MY 'UNFINISHED SYMPHONY'

PROLOGUE

'Let me tell you a story….'

In this prologue, I introduce my thesis as my unfinished symphony, a metaphor that permeates the narrative account of my self-study action research approach to my practice of developing student and young adult leadership processes in two settings, a school and a local community. I outline the elements of my narrative - its theme, characters, setting, events and credibility - and use my embodied values as living standards by which I judge the validity of my claims to knowledge. I offer a descriptive and explanatory framework for my thesis which is developed, in detail, in later chapters.

Why a narrative format?

Writing this thesis and reflection on my practice have alerted me to the transformational power of narrative and metaphor to generate and foster transformative and inclusional educative practices and processes and contribute to the education of social formations (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006). My story possesses historical antecedents, unfolds in the present and, through processes of suspension (Varela, in Senge *et al*., 2005: 29), contains characters, actions, events and relationships while portraying the emotions, beliefs, interactions and values of the protagonists. Presenting my thesis in narrative form fulfils several functions.

One, it serves as a description and an explanation of my personal odyssey of ontological, epistemological and methodological transformation, as I address the iterative questions – 'What is my concern?' and 'How do I improve my practice?' (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006) – in ever-deepening and broadening spirals.

Two, the narrative of my personal unfinished symphony, a 'sounding together' (Jacobs, 1978) of all aspects of practice, fosters inclusion of the 'unfinished symphonies' of those

with whom I work in a variety of educative settings, as I engage in a pedagogy of accompaniment (Donovan, 1978) and 'alongsidedness' (Pound, 2003); as this thesis unfolds, I demonstrate the transformative influence of my educative engagement as I work to promote life-affirming leadership development processes among students and young adults in school and community settings. In particular, I challenge approaches to youth work which focus on weakness, needs and youth pathology by focusing instead on young people's potential and giftedness and their ability to contribute to their own learning and to a good social order. My research findings bear out those of other research (Corporate Leadership Council, 2007, 2002) which suggests that a shift from deficit definitions of people and organisations to more positive, life-affirming ones can promote sustainable, personal and organisational transformation.

Three, the narrative form, I feel, serves as a more effective vehicle for the explication of my emergent living theory (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006) generated by my use of an action research approach, described by McNiff and Whitehead (2002: 56) as a generative, transformational evolutionary process as I address the questions at the heart of my practice and act in the service of what is emerging (Senge, *et al.,* 2005: 10). These questions include: 'What are my pedagogical, epistemological and ontological values? How am I living them? What educative relationships foster and promote student and youth leadership development? What models of leadership facilitate the emergence of sustainable communities of shared praxis?'

Four, telling the story of my research, practice and learning is in keeping with Schon's (1995) concept of the 'new epistemology'. My practice in school and community settings strongly resonates with Schon's (*ibid*: 28) description of the 'swampy lowlands' where lie problems of greatest human concern - frequently messy, confusing and incapable of technical solution. In describing my methods of inquiry, my narrative (a la Schon) speaks of experience, trial and error, intuition and muddling through, of adopting a 'what if..?' approach to historical settings and situations while being unclear and uncertain of the outcomes. This lack of clarity and certainty finds expression in a pedagogy of vulnerability, which eschews the traditional trappings of power and control and awakens the possibility of mutual influence and reciprocity in educational settings.

Five, I use the narrative form as a method of theorizing. My story recounts my exploration of educational leadership theory, testing my personal experience and theory against it, while generating my own living theory through dialectical and dialogical engagement with and within historical settings, frequently with unpredictable outcomes. Drawing on Brookfield (2005: 3), I understand the purpose of theory is to make sense of the world, communicate that understanding to others and thereby enable us to take informed action. My narrative demonstrates the inherently practical and teleological nature of my living theory – it both influences and imbues my practice with purpose while being generated by and within my practice.

