failed to adequately meet student needs. When I now look at the slim folder I had prepared in hopeful anticipation that Hands on English might eventuate I have to smile.

Virtually none of that material was used. The situation became hands on for me too! It became a definite case of learning as we went and, like Home School, it was hard work with effort and long hours spent preparing appropriate learning material and setting up the classroom. Fortunately, the years of home schooling gave me a firm grounding on which to build the pilot study that became an ongoing reality. Incorporating cooking, painting, drawing, cutting, sawing, hammering and many other skills, the work was closely aligned to the language focus of reading, measuring, recording data, following instructions, giving oral feedback and doing homework.



Art and craft

Pedagogy has an impoverished language for the senses. (Robertson & McConaghy, 2006, p. 1)

In a way that might gently nudge at the diverse histories of the students, I felt that it was imperative for art work to be an integral part of the new programme. Each Hands on English day we began with art work. The desks were rearranged to make work tables around which groups of students worked on projects, painting, games or writing. Without the formality of the usual class setting it was a time to find new ways of being – to work with others as a group and find opportunities for communicating despite cultural and language differences.

To give themselves permission to pause and work with media in a playful way was something new for most. In fact the notion of not doing formal school work in school time was initially a difficult adjustment for some. Relinquishing formality for some took time too as they resorted to stencils and rulers to gain images or patterns that they had in mind. Each day new items related to the theme or other realia was placed on the tables as catalysts for art work but so often the realia was used as a template, to be carefully drawn around so that beans, buttons, gum-nuts, pine cones and much else continued to bear smudges of paint, crayon or felt-tip pen markings. Sometimes quickly and sometimes gradually each student found confidence to let their own self be part of what they were drawing, letting go of whatever held them to a conception of what was supposed to be “right”, and it was at that stage that, as teacher, I became aware of each student’s surge in learning. The creative spirit seemed to contribute to the learning process.

It was a must that all art work be named, and often there was a story to be “discussed” or copied and so art work became a familiar part of each student’s learning routine. No art work was deemed right or wrong or

bad. It was all good despite many initially allowing me to see their work with the accompanying emphatic statement “Not good”. When the utterance changed to “Good?” with the intonation of a question, I then knew that pride and ownership was beginning to replace a lack of confidence.



Imagination is what imparts a conscious quality to experience and the realisation that things do not repeat themselves, that experience should not be expected to be uniform or frictionless. (Greene, 1997)

Acknowledging the danger of re-traumatisation, at a time when some students were “still running”, unlike Ashton-Warner (Robertson & McConaghy, 2006, p. 11) eliciting emotion words as basic vocabulary from her students, I was not prepared to expose raw emotion. The classroom was planned to provide a relaxed space for learning, not to provide opportunity for cathartic emotional release. For some their chosen colours remained monotonously dark and sombre throughout their entire time in class and sometimes the themes depicted were repeatedly worked and reworked. Circles, maybe flowers or trees – for a few the repetition was endless. No matter how much those students were encouraged to try new colours or new subject matter there was usually little movement from their ongoing patterns but even a small reaching into something different was an opportunity for extra praise. Eventually, when the class had become a community of care, a student, recognising changed work by a classmate, would initiate praise with a comment and spontaneous applause for the work of a tentative student. And so often the response would be a shy smile.

Just as language makes some ways of saying and doing possible, it makes other ways of saying and doing difficult and sometimes even impossible. (Biesta, 2006, p.13)



Dictionaries and readers

The words the [student] learns best, those whose meaning he best fathoms, those he makes best his own through his own usage, are those he learns without a master explicator. (Rancière, 1991, p. 5)

With the development of Hands on English, I devised new literacy tools such as the *Talk To Me* reader and what was referred to in class as the *Big Yellow Dictionary*. Recognising that one cannot possibly communicate linguistically in another language until having sufficient vocabulary and, because of lifestyle and interests, not everyone is going to absorb or need an identical vocabulary structure my response was to develop a student-made dictionary. With stick-in picture-vocabulary snippets that focussed on the activities and themes we were studying in class or in community projects, the incremental development of the dictionaries and the internalising of personal vocabulary evolved side-by-side. In addition these dictionaries incorporated many learning skills including identifying the correct way up of a picture and word – even the book itself, front and back, upper and lower case, alphabetical order, initial letters of words, basic spelling, phonics, and picture-word vocabulary recognition. These dictionaries became very useful tools indeed.

If a student reported their dictionary “lost” I would not replace it, but that student was required to start preparing a new dictionary for a future student yet to come to the class. Amazingly the “lost” dictionaries always reappeared within three weeks! Over many years not one

dictionary was lost forever! Some were temporarily commandeered by other relatives or a spouse who was house-bound but eventually they all returned to class. By the end of 510 hours of class work the dictionaries were often water or coffee stained and well-thumbed but they continued to be very useful reference tools.

On one occasion a student suddenly showed symptoms of a heart attack in class. Whilst awaiting medical help I asked her what she had eaten for breakfast. The response was “Milk” [body language indicated the size of a large glass-full], “Bread” [one finger was held up meaning one slice of bread], and then, holding up five fingers, she said something that I simply could not understand. Seeing my lack of comprehension, another student immediately drew her *Big Yellow Dictionary* out of her bag and carefully searching, turned over the pages until she came to “Dd”. Urgently pointing out to me the vocabulary-picture snippet of “dates” she ensured that I understood that the ailing student had also eaten five dates that morning! All students then relaxed – getting the teacher to understand had been quite a problem!

Although taking time to put together, those dictionaries became treasured assets to learning and hopefully useful aids to self-learning outside the classroom.

Another Hands on English project I developed and introduced was a paste-in, vocabulary word list book based on themes such as “Farm animals”, “Where do you come from?”, “Verbs” and “Fruit”, with each page numbered. Maintained over several years, it was certainly a very useful tool but maintaining its currency in class with the continual influx of students was difficult. Replicating Ashton-Warner’s continuing frustrations when anticipating production of her readers (Ashton-Warner, 1963), hopes to have had the booklet put into limited publication not eventuating, individual pages of the work then became useful as homework for the various themes that we worked on in regular class and also becoming useful vocabulary lists for the deaf class.

Much easier to maintain and of greater support for independent reading and literacy, in my estimation, was the reader I developed entitled *Talk to Me*. With illustrated simple phrases, each page introduced the reader to everyday phrases with everyday vocabulary. These “books”, also paginated, allowed for instructions such as “Turn to page 6”, “Turn over two pages” and “Turn back four pages.” But, as with all of the Hands on English literacy projects that were developed on-the-run, with the continual influx of students and the difficulty of undertaking an “edit” change, this one also remained at Version 1 stage for the duration of the enquiry.



Hands on English in the community

As well as in-class activities the students were frequently involved in a range of projects and voluntary work in the wider community (Simpson & Whitehead, 2015) as our work became increasingly committed to a community engaged pedagogy. We planted bulbs in the gardens at a home for the elderly and prepared work for flower shows and a garden show. We made lanterns for mid-winter festivals and made doves for a pageant. We painted graffiti covered church hall doors and painted a traffic signal box. There were many voluntary chores we could do in the community – although sometimes invited it was mostly a matter of looking and asking if an organisation would like work done.

At the teacher level, as well as the negotiation, planning and management to be undertaken, each new activity required class preparation. New concepts of work procedure and new concepts of OH&S all necessitated the introduction of vocabulary and relevant snippets for the *Big Yellow Dictionary*. There were worksheets to prepare and

sometimes the practising of new skills in class. Preparation was endless but so were the results and the interaction with the wider community provided opportunities for mutual acceptance.



There is one especially memorable occasion I recall from our many community projects undertaken. With enormous enthusiasm and much learning-on-the-job, the students became involved in a Landcare project, planting native trees and shrubs along a small, partly tidal creek. They dug holes, matched plant labels to marked planting spaces, planted and tended the plants. It was good work well done. But I will long hold the memory of the students, from a number of nationalities, after their work was done for the day, setting off through the adjacent park along the wide, winding pathway, back to the bus stop that was on a nearby busy highway. With linked arms they all, overflowing the pathway in a ribbon of gay abandon, sang and danced their way along, joining in the unending string of each other's traditional songs as well as they could. The looks of staring wonder on the faces of eight police officers, as they drove slowly past in two marked police cars, was a picture. With quizzical staring, the local folk obviously also wondered about our sanity or sobriety when the singing and dancing continued as we waited for our bus to arrive! What a great group.



Cast into the unknown

The greatest concern of the human being is to know how he should properly fulfil his station in creation and rightly understand what one must be in order to be a human being. (Kant, 2005, p.6)

I have often wondered what has eventuated from our class work, our themes and projects, and our work together. Mixed with life-learning, what is it that my students have taken with them? How often I wish that assessment results could divulge such information, for, on such enlightenment I could, more astutely, build my pedagogical philosophy and work.

At the traditional wedding of the daughter of one of my students I chanced to meet a couple that had been in the very first class of Hands on English some years previously. The wife had been very enthusiastic about learning and had particularly enjoyed trying to memorise and use the vocabulary in her *Big Yellow Dictionary*. As the couple had been about to go to work in a vineyard at the time when they left class, I recalled her urging her husband to say “secateurs”. “Sec-a-ters. Sec-a-ters” she would repeat over and over to him in great urgency. But the husband, with long legs and a lifetime of farming behind him was so obviously uncomfortable at a desk. Folded into a chair, inside a big, air-conditioned building was not a good place – and I felt for him. In class I recall having “asked” about the crops and animals he had owned. Amongst the details he had divulged was that he had owned four horses and from that information the brown, plastic toy horse in the classroom, with flowing mane and tail, was always known as his horse.