Finally, I believe the narrative format, accompanied by written and audiovisual evidence and data (to be found in my appendices and accompanying evidence archive), critique from 'critical friends', colleagues and participants of my research, most effectively supports the demonstration of my values (justice, inclusion, reciprocity, democracy, dialogue and mutuality) expressed as living epistemological and ontological standards of judgement. In particular, I demonstrate how I have helped disenfranchised young people use their voice and energy to contribute to the transformation of their educational and communal settings. In the course of my narrative, I also theorise my practice of developing my own living theory of educational leadership, and interrogate my assumptions by benchmarking them against a variety of literatures and existing theories. I demonstrate how my living theory of educational leadership and practice challenges dominant propositional epistemologies and logics of leadership, education and community. Let me now describe the elements of my unfinished symphony.

Elements of my story of practice

At this stage, I outline briefly the elements of my narrative which will be developed in greater detail in subsequent chapters.

What is the theme of this narrative?

The theme or score of my unfinished symphony describes my embodied, reflective response to two iterative and interlinked questions - 'What is my concern?' and 'How do I improve my practice?' (McNiff and Whitehead, 2002: 72), as I generate my own living theory of practice in the context of student and young adult leadership development. As will be seen in the unfolding narrative, my concerns change and take new forms. I begin with a concern about improving and problematising my practice of delivering leadership development to students and young adults, but as my practice evolves, other concerns emerge - concerns about undemocratic and unjust structures that foster the marginalization and voicelessness of young people, and about oppressive practices and processes that are destructive of life-affirming, educative relationships. A significant outcome of my practice is the manner in which I have exercised my own voice in oppressive educational settings, particularly in the face of considerable opposition. I also became aware of the absence of living theory accounts of leadership in the literature, which frequently reflects a traditional cause and effect approach. By way of response, I describe how I have developed value-based and value-driven models of leadership that address these concerns. In particular, I provide a narrative account of how I have generated my living theory of practice by moving beyond Wenger's (1998) concept of communities of learning and practice to foster and promote communities of *shared praxis* (Groome, 1991) with appropriate models of leadership. I provide a space where the voices of young people, traditionally excluded from educational discourse, can find expression in praxis-driven engagement in their educational and communal settings.

Dramatis Personae: Who are the characters in this narrative?

In contrast with largely propositional forms of theory generation, *I* am the central character, the focus of my inquiry as I describe my efforts to create congruence and resonance of spirit in my practice and generate my 'I-theory' (McNiff and Whitehead, 2002: 22) of knowledge, already located within my tacit (Polyani, 1958) and experiential (Winter, 1989) ways of knowing, and which, through practice, emerges as personal forms of acting and knowing. Placing the 'living I' (Whitehead, 1993) at the

4

centre of my inquiry, my voice permeates this narrative; yet there are many other voices to be heard here too: participants in my practice - children, students, teachers, parents, critical friends - all have played a part in co-creating and generating my living theory through relationships of reciprocity, mutuality and collaborative engagement within a dialogue of equals (McNiff and Whitehead 2000). Voices from a variety of literatures (theology, psychology, missiology, spirituality, leadership and management) are present also - alerting me and challenging me to address the problematics of developing living theory in living contexts (Lomax, 1994). In particular, my narrative provides a space where students and young people, frequently marginalized and disenfranchised in and by educative and community structures, have been empowered to discover and give expression to their own distinctive voice. My narrative illustrates this and provides evidence of living theory co-created (Senge, *et al.,* 2005: 66) through relationships of mutuality and reciprocity rather than through hierarchical relationships of alienation and separation.

What is the historical setting of my narrative?

While my narrative is located within two specific settings - a grammar school and a local community - in Northern Ireland, with its historical backdrop of division, conflict and destruction of life and property, my practice in other locations, national and international, has both influenced and contributed to the development of my living theory of educational leadership. My initial work with three schools now contributes to student leadership development in a network of approximately fifty second level schools.

What happens in this narrative?