Wonderfully, meeting the couple at the wedding I noted that, although their English had progressed little, they were both happy and in good health. With time to talk after the wedding, when I asked about work, they were both pleased that the husband had employment. Gradually, through the “discussion” of his vineyard, orchard and farm

work, the husband's talk turned from tractors to horses and, without any provocation, he indicated that he had once owned four horses. Then, with a gentle, introspective smile and a far-away look, as if touching each horse in reality, he proceeded to slowly and gently stroke four fingers in turn with a pointed finger of the other hand as he counted in English. Looking on, I momentarily thought of Buber and the grey horse of his memory and my own giant teddy-bear of a horse.

In their new lives my students leave so much behind – escaping and leaving so much, in reality gaining I know not what. Certainly formal student assessments have not illustrated the picture I have been looking for.



Now, in closing this section of the experimental study, I take a check-pace with the intention of critically affirming or, if necessary, realigning my teaching practice in relation to the ever-evolving theoretical matrix that has supported the research. In reflection, I too felt as if I too was cast into the unknown, emerging only briefly throughout the very mixed contexts and constraints of teaching former refugee adults learning language at preliminary level. Drawing on a critical analysis of the theoretical and conceptual design, I ask, what is it that I can extract and what recommendations should I take onwards?

In my ever evolving theoretical approach I would definitely claim greater support from some of the philosophers, such as Luciano Floridi (2015), who are struggling with the issues of our rapidly changing technological, political world. Imparting logic, envisaged scenarios and way markers relating to the place of humanity in our world of the ongoing future, from which guidelines for humanitarian understanding and pedagogical practice may be derived, must be given credence in sincere relationship to the varied cultural backgrounds of the students.

I would also reacquaint myself with philosophers that have imparted sparks of wisdom, thereby giving substance and aspects of thinking that has confronted ways that I have not been open to see previously. Works by writers such as Arendt, Kierkegaard, Guyau, Todd and Tolstoy particularly call me to pay closer attention.



Chapter VIII Signs of Learning



Deafness in a culture of education

Working in deaf education is challenging as it involves engaging with complex linguistic, political and sociocultural issues as well as the development of educational and technical expertise. Educators of [the] deaf ... need to be well prepared for uncertainty because there are so many questions and ideas still to explore and the ground is also constantly shifting, and so teachers have to assume that they will be agents of change, rather than expecting others to lead them. (Swanwick, 2010, p. 147)

Several years before the above quotation was published, when already working with my first adult deaf student in our Pre English class, after a conference, with other delegates waiting for homeward connecting flights, an international keynote speaker focussed on me during a lull in conversation and asked with genuine interest, “What do you do?” I briefly explained my teaching work and how I was exploring the use of fingerspelling to help introduce the alphabet, phonics, spelling, number and other literacy work to both hearing and deaf adult, former refugee students beginning to learn English. “This is information we need. Where have you published?” was the enthusiastic response. Feeling rather embarrassed, as to me the project ideas were still very much at Version 1 stage, I mumbled that probably similar work had already been published. Thankfully the surrounding conversation then moved on. Later, when leaving to catch her flight, this academic shook her finger at me across the circle with the admonition, “You must publish!”

More work with fingerspelling and quite some years slipped by before there was opportunity to write about my journey with the versatile tool of fingerspelling, so herewith, is an updated version of the information that was never published.



In this section of the enquiry I now focus on my teacher role being confronted with and challenged by the ethical dilemma of accommodating students with deafness in the Pre level English class. It was a dilemma that demanded change in pedagogical thinking, change in lesson delivery, change in class management, the making of appropriate new class materials and the learning of fingerspelling to accommodate perceived needs and strategies. With no training and no model to work from, drawing from previous experience in a diversity of pedagogical environments, the dilemma continually confronted new facets of experimentation, learning and understanding as I found new steps forward. It was definitely a case of “learning to think with what you’ve already got hold of” (Bruner, 1996, p. 129). Part of the dilemma was always that progress never seemed to be fully overcome. As new deaf students, each with different needs, became part of the class that had its own diversity of needs, new ideas and strategies were ever evolving. It was as if tripping over each new goal before finding the challenge. It was as if relentlessly plodding towards a horizon that continually shifted out of range but perversely stayed much the same! That does not mean that the work was not satisfying – it most certainly was.

In contrast the two projects that took fingerspelling in new directions, fingerspelling to support learning in horticulture and the little class for “hearing impaired”, did have specific goals. Although both were definitely challenging, again there were no model precedents. Taking strength and impetus, knowledge and basic philosophical grounding from

lived experience and previous pedagogical projects I embarked on the addressing of yet more new challenges. Although explored with pedagogical emphasis, the whole journey was one giant triptych cameo that allowed me to explore the unknown as I put my underlying pedagogical philosophy into action.



Man communicates with man through the works of his hands just as through the words of his speech ... (Rancière, 1991, p.65)

Coinciding with the beginning of my research for this study, the first deaf, former refugee student to join our Pre class provided the first of many challenges that set me on a tangential teacherly pathway of teaching English to deaf students that were not literate in the mother-tongue of their own culture. Adding to the challenge there were a few deaf students with no hearing and no oracy and some with other learning needs. As more deaf students joined and flowed through the mainstream class with their allocated 510 hours of English learning, the pathway broadened as I observed, experimented and searched for pedagogical strategies that assisted them all. But, feeling exceedingly isolated, as if stumbling along an overgrown pathway, as the work proceeded and developed I seemed to flounder ever on as I learnt and slowly added to my understanding and teacherly knowledge.

Fingerspelling

A description of use of the body as a form of intelligence may at first jar. There has been a radical disjunction in our recent cultural tradition between the activities of reasoning, on the one hand, and the activities of the manifestly physical part of our nature, as epitomised by our bodies, on the other. This divorce between the 'mental' and the 'physical' has not infrequently been coupled with a notion that what we do with our bodies is somehow less privileged, less special, than those problem-solving routines carried out chiefly through the use of language, logic, or some other relatively abstract symbolic system. (Gardner, 1993, p. 208)

The first deaf adult, former refugee student that came to my regular Pre English class was profoundly deaf and, initially, I thought he was also mute. Apparently from a family with other deaf members, I understood that they had communicated with a form of sign language but, what it was, unfortunately I did not discover and nor did I knowingly observe a vestige of it. I was intrigued that this student's tongue was quite atrophied, being about the size of a large thumb. As the students and I regularly did exercises in class, the other issue I quickly noted was that this student's body movements were unusually stiff, his arms could barely reach above shoulder level, balancing on one foot was impossible and walking was almost a lumbering gait. When he left the class it was gratifying to me that, his step was more confident, he was much more flexible and he participated in our regular exercise sessions with great enthusiasm.

Observing interaction between this student and another family member, I also noted that their perfunctory communication was mostly by almost expressionless facial and head movements accompanied by very brief shadows of eye contact, or was it by other subtle body language that I had not perceived? Throughout class lessons this student's concentration span was exceedingly short, he would lose focus and mentally wander off into his own world but, with time and encouragement, longer and longer

spells of concentration were achieved. Appearing to have no residual hearing, this student did not have hearing aids fitted during the time he was in our class.

Although from the west Asian region, this student was soon befriended by a hearing student from Africa who, through his own volition, adopted the deaf student as his class buddy. Sitting next to the deaf student, ensuring that he was aware of changes in class instructions, ensuring he had a pencil, or enough money with him for minor needs, the deaf student was so fortunate to have had such a wonderful guardian angel. Despite little communicative response or interaction, to his great credit the hearing buddy stalwartly retained the friendship throughout the months of class time together.

As teacher, my concern was confronting – how was I going to teach this student? Not only was he not literate in the language of his own culture, but in addition he could neither hear nor speak either his own language nor the new target language, English. Where could I find a starting point? With little understanding of, and certainly no experience in teaching the deaf, I embarked on a challenge that drew me along a new path in teaching adult, former refugees. Legally the student, as a humanitarian entrant to Australia, was eligible to be enrolled in the English class but ethically and pedagogically how was I to meet this new challenge? Apart from playing with semaphore and a little morse-code, my training and life experience had not encompassed any form of signing language. There were two pieces of information that were my starting points. The first was that the local deaf organisation was to teach Auslan, the recognised sign language of the deaf in Australia (Lo Bianco, 1987), to the student and his family. The second, ultimately more useful than the first, was a page torn from an old telephone directory that depicted the fingerspelling alphabet. What a start!

Whilst awaiting the Auslan tutoring for my student and his family to commence, in the interests of equity, the college set in place an

employed Auslan interpreter in the classroom for one day a week. As teacher, from the start the situation became one of increasing tension. I was asked to submit my work-plan a week before each class was to take place. This was a challenge in itself, for with a pre-literate class, although a teacher knows roughly what will be covered regarding theme and vocabulary, if understanding of concepts required further clarification then work was likely to proceed more slowly to allow for more extensive teaching and revision.

Given that the deaf student had no grounding in Auslan whatsoever, already I could foresee that the project was going to be an interesting experience. An interpreter for one student in a class of beginner learners of English, all learning the intricacies of a culture of education and from various ethnic backgrounds was, for me, an odd concept. Inwardly and outwardly I questioned the project on ethical grounds, in that the student was being subjected to the learning of two distinct languages at once – English and Auslan (Lo Bianco, 1987). There was also the issue of equality as others in the class had significant speech, eyesight and learning difficulties, yet assistance for them had not been given similar consideration.

Duly the weekly visits by the interpreter began. The interpreter insisted on standing in front of my left shoulder wherever I was in class, so when I turned to write on the whiteboard, then turned back to the class, there was this human wedge to negotiate before I could continue with a lesson. Of greater concern was that the deaf student, with no knowledge of Auslan, had a person focussing on him, mouthing incoherent messages with arms widely gesticulating an unending whirl of semaphore-like gestures. Everything I said was “interpreted” to the one, non-comprehending, student. To further complicate the situation, the other students had difficulty seeing me, as I was partially obscured from their sight by a human who was emitting a filtering windmill of flailing arms wherever I moved about the classroom. This was a problem for all

students as I use a great deal of body language when teaching Pre level. This situation went on for some months and the anticipated Auslan lessons for the family failed to eventuate. It was certainly a relief to me when one day the deaf student, whilst working with a librarian at a computer during our Learning Centre time, somehow made it known to the interpreter that he no longer required “interpreting” services!

One of the issues that arose during the Auslan interpreter’s time in our class was that my attempts to engage the deaf student with lip/speech reading, and also my call for his attention to facial expression and mouth shape in oracy, were definitely not approved of by the interpreter. I so wanted to give the deaf student opportunities to participate in oral and other class work as a link to communication, reading and other literacy skills, even if he later chose not to develop oracy as a communicative tool – my reasoning being that he had voluntarily chosen to enrol to learn English. My other motives behind the call for attention to speech reading were to not only engage the student in body language “dialogue” but also to promote greater concentration and a longer focus on communication with others. But, as a consequence, when encouraging speech-reading during lessons I would be curtly reprimanded – apparently the learning of speech-reading was considered to be against the ethos of the deaf community to which the interpreter belonged. Apparently this interpreter believed that if you are deaf then you belong to the deaf community and that the language of the deaf should be the primary means of communication (Jones, 2002; Hallahan & Kauffman, 2000, p.358). To me, this thinking did not fully acknowledge other means of communication expected by social groupings in the wider community that my students might be affiliated with, nor did it leave a place for goals and aspirations that individuals might hold and strive to fulfil. Supporting this notion Josselson and Harway note that, “[p]eople live at the edges of more than one communal affiliation, bridging loyalties and identifications” (2012, p.3). In addition the ethos, as I perceived it, appeared to be a claim for a culture of exclusion. Having already become aware of politics within

the deaf community (Mertens, Sullivan & Stace, 2011; Baker & van den Bogaerde, 2010, p. 248; Senghas & Monaghan, 2002, p. 71; Clark, 2000, p. 66) when previously working as a counsellor in the wider Tasmanian community, I continued with my teaching of English with all of the tools I felt to be appropriate for the students. Having already begun introducing finger-spelling, based on the British two-handed system (Schembri, 2005) and the Auslan fingerspelling alphabet (deafchildreinaustralia.org.au), I also incorporated some Makaton manual signing for the vowels particularly. Makaton having been devised in the 1970's, as "a language programme integrating speech, manual signs, and graphic symbols, developed to help people for whom communication is very difficult ..." (Oxford English Dictionary, 2004). I also included some universally accepted and readily understood hand signs, such as "good", "high", "low" and "little", to give visual vocabulary support for the class as a whole.



Although an absolute beginner of fingerspelling at this stage, I recognised the potential benefits of it for all of my students and when a commercial method of phonics instruction was touted for class use, I remained firmly convinced that fingerspelling was providing beneficial literacy support to my Pre level students. From many nationalities, with different learning needs and with varied pronunciation issues at their preliminary level of learning, fingerspelling appeared to fulfil many learning requirements. With a lack of literature corroborating my thinking the use of fingerspelling to support both deaf and hearing adult students in their English language learning was yet another intuitive stance in my pedagogical journey. Instinctively I felt that hands, being part of the body, were much more present as aids to learning than some paper-based, rote learned system that had little recognition or use in the wider community. In my estimation, the benefits of fingerspelling included it being a system that did not require charts once the basic alphabet was learnt, as a system it was a simple aid to help literacy learning and could also be used for

interactive communication in the community. I also recognised that by learning fingerspelling, the preliminary level deaf students were taking a step towards learning Auslan signing if and when they so desired (Haptonstall-Nykaza, 2007).

To be confronted by the Auslan language in addition to English simultaneously, by two people in authority in the classroom, just did not seem logical. It seemed unrealistic to expect deaf students to learn another recognised language at Pre level during allocated English teaching time. In addition the imposition of the interpreter's claim for space was clearly making class intercommunication difficult. I saw that as all of the students, by choice, had enrolled to learn English, it was my job to assist them all to meet that aim to the best of my ability. Supporting this thinking Hanafin, Shevlin and Flynn state,

Educators are charged with the task of developing an education system that recognises and affirms pupil diversity. Such a system must move beyond valuing pupils according to their competence in a restricted number of areas. Rather, pupil diversity in learning must be welcomed through a range of pedagogical approaches, curricular initiatives and the creation of a supportive classroom environment. (Hanafin, Shevlin & Flynn, 2002, p.409-410)

And so my fingerspelling improved and I continued on. Having had some notion of the worth of incorporating codes, sign and symbol interpretation during the years with my Home School students, for not only was it fun but it also challenged thinking, the issue of accommodating deaf adult students, enrolled to learn English, forced me back into exploring the notion of multiple sign systems in the learning environment (Klein, 2003, p. 73). However, as I soon discovered,

[f]ully understanding language acquisition in sign languages can challenge some of our theories of spoken language acquisition, and means that we may have to adapt other theories and modes. (Baker, 2015, p.1)

With my first deaf student, I discovered very quickly that he was not entirely mute but for quite some time he was resistant to speech-reading. Preferring to sit at the back of the class, on the periphery of class activity and communication, eventually, somehow his class buddy drew him into the midst of class seating and participation. With continued support, he and the class as a whole were thrilled when he audibly articulated his first word, “pie”, in context. So often I have wondered why he chose that word to be his first for, derived from a picture in our display-folder readers, it was merely an incidental word in the class vocabulary. Although highly aspirated, it was a distinct word. It was a breakthrough for him for which he received a spontaneous round of applause from the whole of the class and his modest smile in response indicated some pride in his achievement. As time went by he managed a small range of words and continued to use his voice for some communication but, as with his attention span, confidence to use his new found voice was very tentative. Similar to other profoundly deaf students I have had since that time, confidence and the will to communicate appeared to fluctuate considerably for, perhaps as Allwright observes,

Being unable to communicate properly with others because you do not know the language well enough means you are likely to appear less intelligent, less well-informed, and socially less confident than you feel you should. (Allwright, 1986, p.50)

Although a very patient class volunteer spent time working with this student on communication, literacy and oracy, the very slow rate of progress frustrated the tutor and eventually this work was abandoned. Oh, to have had the opportunity and time to work with this student on a more intensive basis.

Getting started with fingerspelling in the classroom entailed hanging a large chart of letters and another of numbers close-by on the

wall so that I could make easy reference to them if confused or memory failed me, but soon I was underway. Although now many years old, those same two charts, affixed to the wall, stay at hand for easy reference for those visitors or students needing a prompt.

Finding my way, at first only with class alphabet work and spelling, activities my method of teaching in the mixed deaf and hearing class was mostly based on a combination of fingerspelling along with body language or other devised signs, especially for double letters, silent letters and digraphs during spelling activities. Gaining greater proficiency and confidence in fingerspelling, my use of the skill as a tool soon extended to all of our class work.



Scanning learning horizons

The change in class routine to accommodate the first deaf student was quite marked, yet I am sure it was not to the detriment of learning for the hearing students. For example, in our class, singing had been an important and pleasant way of supporting reading, vocabulary acquisition and understanding of sentence structure, but being profoundly deaf the deaf student was unable to replicate the rhythm of songs or participate meaningfully in singing as a class activity. To ensure inclusiveness, change brought greater emphasis on vocabulary and clapping patterns for alphabet, vocabulary, syllables, simple exchanges and also numbers. Thus, our singing sessions became fewer and I placed greater emphasis on clapping and stomping patterns for syllables and chants, sometimes with basic musical instruments. Based on the concept of the Sound of Music song, “Do Re Mi” (Rodgers and Hammerstein, 1959) we used all sorts of alphabet and phonemic combinations to emphasise beat, pitch and rhythm. In addition, as an aid to further mobilise the deaf student’s tongue and vocal chords, as a class, we explored literacy and vocalising in round-about, non-confrontational ways – emphasising ends of words, chanting rhyming words (cat, hat, mat), and exploring opposite pairs (up-down, yes-no). Although perceived as a fun activity, the work also incorporated correction of oracy for some of the hearing students, and pronunciation was treated as a general class issue in the ever evolving pattern of work.

As part of scaffolding for class reading of texts such as the weekly computer worksheet, through careful instructions (Buchanan, 2005; 2007), I would guide the students to accomplish fairly complex text scanning activities as fun challenges. Demonstrating the process on the board, I would ask the students to find all of the words in the text that perhaps said “IS”, “AND”, or another basic word that was repeated twice or more in the text. With a ruler to assist, they would then scan the text, working left to right, line by line from the top down. The students might

have been asked to put two lines under (one line under, a wiggly line under, or a circle around) every target word that they found. Once the class had located the specified word located in various parts of the text, had followed the instructions and then counted the number of target words located, I wrote the number beside the word on the board. Discrepancies created lots of checking and laughter. Soon I found that from my modelling scribed on the whiteboard and the modelling of his buddy, the deaf student could follow the instructions that had been given to the hearing students. He eagerly became involved in this activity but it was so disappointing for me that he could not participate in the reading activities that followed and had to leave the main text to do something at his own reading level. This problem worried me for some time until I began signing the initial letter of each word or syllable which allowed participation and an introduction to longer texts.

The incremental development of the deaf student's skills, as with the progress of so many of the Pre students, could, unfortunately, be given little credit within an official assessment context but it was so gratifying when progress of any sort was achieved.