This narrative traces my interaction with principals, teachers, students and young adults as I develop leadership processes that challenge dominant epistemological and pedagogical discourses in educational and community settings. I describe the manner in which I have acted 'expressively' rather than instrumentally; to act expressively, according to Palmer (1990: 24), is not to achieve a goal outside myself but to express a conviction, a leading, a truth that is within me. As Palmer points out, an expressive act

not taken is a denial of my own truth, conviction, values and nature; avoiding obsession with pre-determined outcomes, my expressive acts are rooted in my spirituality, defined by Schneiders (2000: 343) as 'a quest for life-integration through self-transcendence towards the ultimate value one perceives'. In a school context, I describe the manner in which I have worked (through dialogue and modelling alternative, inclusive and democratic practices and procedures) towards the implementation of a process where students are recognized as key members of the school community and provided with a forum where their voice is heard and an opportunity provided to contribute to improving the quality of life and relationships within their schools.

In a local community setting, I describe how I have developed and implemented leadership development processes with young adults who provide a holiday experience for children from disadvantaged or marginalized backgrounds. I describe how this process is achieved through developing communities of 'shared praxis' (Groome, 1991), where leadership is understood as a shared and distributed function, the 'natality' (Arendt, 1958) and uniqueness of each individual is recognized and empowered, and difference is recognized as a resource rather than an obstacle to progress. I demonstrate how I have helped young people generate their own living theories of leadership instead of being passive recipients and receptacles of other people's knowledge.

Story and metaphor, specifically metaphors of symphony ('sounding together') and community, play a significant role in generating my living theory of practice. Generating my own living theory of practice, however, has engendered situations where I experience myself as a 'living contradiction' (Whitehead, 1993) where espoused values, personal, institutional or organizational, are ignored or denied in practice and I have encountered significant fear and resistance. I draw on two concepts - spirituality and liminality (discussed in detail in later chapters) - to explore, critique and understand my practice, address issues of hegemonic resistance to change and initiate the use of living logics as generative transformational spaces (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006).

My narrative provides a concrete example of theory-in-action, rooted in my values of care, justice, belief in individual uniqueness, holistic spirituality, mutuality and

reciprocity, in contrast to dominant epistemologies where concepts such as theory, community, leadership and transformation are abstractions, frequently divorced from and lacking expression in concrete life-settings. In the following chapters, I describe concrete expressions of a living theory of community and leadership and how these have generated living transformative practices, initially within me, but increasingly within school, community and organizational settings. My narrative describes the manner in which I have integrated theory and practice in reflective and embodied social engagement. In the closing stages of my narrative, I describe how my learning and practice have transformative and sustainable potential in educational and organizational settings.

How credible is this narrative?

My claims to knowledge are as follows: I have come to a deeper understanding of my practice, its philosophical underpinnings, its wealth of tacit (Polyani, 1958) and experiential (Winter, 1989) knowledge, value-driven and dialogical processes of engagement. I appreciate more fully (and will describe in detail) the historical influences that have contributed to my current level of epistemological and ontological awareness. I have developed and implemented life-affirming and empowering student and young adult leadership development processes as a way of exercising my educational influence in the development of a good social order in school and community settings. In the process, I have developed my own living theory of educational leadership and demonstrate its embodiment in practice. In coming to understand my practice in terms of the Aristotelian notion of *praxis,* I have adapted Groome's (1991) concept of *shared praxis* to foster communities of shared praxis as a locus for the education of social formations (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006) through relationships and discourses that challenge dominant paradigms and epistemologies. Finally, I can claim that my praxis has contributed to more democratic educative relationships in a national network of schools. Reflective feedback from principals, education officers and teachers provide the data and evidence to support and test my claims (Appendix 2).