Fingerspelling aiding spelling

Once this deaf student had settled into class and had some understanding of fingerspelling – and I too had progressed a little – I invited a deaf student from a higher level class to join our class for an hour long “spelling” session each week. Although termed “spelling”, in effect, aided by fingerspelling, we were looking at vocabulary and phonetically exploring some of the words associated with the theme currently being studied as well as working on short texts. This student, from a totally different culture and already becoming proficient with Auslan, was an asset as a role model for my deaf student. She would get impatient when he lost concentration and would give him a nudge, then demanding his attention, would mouth a word or letter, and repeating my signing she would call his attention back to the class tasks in hand. Baker confirms and clarifies my observation of attention variance in the statement that,

Of course, learning a sign language also requires a different form of visual attention ... [t]here is a complex visual attention pattern [and] ... the attention factor needs to be included [not only] in models of sign language acquisition, but also [in] spoken language acquisition” (Baker, 2015, p.2)

This time of learning for me was a time of intensive searching for possibilities and a thinking pattern that explored teaching methods. There was so much to learn and so much to explore but my progress seemed to be frustratingly slow.



Communication and Learning

From the time of my first deaf student there was nearly always at least one deaf student in the class but, immediately after the first departed there was a short period before the next arrived. Having worked hard on my fingerspelling capabilities I briefly stopped using it as a class learning tool, mostly because I failed to fully comprehend how useful the technique was in supporting language learning for all students with their varying learning styles and abilities (Gardner, 1993; Eberle, 2011) at the Pre level. But resounding confirmation of its usefulness for hearing students beginning to learn English was clearly conveyed to me soon after the first deaf student's departure. His hearing buddy, having also completed his hours, came to see me after class one day to tell me what he was doing. As we "talked" he suddenly paused as he memory searched for a word that he needed for the communication. Guessing correctly that the word was "go" I unobtrusively fingerspelt the letter "G" low in his peripheral vision. The fellow's face cleared and using the word "go" he continued with what he was saying. That was the check and confirmation that I needed telling me how useful the tool was with hearing students as well. Fingerspelling then became part of my ongoing teaching repertoire. Although not taught as a specific technique, it became absorbed, as if by osmosis, as we learnt the alphabet, the days of the week, numbers, and went about our daily class activities. The only time I was more explicit with fingerspelling was when students had issues in differentiating vowels. I then worked with such students - hearing or deaf - individually, usually in conjunction with a phonics iPad app. as their learning and understanding had clearly reached a level of proficiency that required further support.



Downside of confidentiality

An issue that left me constantly watchful over all of my deaf students was that, with our understandable legal/ethical standards of confidentiality, I was not informed as to the levels of deafness of students. Because of a lack of English to explain, the students were unable to tell me how long they had been deaf – that information giving me some indication of how much of their mother-tongue language they were likely to have, how much residual hearing they had, what level of hearing they had once they acquired hearing aids, even which ear was the better one for listening. It was a constant guessing game and vigilance was necessary for clues so that I might be better able to help each at their own level. I looked for student communication with their own family, community and class members, how well they attended to what was going on in class, how responsive they were to oral work and what sort of sounds they could hear.

Having had a deaf, white cat as a family pet when a child, I was aware that it often settled on top of a radio - an old valve radio in those days. Not only was the radio a place out of the way of a busy family, it would have been warm, and, maybe even the vibration of sounds from music, singing and speech may have been of comfort. The only time that the cat pricked up her ears was when a soprano singer sang in top register. This gave me the idea of giving a quick, rising whistle to regain attention from the deaf students, particularly in a less formal class situation when, with short concentration spans, they turned and walked away from me when I wanted to complete some information. It sometimes worked and those that responded obviously did not find it offensive, in fact it was seen as a game. The hearing members of class sometimes paused to see if the “message” had been “heard” but, then again, just maybe that focussed pause by others gave a message to the deaf student that further attention was being sought!



Teacher training

With another student, recognising that particularly since having hearing aids fitted, she continued to have very short spans of focus when involved in interpersonal communication with me, despite her concentration on tasks being exceptionally good, I devised a routine that appeared to help her but definitely challenged me. In the midst of giving information she would hold focus until the first pause, virtually to what would be a comma pause in literacy. My attempts to redraw her attention by gently patting the desk with a flat hand always resulted in a short refocus, after which her attention would again immediately revert to the task in hand before what was being communicated had been fully conveyed. Being a diligent student I reasoned that this was possibly a habit developed early in her deafness, perhaps a habit to scan the environment to ascertain what was happening about her when hearing was giving little or no assistance in gaining that information.

In attempting to hold this student's focus I tried to train myself to remember to indicate how many pieces of information I was about to give at any one time. In doing this I would give her silent cues. If there was only one piece of information or one stage in a process I would hold up one finger, as in the fingerspelt number one. If there were two pieces of information I would hold up two fingers and point to one finger before I gave and completed conveying the first piece of information. Then I would point to the second finger before I gave the secondary piece of information, finally giving a smile and nod when my message was complete.

Training myself to remember to give this information within the whirl of class work focus was quite a challenge. However the student, a cheerful, eager worker, appeared to be aware of what I was attempting to help her do, and more importantly, she had the patience to co-operate with my attempts. Despite occasional miscommunication, mostly our work together synchronised well. Although I had noted the short focus on

a communicator and abrupt, cursory scanning with deaf students previously, the behaviour had definitely not been congruent with that particular student's exceptional concentration on literacy tasks. As a consequence, through her influence I learnt to indicate the number of information "packages" I was about to give, not only to the deaf students but also to the class as a whole – thus the mnemonic learning included us all!

That time of onset of deafness and the amount of residual hearing might have some bearing on each deaf student's socialisation were also unknowns that I always had at the back of my mind. Sadly for some, it appeared that deafness had been the cause of social isolation and discrimination. In addition, as with all of my Pre students, it was frequently difficult to distinguish other learning difficulties within the multiple issues related to resettlement, adult Pre level learning and the acquisition of another language. Dual sensory loss, deafness and blindness, was also an issue for a few that necessitated other modified strategies.



Interest in my work was indicated by the Federal Department of Immigration and Cultural Affairs (DIAC) when I was asked for details as to how I worked with deaf students in a combined deaf/hearing class at preliminary level. My emailed response at that time indicated my own learning and understanding to that date. I concluded the report with,

Given that there seemed to be so little material available when I started, most of what I did was trial and error, however, I was pleasantly surprised how much of it worked. My big regret was that there was so much that could have been done and made – particularly in the way of materials - but there was not enough time or energy to do it all. (email extract, 17.9.2008)



Recognising a learning tool

As I flapped my hands around with fingerspelling, new hard of hearing students would not immediately recognise that I was using a strategy that could help them in their language learning. Mostly they were confused and overwhelmed with culture shock in their new homeland. However, one new deaf student came to class, and as usual, enabling benefit from any residual hearing and the fostering of speech-reading skills, I sat him in the front row. On his first day in class we were going through the alphabet from the frieze above the whiteboard as I fingerspelt each letter in turn. On completing the alphabet, I could not believe it when the student rocked back, with his chair on two legs, uttering joyous sounds of approval as he threw his hands in the air. Not being sure of his intent and without looking at him, I repeated the exercise and got exactly the same response. Then I knew that he knew that my fingerspelling effort made sense to him! In all the years of using fingerspelling, this student was the only one from Pre level who recognised the learning link from the outset. A delightful, hardworking student who possibly had later onset of hearing loss as well as possibly having had some previous experience in a culture of education, this student progressed well.



Hearing aid issues

You may want to know – how does it sound, this new language? It can be crackly, squeaky, metallic, rumbly, resonant, piercing and quite unlike the sounds I think I can remember. But with variations in pitch, rhythm and length the noises do have some meaning – especially with imagination and wild guesses. (Dunn, 2000, p. 14)

The excerpt above is from a letter written by Anne Dunn sent to Professor Clark after she had received one of his bionic ear inventions. If my students had the vocabulary and linguistic ability I suspect most would have tried to tell me something very similar after they had their first hearing aids fitted.



When deaf students initially arrived in class it was often difficult to discover how much they could hear, in fact some had a hearing difficulty that they seemed unable to acknowledge. My first deaf student was not given hearing aids during the time that he was in our class and for some it took months before they were finally screened and fitted with them. Thankfully, the system improved so that assessment and the fitting with hearing aids, when necessary, became part of post-arrival health screening. Even so the transition from not ever having used hearing aids to wearing them brought a period of adjustment.



After being fitted with new hearing aids I discovered many students seemed to go through a marked responsive pattern. Initially, they were generally worn with pride, although a few would hide the fact that they were wearing aids by wearing hats to cover them. Usually there was almost hyper-alert, hyper-vigilant behaviour, higher levels of focus would be maintained in communication, and generally the students focussed with longer concentration spans on tasks. Finger spelling was generally followed more closely and there was more awareness of gesture and speech reading. In addition, especially with female students, a strong compulsion to engage in communicating orally in their mother-tongue language with others in a social context, often, very loudly and inappropriately during class activities, would become evident! For a time there would generally be noticeable progress in class based language and literacy. My workbook records the reaction for one student, a typical observation for the first day of having hearing aids in class;

B ... has new hearing aids. Her head was bobbing up and down all day as she tried to follow what was happening in class. She must have been exhausted at the end of the day!

With the benefit of hearing aids, communication with others in both mother-tongue and English was noticeably lengthened but, all too soon problems emerged. Soon batteries started to fade and sometimes, the hearing aids not fitting well, would hurt their ears or begin to squeal. For a week or so the hearing aids would be left at home and when “asked” orally and with mimed speech where they were, there was usually a dismissive wave of the hand with “home” or “lost” as the response. During that time concentration would drop markedly, sometimes briefly to near intake level, confidence dropped and self-esteem seemed to plummet. What was more disturbing was that there sometimes seemed to be a return to a cocoon, or even a mute state with very little communication attempted, even with those of the same culture. Once hearing aids had been refitted or new batteries inserted then progress resumed. Although each student

reacted differently, the teeter-totter swing related to the functioning of hearing aids became quite apparent and was something I looked out for in all of my deaf students. In addition, there seemed to be no reliably predictable pattern of reaction and acceptance to the new aids.

The following extract from my journal highlights one observation.

K... arrived early today and proudly showed me her new hearing aids. Having previously trialled an exceedingly cumbersome earphone and waistbelt-worn system she was so proud of her new aids. During the morning, mostly for me to observe how she responded, we had singing. It was not quite what I had expected – totally focussed on my face and instantly finding a new voice, in very off key, somewhat in echolalia form K... lustily warbled, wailed and joyously “sang” with us! I was shedding a, hopefully unnoticed, tear and her classmates, with rounded eyes, tried to concentrate on their singing. We sang again the next day. With increased confidence and with head back, as if singing to the moon, again without reference to her song book, K’s loud, off-beat crooning, droning and howling nearly drowned everybody else’s voice, much to the barely concealed amusement of her class mates. It was just as well that most of them sat behind her. Her pervading, upwelling joyousness in being able to participate was all encompassing but, I have to admit that, I too struggled to keep a straight face as her voice soared off to strange notes and crescendos not in the tune. With quick glances up from the words and picture clues in their song books and exchanging small, conspiratorial nods and shared smiles of understanding we all accommodated her “singing”. As adults from many cultures, it was a special moment for us all as a class community.

Summing up the story my journal entry concludes,

Our singing was wonderful. Diction was not good. Tunefulness was not good but a love of life and the being togetherness was tremendous. Am not sure how much English was achieved!!



Oracy and Pronunciation

Especially for those deaf students having some degree of residual hearing and some mastery of their own language I considered the enhancement of any oracy, whether in mother tongue or English, to be of great importance. With this as a working baseline, on occasion I would try to build on remembered mother tongue vocabulary, usually elicited by asking and miming “What is that in your language?” of hearing students. A question that sometimes caused long pauses as the student memory-searched for the word. Those long pauses intrigued me and I wondered if trauma had caused the memory lapse but then I realised there was another possible cause. Many students, in fleeing their own country, had become immersed in the cultures and languages of host or countries of transit. And, in specifically asking, “What is that in **YOUR** language?” there was obviously some code sorting taking place. Fruit and vegetables provided the usual catalysts for response and by writing the words down phonetically we would compare sounds and delight in the giving and sharing of words, a sharing that could easily take over much class time! By eliciting vocabulary in the deaf students’ mother tongue and internally comparing the deaf student’s utterance with the speech of hearing students from the same language group I became aware of pronunciation and other differences, differences that could sometimes be addressed through the English alphabet and language, a strategy that did not compromise what ability the deaf student retained in their own mother tongue. Confirming my thinking Baker reminds me, “all deaf people are bilingual to a degree, therefore codemixing is to be expected. However the codemixing is more code-blending” (Baker, 2015, p.2).

Pronunciation for all second language learners was a concern, both for the learners themselves and the teacher. Generally, most cultural or ethnic groups have their own specific sets of English pronunciation issues that required strategies to overcome but for the deaf, pronunciation often

created very real challenges for both student and the, untrained speech-therapist, teacher .



Fingerspelling in the Horticulture classroom

The distance between what is expressed and the means of expression itself must be bridged by a double-edged line of thought. (Lefebvre, in Middleton et al, 2011, p. 85)

Taking a break from general teaching at the Pre level, for most of one year I was appointed as English Language Support teacher to a group of upper Preliminary level/Certificate 1 students, of several nationalities, who were enrolled in Horticulture Certificate II.

Of the eager learning group, all but three of the students had been previous, hearing students with me in our Pre class and although needing revision, they were reasonably proficient in fingerspelling. Of the other three students, one was deaf and wore hearing aids some of the time – when they were not squealing and when he had batteries that functioned. Sometimes he wore just one hearing aid. Being the youngest in the group he showed reluctance initially to work with fingerspelling, perhaps more because he was not as proficient with the skill as most of the other students. Maybe he was in denial about his hearing difficulty and categorised fingerspelling as being a communication prop for the deaf and did not want to know about it. Maybe there were other reasons. Rightly or wrongly I felt it was a skill that could later lead to Auslan, another means of communication for this student, therefore, as we were working on spelling and other literacy work, I persevered with the fingerspelling techniques that the majority of the students already had some skill in as a



support to learning. Thus, as the weeks of the course moved on all of the students, including the deaf student, became proficient in working with fingerspelling as support to the literacy components of their work. Coming from such varied countries, cultures and climates it must have been work that threw them into new ways of thinking that I had little conception of, although sometimes I found some small clues to understand as in the class presentations documented below.



S ... talked to us about farming in Bhutan and Nepal. In summer he grew

many vegetables and turmeric  and cardamom. 


N ... was a farmer in Ethiopia. He grew barley, wheat, sorghum, sesame

 and cotton. 



In his garden in Tasmania he grows potatoes, carrots, spinach and chick

peas. 


R ... talked to us about his farm in Bhutan

where he grew oranges, lemons, guava  and wheat.

He now grows many vegetables in his garden in Tasmania. He brought

an okra  plant and a strawberry plant. 

T ... talked about farming in Sudan. She grew mangoes, 

amaranth  and cassava. 

In her garden ... she grows many, many vegetables.

Extracts from our class diary (2010)



Presence of language

“And on top of this tower I see this shape that has been hovering ... ungraspable ...; this key”, Ashton-Warner claimed (1963, p.189) when working towards a reading method for her young Maori students.



As the Horticulture course and learning moved on, with impending assessments looming, one day I was informed that the students would be required to identify 20 plants. As a confronting surprise, I was also informed that they would be required to give each plant its scientific name. The latter expectation seemed an almost unrealistic challenge for both the students in the learning and for me in the teaching. For me in the sense that how does one teach an understanding of reading Latin to students who are still in the initial stages of learning English? For the students it was yet another of their many hurdles. They already knew many of the names of the plants in their own languages and had since learnt the common English names, but, with the expectation of identification by binomial nomenclature, there was a double name to learn as well! Fortunately some scientific names had similarities to names that they knew in their own languages as with *ananas* for pineapple, or others that had similarities to common names such as *Mentha* (for mint) or *Dorcas carrota* (for carrot) but others just had to be memorised. The big question for me was, what could I do to make the learning easier? In lengthy *cogitationes* (Sartre, 1956, p. 33) searching for a key I kept coming back to my own early struggles to learn Latin and also the query from a Tibetan mountain guide in the Debating Garden of a remote monastery in the foothill-mountains of the Himalayas. “Why do you people use such long names for plants?” he had asked of me (Buchanan, 2007a, pp.25-26). How could I make it easier for my students?

After much thought a doable idea finally emerged: by using fingerspelling and clapping syllables, but presented as a game in which the students had to “teach” me, we could utilise their already well developed fingerspelling skills! In preparation I devised very basic worksheets for the students with pictures of a set of six plants, each labelled with both common name and botanical name. I began the first lesson with a brief “lecture” explaining the background and use of binomial nomenclature all over the world by scientists of many cultures and languages and how the old, Latin language is used in a way similar to how our own family and given names apply. I “outlined” the finding and naming of Lucy (*Australopithecus afarensis*) (Johanson & Edey, 1981, p.288), a name bestowed on a partial set of chimpanzee/humanoid bones found in the eastern Serengeti, which some of the students knew of as they came from that region of the world. That I, here in Australia, so far from the Serengeti, also knew of Lucy was a difficult notion for those students to grasp. I also “talked” about the name, *Homo sapiens*, that as humans, we all have; a concept that initially caused shock and stunned, utter disbelief amongst the students. Almost redirecting the lesson, asking questions to verify the information, they just could not believe that our differences in culture and colour do not make any difference to our collective scientific name. Then I explained that we were going to learn some extra names, just like our family and given names, for some of the plants we were working with. I then outlined the procedure of the game and handed out the first in the series of worksheets. Standing at the whiteboard, I was ready with marker pen, then, taking turns around the class circle each student fingerspelt a letter in the sequence of a plant’s botanical name. I would “read” the letter-sign directed at me to interpret, orally identify the letter whilst modelling the fingerspelt letter back to the sender and, if the students deemed I was correct, I would write the letter on the board. Sometimes, deliberately misinterpreting a signed letter, the signing student had to repeat the process and sign the letter more clearly, a process that caused much laughter as I was “corrected”. Once the scientific

name was on the board we “discussed” where the syllable breaks might be and tried reading each syllable, adding the next in sequence as we worked hard at pronunciation. After much repetition at this stage we finally read the scientific name, reading it in a rhythmic pattern accompanied by claps for syllable differentiation. Despite being a demanding accomplishment it actually worked and with practice we became more and more proficient.

My journal records,

... all took turns feeding signs for me to “spell” the botanical names in our plant ID. Clap hands/stamp feet/thump the table for syllables. Can’t believe how powerful this system is – using the same system for spelling and, in reverse, “learning” Latin for people who are still learning English – it is all a game. It has taken so few weeks to get this far. Have now looked at 18 plant names in three weeks – 6 a week. This is great!