I test the validity of my claims to credibility by the manner in which I have conducted my research and practice within the ethics and codes of practice of the religious order of which I am a member (Christian Brothers, 2002), of the Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy of which I am an accredited member (IACP, 1998), and by embracing the guidelines of the 'Declaration of Accountability' (Alderman, *et al*., 2006), a document that summarizes the ethical values that form the cornerstone of respectful and mutually beneficial relationships between young people and national organizations. To avoid what Polyani (1958: 256) describes as 'a futile authorization of my own authority', I have honoured my commitment to dialogue and transparency throughout my research, ensuring participants were informed and involved at all times. This reality is echoed in H.'s (one of the young leaders) question when we gathered to prepare for a training session - 'Chris, how is *our* thesis going?' (Personal Journal, January 2005, emphasis in spoken words). My evidence archive includes journal entries, evaluations, feedback and correspondence from participants, forms, newsletters, published articles, photographic and audiovisual evidence illustrating aspects of practice, including a DVD (Appendix 1), (a section of which was aired on national television), produced by an independent film company. This file also includes the reflective critique of my practice on the part of many 'critical friends' (Appendix 2).

As Polyani (1958) has pointed out, we, as individuals claiming originality and exercising personal judgement with universal intent, can decide to understand the world from our own point of view. Throughout the process described in this narrative, I have used my commitment to seeking the truth and sharing my findings as a framework for my research. Drawing on Polyani's insights, I use his view of commitment to justify my claims to knowledge. He writes:

> To accept commitment as the framework within which we may believe something to be true, is to circumscribe the hazards of belief. It is to establish the conception of competence which authorizes a fiduciary choice made and timed, to the best of the acting person's ability, as a deliberate yet necessary choice. The paradox of self-set standards is eliminated, for in a competent mental act the agent does not do as he pleases, but compels himself forcibly to act as he believes he must. He can do no more and he would evade his calling by doing less.
> (Polyani, 1958: 315)

I also incorporate Habermas' (1987) four basic principles for achieving intersubjective agreement in my research as criteria for testing the validity of my claims to knowledge. He suggests (*ibid*: 2) that to foster understanding between speaker and hearer (and I suggest between researcher-writer and reader), there must be comprehensible expression understood by all parties, the intention to communicate a true proposition, that what is communicated is trustworthy and reliable, and finally, that communication occurs in an agreed normative background. My narrative strives to reflect all of these principles.

As a further step to ensuring the validity of my claims to knowledge, I draw on insights from Lonergan (1972), specifically his concept of 'transcendental precepts' (p.20). Lonergan understands human knowing as a compound of experience, understanding, judgement and belief and suggests four precepts that foster authentic ways of knowing and being: be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable and be responsible. These precepts function as dynamic processes rather than written rules within my research and practice, and are transcendental in going beyond the purely descriptive content to include and address the metaphysical dimensions of reality. As Dunne (1985: 61) points out, transcendental precepts are experienced as questions: being attentive, I ask *'what?, when?, where?'* Being intelligent, I ask *'how?'* and *'why?'* Being reasonable, I ask *'What judgement should I make?'* Finally, being responsible, I ask *'How should I respond / act?'* I have been challenged by Lonergan's precepts throughout my research when I encounter paradigmatic inadequacy or the tensions of personal authenticity in practice settings, described by Whitehead and McNiff (2002: 22) as experiencing myself as 'a living contradiction'. There is tension running through this narrative as I strive to embody and give authentic expression to my espoused values while claiming to honour the natality of those I engage with - a recurring example from my practice centres on the desire to act unilaterally when confronted with individual or systemic arrogance, injustice and resistance to change.

What are my standards of judgement?

Drawing on Habermas' concept of communicative action, with its aim of rational, mutual understanding, and Lonergan's concept of transcendental precepts which serve

as a guide for authentic judgement and response, I now address the standards of judgement on which I base my claims to knowledge and new living theory. Conscious of the problematic and contested nature of theory generation in general and within a self-study action research approach in particular (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006: 83), and recognizing and accepting the reality of paradigmatic pluralism (Donmoyer, 1996), I portray in the narrative of my unfinished symphony the manner in which my epistemological, methodological, pedagogical and ontological values, espoused and embodied in practice, serve as living standards of judgement in linking my theory and practice. I briefly address the matter here while explaining this concept in detail in later chapters.

I am concerned on a theoretical level that dominant forms of theory are inadequate for theorizing leadership in a living sense and that organizational practices militate against students and young people having a voice and developing their own living theories and practices of leadership. The standard of judgement against which my practice may be assessed is contained in the question - 'To what extent does my practice provide an opportunity for young people to recognize, apply and develop their leadership skills and qualities? Does my narrative contain both descriptions and explanations of how I achieve this?'

I am concerned about how normative institutional contexts provide scant acknowledgement or recognition of a person's natality and uniqueness, and how human potential is systematically suppressed by oppressive social practices, grounded in logics of domination and control (Marcuse, 1964). In the two settings described in my narrative, one a school setting, and the other a community setting, I choose as my standard of judgement, the manner in which I avail of emancipatory praxis to challenge oppressive systems by providing an alternative model of engagement, underpinned by logics of accompaniment and mutuality, where I foster the capacity of young people to speak for themselves, have their voices heard and contribute to the transformation of their circumstances within an improved social order.

From my experience of living in a religious community, I understand community as a powerful and privileged place to foster life-affirming practices and relationships and I provide a narrative description and explanation of my efforts to build communities of shared praxis. I choose as my living standard of judgement both the manner in which I have embodied and expressed my ontological, epistemological and methodological values around community and relationships of mutuality and reciprocity, and the manner in which I have generated my living theory of community-building.

I espouse other values - care, integrity, love, justice, freedom and so on - and suggest as appropriate living standards of judgement the extent to which I embrace and embody these values in historical settings and life-affirming relationships, as shown in the response to questions such as - How am I caring? How do I live authentically and with integrity? How am I just? How do I show love? How do I demonstrate my living theory in practice?

Mindful of the need for rigour and intersubjective agreement in practitioner research, and mindful also of the danger of what Palmer (1998: 52) describes as 'reckless subjectivity', I describe how I have closely related my claims to knowledge to the experiences in which they are grounded and generated. I have gathered a considerable body of data, comprising the voices, reflections and critique of students, young adult leaders, teachers, colleagues and critical friends, from which I have extracted evidence to support my claims to new and original theory, mindful of the six principles for conducting action research defined by Winter (1989: 38ff), which will be explored and supported by evidence as my narrative unfolds. They are: reflexive critique, dialectical critique, collaborative resource, risk, plural structure and theory-practice transformation. Let me give some examples from my data archives.

Part of my practice involves a follow-up visit to schools to review my work and its effectiveness in the 'swampy lowlands' (Schon, 1995) of daily practice with members of student councils/prefects who have undergone a student leadership development process with me. In response to my question, *'How have you grown in your role as Student Council member or Prefect?'* they replied as follows:

'I have become more confident and trust myself more.'

'I feel more confident in myself, this whole experience has taught me how to not doubt myself, in and out of school.'

'Some challenges that I faced were new ideas. I thought that some ideas I had were a bit stupid and silly, but they turned out to be the perfect solution.'

'I / we had to deal with frustrations/ difficulty dealing with management at times but we learned to cope with them.'

(D, *et al.,* PSN (school initials) 2005)

(Note: To preserve anonymity, I use only individual and school initials. Original documents are included in my evidence archive.)

From these replies, I demonstrate that I have contributed to more effective student leadership processes, that I have contributed to, and supported, students in becoming more capable and confident people, capable of effective, realistic and collaborative relationships with school management. This example of dialectical and reflexive critique supports my claim that my theory and practice of involving students in 'doing' leadership through experiential and reflective learning processes assist their growth in effectiveness in living contexts.