After several weeks working with the fingerspelling game, for revision I prepared cards, each with common and botanical name and a picture of the individual plant. I would show a card and the students, matching picture and name, would find the plant reference in their books. Those finding the reference first, using the clapped syllable system and without any direction or prompting, then began to untangle and articulate the scientific name, being joined spontaneously by the other students as they too located the plant reference. Extraordinarily, on their own initiative, the students carried the learning game into this extension.

One day, after we had worked hard at a plant list, with the students’ approval, we invited the head of department to come and watch our learning strategy – he was very surprised at how well the method worked and commented that our efforts were as good as or better than the regular, English speaking students. How proud my students were but what a strange pedagogical journey into the unknown it had been for me. It was a stepping into the unknown that is perhaps close to what Greene describes as,

A concern for imagination as the capacity to create new orders in experience, to open up new possibilities, and to disclose alternative realities. (Greene, 1985, p. 167)



Experimental Fingerspelling

Learning a language in a classroom is hardly easy. Languages themselves are complex enough without the extra complications that arise when people come together in a class and start to perform in front of each other. (Allwright, 1986, p. 50)

Three weeks before the end of the academic year, after the Horticulture course was completed, I was reassigned to a regular Pre level class of adult former refugee students. Not ever having been associated with either fingerspelling or me as teacher, the students in this class provided an ideal experimental group for me to discover if, taught by a strange new teacher, fingerspelling might be accepted. Working by the osmosis process used previously, I constantly used fingerspelling in alphabet and number work, spelling, and signing initial letters of words in reading worksheets and board work. It was a pleasant, although not totally unexpected surprise, to find that most students had a very useable grasp of fingerspelling as a tool to learning within three weeks.

I continued to use fingerspelling in the classroom and found the role it played in language learning to be reaffirmingly invaluable. For those students who may have been inclined to overlook those with “difference” because of their deafness, it encouraged acceptance, inclusion, interactive communication and some normality. For those with some hearing loss that had yet to be attended to it opened a window for communication possibilities, and for all in the class it acted as an aid in

learning the English language. For some with different learning styles, as a pedagogical tool, it seemed to resonate more concretely and, some cultures appeared to adopt the tool more readily than others. Further research based on these observations would surely benefit student learning.



“Specialised Literacy for Hearing Impaired”

Imagination, intention: Neither is sufficient. There must be a transmutation of good will, of what I call wide-awakeness into action. Yes, wide-awakeness is an aspect of Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s (1964) view of “the highest level of consciousness” and Paulo Freire’s (2005) conception of “conscientization.” Both demand reflection and praxis, which are inseparable from each other. Both not only imagine things as if they could be otherwise, but move persons to begin on their own initiatives, to begin to make them so. (Greene, n.d.)

In the latter half of 2014 I was a member of a small panel that brought together two organisations involved with the education of adult migrant/refugee students, and representatives from other groups that were concerned about the difficulty of learning English by adult migrant deaf students. Subsequently an application for a Tasmanian Government Equity Grant was successful, enabling the instigation of a pilot study class for the duration of one year with the aim to further English skills through fingerspelling with deaf preliminary level students. Involving students from both organisations and the wider community, in recognition that there would be two distinct levels of students within the Pre level, two teachers were appointed to conduct the class.

Having worked with fingerspelling for many years in my regular Pre class I indicated an interest and became one of the two teachers involved. The class was advertised for one morning a week and the deaf students were permitted to bring a family member or friend for support if they so wished. I was delighted to be involved in the project and immediately began researching relevant literature but, again, was somewhat surprised and dismayed. In an online literature search, nowhere could I find studies or research that had similar focus or a similar student cohort. Once again the teaching journey became a situation that required lateral thinking, hypothetical planning, devising learning material and experimenting with strategies and methods that one hoped would be workable but, in reality, not quite knowing where it was all going to go. My literature search consistently came up with recommendations such as,

[w]ide-ranging research is critical to the development of a quality, communication driven education system for deaf and hard of hearing students. ([USA] National Agenda, 2005 in Forney, 2009)

And,

Until sufficient research can be completed, teachers face the challenge of making decisions on what to include in the curricula based on the information available and sound educational judgements. (Forney, 2009)

In some ways it all seemed rather depressing that there was so little supportive research or material, yet in other ways it was an immense challenge. The years of experience with mixed hearing and deaf students seemed to offer a platform as a starting point, but, as Ashton-Warner asserts, “Ideas are never the same again, ... even if the only change is in our mood of re-approach” (Ashton-Warner, in Middleton, 2014, p.94).



That there were several months to research and prepare before the first class started was a relief for, as I had found previously with the setting up of Hands on English, moving into a new project with little preparation time was demanding and meant that reflection time and course development needed to be done “on the run”.

Although having used fingerspelling as a tool in my regular class teaching for nearly a decade, apart from the worksheets devised previously and a British Sign Language Fingerspelling (2010) iPad app, there appeared to be very few resources available that were appropriate for Pre level adult beginners of English and fingerspelling (Baker, van den Bogaerde & Crasborne, 2003). With time to think through rough parameters of the project, initial preparation included development of the front and back sections of information for the student’s workbooks. These, pages included basic course information and class times, fingerspelling sheets of the alphabet and numbers to 20, the days of the week, the months of the year, a calendar – for lesson work and to record holiday dates, a number chart 1-100, and an alphabet-vocabulary-picture sheet: all anticipated to provide useful information that would be readily at hand for class teaching, student reference or home study purposes.

As the students were to be enrolled to learn English through a solid grounding in fingerspelling and basic literacy skills it was considered that Auslan (Australian sign language), recognised as a language in its own right, was not appropriate in the learning trajectory of the course being offered. In addition, although the two ESL teachers involved had some grounding in Auslan signing, neither were qualified Auslan teachers.

The class began with a very enthusiastic group of deaf students, three having brought their respective spouses as their support persons. Having previously taught most of those attending, and was currently teaching two, was a special joy for, although deaf students had always been offered seating at the front of my class and the pace and style of teaching adjusted to more readily accommodate them, I knew that with

more focussed attention they could have made greater progress. In effect I was being given a second chance and I wanted to make it work.

Designing and planning the course for the duration of one year with structure and focus, I negotiated that we could base our learning programme around one of the optional NSW AMES 2013 Preliminary CSWE (10361NAT) modules, Module E Signs and Symbols (SWESYMO05A), a module that our school had decided not to adopt with mainstream Pre students but which I had requested be kept on scope in the event that it could be used for students having different literacy needs – at the time of making the request, little envisaging how fortuitous it was. Thus signs and symbols provided the underlying focus of our learning, in support of which I produced the *Signs and Symbols Dictionary* to which we added other picture-word snippets of vocabulary.

In class we very quickly fell into a routine for the morning. As soon as the students arrived – most 10 to 20 minutes before class started – they began individual work practising fingerspelling the alphabet with the iPad app. Then, as proficiency increased and less time was required for fingerspelling memorisation, the students avidly accommodated other apps that included phonics, pronunciation, vocabulary, money, reading and various literacy skills. Whilst the students were so occupied, both teachers worked with individual students to encourage greater clarity with signing and oracy, for, as with things we all practise, the trap of falling into bad habits was an issue. Fingerspelling clearly, with hands in the correct position for others to “read” was important. Sometimes the oracy work involved mirror work with a teacher, sometimes face to face and sometimes a teacher worked with a student on pronunciation on an iPad app. With my lower students, once they knew the routine of fingerspelling and oracy it seemed that the mirrors were not giving them the close individual attention which they really appreciated. In some way interaction with the teacher through mirror medium was just not the better option once they were comfortable with what was expected of them.

I found too the benefit that by working face to face I could see more clearly where a teaching focus should be directed. When working with a new student or some of the more reserved students from the upper level I either worked with a mirror or gave them a choice. Although having long had an understanding of the role of imitation, of mimesis (Tausig, 1993; Soni & Thakur, 2015) in language learning, it was during the individual work with the deaf students that I came to more fully appreciate that “Language is a skilled activity [and i]n the development and acquisition of the skill, imitation plays a pivotal role” (Soni & Thakur, 2015). Indeed, within their sustained focus and a strong will to learn manifest in all of the students, especially during the individualised sequences, the flow of mimesis was both clearly observable and powerfully experienced.



Working closely with the lower level students, periodically, at about monthly intervals, by undertaking an informal oracy-pronunciation assessment of the alphabet, both by letter name and phonetically, I became aware of gradual improvement in oracy. The students were so eager to engage in the learning but sometimes jaw shapes, dental structure, palate structure or tongue size and mobility impeded articulation. That a hearing impairment compounded the issue made it challenging work for us all.

Having worked closely on fingerspelling the alphabet and oracy we then separated into the two ability groups to for the rest of the morning.

Working within my own, long classroom was ideal as it was a setting familiar to most of the students with glue, scissors and other tools or realia within easy reach. The formal and informal settings of chairs and tables allowed for varied learning spaces and the two teachers and the two

groups operated and interacted well. The learning environment was ideally suited to the class needs.

Lesson-planning initially evolved through collaborative discussion by the teachers as we felt our way into the project and lesson content was constantly being fine-tuned to perceived student needs. Then, the more advanced group, having been allocated an extra class a week and with language skills progressing quickly, the teachers worked more independently.

With such enthusiastic participation by the students, very quickly their trust in the teachers and each other developed – a point noted and commented on by visitors to the classroom. In the first week the students were assisting each other with iPads, helping each other with finger spelling and very soon they were helping each other with their hearing aids. A strong and very respectful, special camaraderie was established, a camaraderie that strengthened and was maintained for the duration of the year-long pilot study.