To ensure my work avoids any 'colonising' or undue influence over young people, I invite teachers to be present during my work with students and to reflect on the effectiveness or otherwise of my work. C., a liaison teacher with her schools' council, in her reply to my question - *'Has our working together made a contribution to (a) the students themselves (b) the school?'* - wrote as follows:

> *'Yes, it has made a contribution to both the pupils and the school. I think that more and more of the members of the students' council who sit on the council each year are coming away with invaluable life skills such as how to how to communicate in small and large groups, how to be responsible for themselves and others, how to plan ahead, make goals and evaluate. The pupils' confidence has been boosted, definitely, by seeing just how much they can actually achieve. The whole school benefits from the quality of student representation on the*

students' council. The council really takes on board the needs of the students of the school and go as far as they can to make life easier in the community on the whole.'

<div align="right">(C. 15th May. 2006. PSN)</div>

Placing my narrative in the public forum to show that my provisional claims to knowledge are genuine, fair and accurate, supports my claim to authenticity and validity and that this process, in Winter's words (*ibid*: 60), is not merely one of openness and exposure to refutation but also one of exploring possibilities of transformation. In my narrative, theory and practice co-exist and are not in mutual opposition to each other. On the contrary, theory and practice mutually foster the development and vitality of each other. Winter summarises this reality as follows:

> Conversely, it is the separation of one from the other which threatens the stultification of both: theory separated from practice slips into abstract speculation and the ramification of jargon; practice separated from theory slips into self-justificatory reaction or self-perpetuating routine.
>
> <div align="right">(Winter, 1989: 67)</div>

Nor is my narrative complete with the writing of this thesis. A feature of my practice is its emergent, evolving quality as my practice continues to change in a process of non-definitive fluidity (McNiff and Whitehead, 2002: 57); I recognize the provisionality of my claims to knowledge and the interplay of theory-practice as a generative, transformative evolutionary process (*ibid:* 57). My narrative is 'for now', but my unfinished symphony remains unfinished and incomplete as I continuously address anew the question: 'What is my concern?' (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006: 89) and the next phase of my self-study action research cycle begins once more.

To conclude this chapter, I now outline the structure and form supporting my narrative.

Seeking a descriptive and explanatory framework for my Unfinished Symphony

A significant shift in my understanding of my practice occurred at an early stage of my self-study action research process (personal reflection notes, September 2000, evidence archive) informed in part by Schon's (1983) idea of reflective practice. It began to dawn on me that, given the customary reflective nature of my professional practice and the

manner in which I consistently strive to embody my values, my practice could, in fact, be understood as *praxis,* which Fear *et al*. (2006: 93) describe as '*intentional, informed, reflective action as a dialectical way of being in the world*' (emphasis in original). Spurred on by energizing engagement with principals, teachers, parents, students, caretakers, office staff and young adult Edmund Rice Camp leaders, through innumerable conversations around shared struggles, vision, hopes, successes and disappointments, I was struck by the startling realization that *their* committed and value-driven practice was, in fact, praxis; it was a short leap of imagination to the even more startling realization that our shared practice could be understood as a form of unified, shared praxis (Personal journal notes, September 2000). I expressed this expansion of consciousness in my decision to explore what I later understood as a pedagogy of alongsidedness (Pound, 2003) and accompaniment which I was already using in therapeutic and spiritual direction settings. Donovan's advice in particular became an inspirational influence in my educative relationships:

> In working with young people …do not try to call them back to where they were, and do not try to call them to where you are, as beautiful as that place might seem to you. You must have the courage to go with them to a place that neither you nor they have ever been before.
>
> (Donovan, 1978: vii)

My concern was then encapsulated in the challenging question: 'If I really believe this, how will I respond authentically, congruently?' (Personal journal, December 2000). Influenced by Donovan's account of his experience among the Masai, and Vanier's (1988) account of his experience in the community of l'Arche, I felt drawn to adopt a pedagogy of vulnerability where I engaged in educative relationships of shared humanity, mutuality, reciprocity and invitational processes. In practice, I decided to forego titles and rank, using and allowing others (teachers, students, children) to address me by my first name; I suggested sitting in a circle as a symbol of equality and non-hierarchical status, and instead of traditional, prescriptive pedagogies, ceded power and control by inviting participants to freely engage in interactive, reflective processes of shared insight and learning. In the initial stages of my research I strongly resonated with Donovan's (*ibid*: 16) description of his practice:

Outside of this, I have no theory, no plan, no strategy, no gimmicks – no idea of what will come. I feel rather naked.

(Donovan 1978: 16)

I gradually realized that my actions were rooted in my deeply-held belief in, and valuing of, each person as unique, gifted, embodied potential and, in religious terms, a living expression of a creative God. By providing young people with an opportunity to 'do' leadership through reflective practice in school and community settings, I challenged them to give expression to their creativity and potential in life-affirming social practices. I also came to appreciate my research and practice as an expression of my spirituality (personal journal, 2001), with its accompanying values of justice, integrity, love, compassion and service, summed up in the words of Micah 6: 8,

This is what Yahweh asks of you, only this: that you act justly, that you love tenderly, and that you walk humbly with your God.

(Micah 6: 8)

I address the issue of spirituality in my research in Chapters 2 and 4 and, drawing on Dorr (1990), describe how I use Micah (6: 8) to develop my embodied, living theory of educational leadership (Chapter 4).

 Meanwhile, my search for a theoretical, practical and explanatory framework to address my concerns continued. However, reflecting on my work as my unfinished symphony and my understanding of spirituality (Nemeck and Coombs, 1988; Rolheiser, 1999) led me to adapt the notion of 'movement' in music and in spiritual, psychological growth as a way of understanding the 'movements' of my research (Lowney, 2003; Radcliffe, 2005). Experiencing resistance and liminality in my practice settings, I felt the need to embark on a journey of critical exploration of my epistemological, ontological and methodological stance and provide an alternative to dominant prescriptive epistemologies. I decided to adopt Groome's (1991) interpretation of a shared praxis approach as a descriptive and explanatory framework for my research and for this thesis.

Groome's 'Five Movements' as a descriptive and explanatory framework for my thesis

At the outset, I have adopted Groome's (*ibid*: 136) understanding of praxis as 'purposeful human activity that holds in dialectical unity both theory and practice.' He proposes a five movement approach to shared practice around a 'generative theme' (Freire, 1970), reflecting a marked similarity between Lonergan's (1972) transcendental precepts, Holland and Henriot's (1983) 'pastoral circle' model of social analysis, and Halloran's (2002) approach to developing Small Christian Communities. Groome's five movements are as follows:

Movement 1: *Naming / Expressing 'Present Praxis.'* Movement 1 contains Chapter 1, in which I describe my research and practice settings, the nature and characteristics of my research and my understanding of a self-study action research approach.

Movement 2: *Critical reflection on Present Praxis.* Movement 2 contains Chapters 2 and 3. In Chapter 2, I describe my experience of engaging an action research approach to my work, my concerns and my claims to knowledge, the benefits and contribution of action research to my living theory of educational leadership, and the generative and transformational potential of story and metaphor in improving my practice and generating new theory. I describe my experience of liminality resulting from opposition and criticism and conclude by addressing issues of validity and epistemological, methodological and ontological standards of judgement. Chapter 3 describes my use of story and metaphor as generative influences in my research and outlines their use in practice to promote an alternative epistemological and pedagogical approach to enabling young people to reflect on, and grow in awareness of, the reality of their social settings and make a constructive contribution to a good social order.

Movement 3: *Making accessible Christian Story and Vision.* This Movement contains Chapter 4. In light of my values and belief, and in light of my commitment to embodied living of the principles contained in Micah 6: 8, discussed earlier in this chapter, I describe the manner in which I have developed an empowering living theory of leadership through my engagement with the 'text' of leadership in the literature.