My journal charts thoughts on progress,

“Already we are more than halfway through the year. The two teachers are still with the same core groups of students that continue to be as enthusiastic and committed as at the beginning. In fact, on reflection, they are even more committed - they have bonded as a group. My pre-Pre level, requiring much repetition and slow, steady incremental work has worked incredibly hard. This week when working individually with each, whilst the others were absorbed in iPad apps I introduced vocab. words as we progressed through fingerspelling and articulating the alphabet. This has put a new, dimension on the activity for both the students and me. For the students there is the challenge of articulating the word I offer whilst I support the orated and written word concept with a picture or realia or, sometimes an action if the word is a verb. This clue-cued vocabulary not only challenges articulation but also helps introduce a richer vocabulary for the majority of students no longer having regular class, having only the 2½ hours of “Hearing Impaired” class every week. Out of class, for most of the week

most students would be communicating mostly in their own language so endeavouring to maintain and extend previously acquired levels of English and literacy is problematic. For the two students still enrolled in Pre level English through the week, the class is an asset to their learning – their progress in regular class is apparent. **BUT** how I wish that I had speech therapy training!

By the end of the third term, in my Pre level, although student attendance, participation and enthusiasm had remained remarkably high, literacy skills, despite class work and homework, for most had remained static or had deteriorated. In addition vocabulary recall, without formal assessment for verification, appeared to have regressed. Although the students had been subject to continual use of signs and symbols throughout class activities and in community context, it was a surprise when they failed to recognise “mens toilet”, “womens toilet”, “wash hands” and some other common signs out of context in a game. Considering the repetitive work we had pursued over the previous months to reinforce understanding, this lack of recognition came as a shock and my journal records,

Our work today re-emphasised how imperative it is that the students should be especially assisted in their oracy to communicate as effectively as possible in the target language of the society in which they live. How well they communicate in their language of origin is something I can neither accurately gauge nor support a great deal in the classroom but I wonder if oracy work in English assists greater clarity in their mother tongue especially now that they have hearing aids? Working through strategies of literacy and numeracy skills the focus must be on effective communication – and once again I realise how important it is to provide multiple strategies for vocabulary acquisition.

The pilot study proved to be more successful than I had dared hope. To accommodate the slowly diminishing literacy skills for those in my group not in a regular class, attending only the fingerspelling-English class

one morning a week, it was a time of hard work to devise repetitive but interesting learning resources but overall it was a very special time of learning for us all. Ricoeur aptly captures the development of the little class when responding to the question,

What is it to resolve an entirely novel practical problem? – this is the problem of practical wisdom, which I connect to the hermeneutics of “application” under the aegis of Aristotelian *phronesis*. (Ricoeur, 1998, p. 92)

I would agree with the application of that concept but hasten to add that, although the project might have been underpinned by *phronesis* as applied to a challenging situation, the situation was decidedly less stressful than those in which I have usually found myself engaged in when realising that *phronesis* was my crutch.

As a pilot study, the class proved to be a success in so many ways. That 100% attendance for each class was generally the norm said much for the attitude, self-motivation and desire of the students to be together and learn. The class certainly provided an opportunity for building and strengthening a small class-based community as the students worked together. Their strong trust in each other and in the teachers was palpable, a trust that clearly transferred to their own confidence and self-esteem. Corroborating this observation, Josselson and Harway claim,

Identity is both a form of understanding one’s own sense of uniqueness and a form of locating oneself in an internal model of social relationships. It is both an internal subjective psychological structure and an experience of bonding and commonality with a social group that has boundaries of distinction from other social groups. Multiplicity of identity marks the planes on which one’s psychic sense of embeddedness includes distinct social groups. (Josselson & Harway, 2012, p. 5)

It was also particularly pleasing when other staff members in the language school reported their own positive observations after engaging in dialogue or having observed students in social engagements outside the classroom.

Through support from a very caring employee of Australian Hearing Services, who spent time with the class, checking hearing aids and explaining the care and maintenance of them, the students received a broader message that others cared. Also meeting other caring staff at Australian Hearing Services, class visitors and volunteers, the students learned that there were people in the community that respected them and were prepared to spend time with them – just maybe recognition and acknowledgement that previously some had little experience of.

Despite the two supportive hearing spouse members in our pe-Pre group being also of Pre level their support of me, their deaf spouses and their hard of hearing classmates, their encouragement and enthusiasm in participation was invaluable. Although they also gained language and literacy skills by attending, their patience, attentive presence and individual support to all of the other hard of hearing students was exemplary.

Working so closely with the students as they struggled with hearing aids, as well as speech and literacy in a language other than their own mother-tongue and in a learning environment so different to their previous life experience was such a rewarding exercise. What a grand team and how appreciative they were. Part of my final report notes record,

The class became a close-knit community with a tremendous yearning to learn and although operating only one morning a week the intensity and focus was exhausting for both teacher and students. That attendance was close to 100% throughout the year perhaps indicates the need for such a class. For the students, as a group, all with somewhat similar difficulties, to be together, the bonding was amazing – all students tried so hard and they were often helping each other with work and hearing

aids. The highlights for me were the increased oracy skills and the absolute joy on the faces of the students. (2015)

As the end of the pilot study year approached, flyers went out advertising the class for the following year. Although under different funding, I looked forward to working with those amazing students again. Then, as the New Year began, previous students returned and new deaf and sight impaired students apprehensively joined the class as we all set off on a new pedagogical journey. With a greater underlying focus on interactive communication and oracy, there were new challenges to negotiate as I attempted to emplace and ground my students in their varied learning and cultural landscapes, for as Buber iterates,

Inclusion always centres us between – the linked space between teacher and learner, between what is experienced and known and the endlessness of possibilities – in this space between: here is the cradle of the Real Life. (Buber, 2002, p. 16)



Reflecting back now over a decade of working with deaf students, from a very tentative beginning I feel that I have come a long way along what seems to have been a very cautious winding path. With little theoretical substance on which to base my practice it became an exploratory excursion based predominantly on the totality of my life/teaching experience and ongoing philosophical and pedagogical interpretation. How good it would have been to have worked within a community of teachers along with the enthusiastic community of learners, for all to have contributed information to more clearly define needs and engender ideas that would have provided greater structural support for the unique cohort. Notwithstanding, I consider my approach has been appropriately and consistently student focussed in the fostering of literacy and

communicative competence, despite on occasion, my awareness of special needs being addressed more slowly than I would have liked. If there was any tardiness in response it was purely because it took time for my pedagogical thinking to find appropriate solutions that fostered profoundly deaf students. I think particularly of the move into reading through syllables and initial letter signing of words and ask myself why that solution was not obvious from the beginning. Then I always became overwhelmingly convinced that there must be an even better strategy – but what was it? The continual search for more fitting pathways through the cultural, cognitive and identity labyrinth is never-ending.



Pictures at an Exhibition – A Retrospective Glance

Chapter IX - Reflective reimagining



Mussorgsky, Promenade, from Pictures at an Exhibition, 1874

Glancing back

The greatest concern of the human being is to know how he should properly fulfil his station in creation and rightly understand what one must be in order to be a human being. (Kant, 2005, p.6)

When beginning teaching my first class of Pre level adult former refugee students, I attempted to define parameters that were to guide my teaching practice through the enquiry. I pondered over and scribed a number of goals that seemed realistic in theory but vague and impossibly unattainable at the time when starting out with new students and a bare classroom. Amongst them I hoped “To develop and maintain a vocabulary rich learning environment appropriate to student needs – adult focussed and reality focussed that promote[d] self-learning, a sense of ownership and freedom to explore materials.” And I aimed “To locate students and teacher on continuing trajectories of resilience, self-development, self-

empowerment and generational learning.” At the time those seemingly nebulous goals were filed and as the years of busied management of ever evolving projects proceeded, the minutiae of developing and making materials claimed focus. Reaching the final stage of this study, I happened to open that forgotten file and, with much incredulity, realised that all goals had reached very satisfactory levels of achievement. Amazingly, it felt as if with subliminal presence, those goals had provided guiding markers throughout the years of the enquiry in the very same manner that my application to the Minister for Education provided an underlying presence during the Home School years.

With a start too, coming to the completion of this study, I realised that it was over 50 years since the interview that marked the beginning of my teaching career. That I had chosen a teaching pathway and had wandered along it has given immense satisfaction and a feeling, that despite moments of self-doubt, Scout-like, I had done my best. Perhaps there were a few instances that I would have liked an opportunity to rework, perhaps where I could have followed another pathway or other ideas, but mostly the challenges had been doable and workable. Sometimes exhausting, sometimes extremely patience testing, sometimes beyond belief, whatever the pathway, the way had been immensely fulfilling.

My hope now is that, in having been a very, very small part of the teaching profession I will have contributed a little to broaden understanding, and, more importantly, that my work may have helped my students, and perhaps others, to open new doors, some as they settled and moved on with their lives in a new country and in new environments. But, that is the problem with being a teacher – we never really fully know what it is that we have done. We can write exemplary work-plans, we can prepare and deliver what we think are great lessons. We may be required to assess our students on the work we have taught, and be questioned why some have not achieved assessment grades but, in reality, the biggest

assessment is in life itself, an assessment that is an impossible task to undertake in the classroom! A notion Cochrane-Smith alludes to when claiming,

We must avoid what is too simple - isomorphic equations between teaching quality and test scores and between student learning and test scores – because they are grossly inadequate to the task of understanding (and ultimately improving) teaching and learning ... in the 21st century. (Cochrane- Smith, 2003, p.5)

Too, I reflect on the many I have “met” on my research journeying; students, teachers, authors, people – including my multiple self, my “I”, “you” and “[s]he” (Gao, 2002, p. 26) – from all spheres of life, all have contributed to and inspired my thinking, my teaching practice and writing. Some have opened new perspectives, some have corroborated or questioned my thinking or have referred me on to others with other philosophy, logic or new ideas. The richness of wisdom and dialogue will long continue to challenge, guide, enrich and push me into new spaces for “the other calls me into question [providing] a communicative openness” (Todd, 2002, p.408).

Also, with a pang of compassion, whilst grounded in the enquiry, I realised that, as with my students, a number of writers had similarly experienced profound loss and displacement in turmoil and oppression. Their writing and lessons in being humanly human being inspirational, allowing me to step alongside and “listen” (Todd, 2002) to my students with greater consideration of difference.

Through interaction with so many from varied cultural and historical backgrounds, the kaleidoscopic journey has been one of wonder and humility. At the surface level student cohorts changed, political and educational ideals and management demands changed – sometimes inexplicably. Change was inevitable, becoming the catalyst that

challenged, provoked, guided, offered or opened opportunities for, as Arendt, with sagacity, advises,

... the reality and reliability of the human world rest[s] primarily on the fact that we are surrounded by things more permanent than the activity by which they are produced. (Arendt in Taylor, 1991, p. 7)



Reflective findings

... we as yet understand little about how this internal dialogue among aspects of self changes over time or what role memory serves in the dialogue. (Josselson, 2009, p. 650)

Now my circuitous, reflective, heuristic journey has found a ley-line, an ending of sorts, when there is so much more in the teaching world, in time and space to explore. The possibilities seem endless, just as Todd advises, “each one of us is engaged in a process of becoming that is relational and on-going” (2003b, p.5). But, when already looking beyond, I must come back to the present.

We are urged to reflect but how and into what? So many questions arise that I sought and continue to seek to have answered – What contribution have I made? What more can I do there? What will happen if? What is the next step here? It is as if somehow an invisible, but clearly perceived, relentless push is goading me on. But I take to heart the wisdom of Rilke who advises,

... have patience with everything in your heart and try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't search for the answers, which could not be given you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the

point is, to *live* everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps, then, far in the future, you will gradually without even noticing it, live your way into the answer. (Rilke, 1903, pp. 23-24. Italics in original)

Not having read that advice before embarking on the enquiry, in the traversing, just maybe that is what I have been doing. I have been living my questions – before even posing them on occasion!

But, within the lengthy journey to find what is it that is in me that I brought to my teaching role what have I achieved? What has made the journey significant? Some of the illustrative cameos, despite being small have provided fulfilling or confronting moments. Some, despite requiring much planning and resource making have given satisfaction and points of departure for new undertakings. The momentum, at times impossibly demanding, has been relentless, but, large or small, what has emerged as being significant? In a Kierkegaardian reflective sweep (Grøn, 2003) I would claim my Home School pedagogy in the pre-internet period as being personally significant and the pedagogical underpinning perhaps worthy of note particularly for families prepared to accept such responsibility, for those travelling for lengthy periods, or with ill children. Or, as in my own childhood, some children, compromised by the realities of mainstream schooling, just need time-out when school environments become too tough or too rough.

In work with former refugee students I would note the development of display folder introductory reading “books”, incorporating so many topics, as being a significant venture introducing preliterate readers to reading strategies and new cultures. The development of the *Big Yellow Dictionary* and our *Talk To Me* readers also provided significant new literacy material for adult, former refugee students learning in the Pre level classroom.

The Maslow-Piaget construct for informally “being with” my students as they settled to new ways of life and new ways of living has

provided a very useful non-invasive, non-threatening tool that allowed greater understanding of individual difference.

The development of the project introducing preliterate adult students to the workplace, a project that I have continued to modify, provided worthy focus. Presenting concepts of OH&S and workplace culture in an Australian context widened windows of understanding and enhanced employment opportunities for students and their families.

“Hands on English”, the two days a week focus on skills other than, but complementary to, formal classroom literacy work continued to be part of the class week. According to student cohort ability levels there was a greater or lesser emphasis on this art, craft, handy-skills style of learning – learning that, over the years, led us to participation in and a sense of “giving” to the wider community. And as part of learning, although other projects came and went, imparting bitter-sweet memories, always we tended our vegetable garden, reaping the rewards for all to take home and share with families.

Perhaps the contribution of greatest significance through the questing was the development of fingerspelling as a tool to assist learning English at Pre level for both hearing and deaf students. Such a simple tool that has clearly been of value in the learning and living of my students all, a tool that will have ongoing influence in communication, understanding of difference and learning. How I wish I could follow its permutating pathways from our classroom to date.

But whatever it is that I have achieved I will continue to search for new ways of being and look forward to learning of or discussing new ways of thinking that have superseded my own, for as Glendinning states, “anything fit to survive beyond its current presence, must be open to the arrival of something unforeseen, something new” (2004, p.165). There is so much more to learn, there is so much more to create and explore. Therefore my riddle of a camino journey continues on. The cameos and

findings recorded in this text are as if moments in time, slices of time, a capturing of essences, of experiences, that have contributed to the shaping of my life, my work. Findings that have given some understandings of “the I, the you, the [s]he” (Gao, 2002, pp. 25-26) perspectives of the evolving identities of the teacher within, that I brought to or took from the classroom, and which I will carry onwards.



In casting a summative glance upon the enquiry, another issue gained greater clarity. I am compelled to confess that in seeking an openness of reflection, the process on occasion provoked a sense of intense vulnerability (Todres, 2004), becoming a confidence sharing that I likened to being “scraped to the bone”. A situation Josselson meaningfully recognises in the reciprocal impact between researcher and narrative (2009, p. 651). Yet conversely, at other times, memories of joyous and wondrous happenings (Jushka, 2003) were prompted and were easily shared. Be that as it may, collectively I trust the storying gives some indication of the journeying that I have had the good fortune to experience. And, from the narrative understandings of lived experience pondered over, it is my hope that the study will be accepted as a contribution to the body of pedagogical knowledge that others may find of some assistance.



Final reflection from a critical stance

Self-identity is constituted and reconstructed relationally, its boundaries repeatedly remapped and renegotiated ... Identities are continually displaced/replaced. The subject is neither unified nor fixed. (Lather, 1991, p. 18)

Now reclaiming individuality, on reflection, in drawing the phenomenological, exploratory enquiry to closure, I understand a little more of my “self”. The journey, however, being far from complete, is but a partial record of essences as I have rushed by; as if briefly hovering over horizons that extend on forever, or hovering over exact but invisible points from which endless possibilities radiate much as when the yacht’s plotter, wallowing, briefly recorded 00.00° at the Equator in the Galapagos. The retrospective picture cameos I have shared being but few of the many snatched glimpses that have marked or shaped my way as I have continued my onward questing. And, recognising too that searching for answers in my life and in the development of my teaching would not provide definitive answers this enquiry has become an open-ended (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 176; Halling, 2010, p.139) searching.

Now confronting the underlying research question explored throughout the investigation, in a final bid seeking to find what it is that is in me that I brought to my teacher role, in taking reflection to greater depth, somewhat disappointingly I have to admit to having failed to find a satisfactory answer. Although the quest granted deeper self-understanding, through the elusiveness of a definitive answer I am obliged to defer to St. Augustine’s enduringly profound statement, “*quaestio mihi factus sum* (a question have I become for myself)” (Arendt, 1998, p. 10). In responding to that statement and also providing clearer understanding of my own searching and inconclusive findings, Arendt notes,

The problem ... seems unanswerable in both its individual psychological sense and its general philosophical sense. It is highly unlikely that we,

who can know, determine, and define the natural essences of all things surrounding us, which we are not, should ever be able to do the same for ourselves – this would be like jumping over our own shadows. (ibid)

Adding even greater complexity to the research question-answer dilemma and, as with Arendt, seemingly giving subtle warning of futility, Butler expounds, “[t]he self is always to some extent unknowing. Its action is always governed by aims that exceed its intentions” (2000, p. 738). Despite this, although not having isolated a definitive answer, I do concede that the enquiry, through the triangulated hermeneutic misting of multiple-lensed self-perspectives particularly, has incrementally allowed for greater self-understanding. In having constantly confronted my “self” in spaces of otherness the journey indeed found some lateral direction, but it is through Lederach’s observation that I am enabled to take another incremental step via a detour by bearing focus on his concept of vocation.

In the truest sense of the word, vocation is that which stirs inside, calling out to be heard, calling out to be followed. It finds its roots in who I am and a sense of purpose I have on earth ... vocation calls us back to the road that winds beyond the rest stops of techniques and day-to-day practice. It beckons us to search for our deeper purpose and possibility, found more in *who we are* than in *what we do*. ... [And] to find this deeper sense of who we are, where we are situated, and where we are going requires that we locate our bearings, our compass. (Lederach, 2005, p. 24. Italics in original)

Questing onwards, with that advice I tumbled to the understanding that, “Before I can tell my life what I want to do with it, I must listen to my life telling me who I am (Palmer, 2000, p.4).” But still begging for clarification and adding further to the ongoing, unsolved, problematic riddle, as if on a mountain track whilst walking a globe encircling trail, the question turns back on itself. In the layered, ribboned strata of the broader self-lived cameo, emplaced in the broadest concept of “landscape”, the

enfolded question then becomes aligned to Rousseau's erudite statement, "Of all human sciences the most useful and most imperfect appears to be that of mankind" (1754, p.6). Noting but standing aside from the unresolving bluntness of that statement, I then take renewed impetus from Aoki's understanding, that "identity [is] not so much ... something already present, but, rather, [it i]s production, in the throes of being constituted as we live in the place of difference" (Aoki, in Pinar, 2011, p.23). Thus, as if walking an open-ended, never ending pathway with endless horizons, my anticipatory questing regains momentum and continues ever on as I continue to live my questions and search for new pictures for a new retrospective exhibition.



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