Movement 4: *Dialectical hermeneutics to appropriate Story / Vision to participants' Stories and Visions.* Movement 4 comprises Chapters 5 and 6, in which I provide descriptions and explanations of my practice in historical settings. Chapter 5 describes my emerging practice of developing student leaders in a school setting, while Chapter 6 demonstrates how I have developed and implemented a leadership programme with young adults who give expression to their leadership by working with marginalized and disadvantaged children in a local community.

Movement 5: *Decision / Response for ongoing praxis.* In Chapter 7, I draw together all the strands of this thesis, outline my claims to new knowledge and theory, and define how I perceive this theory to be contributing to generative processes in educative settings and to a good social order through the education of social formations. I also depict the personal, social and political potential of my research and practice.

Two points are worth noting as I close this prologue to my thesis. One, a shared praxis approach is not simply an approach or adapted format employed as a description and explanation of my practice. It is embodied living action generating living theory and taken in response to the recurring questions of the kind 'What is my concern?' and 'How do I improve my practice?' (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006). Two, while these movements are described separately, they are not to be understood as five separate and disconnected entities; they are, in fact, a deeply entwined and flowing, iterative unit.

I now turn to the First Movement of my unfinished symphony and in Chapter 1, I describe my praxis, work and research settings as a prelude to addressing emergent concerns and developing a living theory approach to student and young adult leadership development.

FIRST MOVEMENT

Introduction

In this movement, I reflect on my current involvement in educational contexts as a starting point for my research, discuss the nature of my research, identify the generative theme underpinning and woven through my research and practice - the score of my 'Unfinished Symphony' as it were - and define the characteristics of a living theory (Whitehead, 1993) self-study action research approach to my historical engagement in living contexts. This movement sets the scene for the critical exploration of my practice as it emerges, evolves and takes shape in the ensuing four movements, and provides the historical and relational contexts within which my learning takes place and my new living theory of educational leadership is generated.

Engaging in a self-study action research, I am stating from the outset that my living theory of practice is grounded in, and generated by, my practice in contrast with dominant theoretical discourses and epistemologies where theory precedes practice. My research reflects a living form of logic rather than a propositional one and Chapter 2 explains the rationale and outcome of this decision. That being said, however, I recognise the value of existing propositional theory and in later chapters I demonstrate its contribution and challenge to my emergent and evolving living theory. In critically exploring my practice through reflection on present action, I recognise the personal and tacit knowledge (Polyani, 1958) and past experience that inspire and influence current practice. I also recognise the potential for future action and transformation in my practice, opening up new horizons of 'risk, possibility and hope' (O'Murchu, 1999: 121).

The Dynamics of the First Movement

In naming the present reality, I describe the historical and social context of my research and practice, the characteristics of my research, and my understanding of 'singularity' and 'self-study' within an action research approach. Movement 1 sets the scene from

which my research evolves, serving as an expression of my consciousness of present praxis at three levels. One, it forms links with the past by raising consciousness of the tacit and personal knowledge (Polyani, 1958), experience and values from the past and their bearing on the present. Two, the present serves as the milieu in which I identify a generative theme, leadership development in young people, by iteratively addressing two research questions - 'What is my concern?' (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006), and 'How can I improve my practice?' As Gadamer (1975: 299) points out, the essence of the question is to open up possibilities and keep them open. Exploring the present within the 'swampy lowlands' (Schon, 1995) of current practice, I am moving towards a third level, unfolding into future possibilities, new horizons (Gadamer, 1975) of risk and hope-filled exploration as my living theory of educational leadership begins to emerge and I 'unpack' the significance of my educative engagement.

Far from being a self-congratulatory and unchallenged depiction of my practice, however, Movement 1 marks the first phase of a pedagogy of vulnerability, which I will discuss in later chapters. Suffice at this stage to say that this movement begins a process of what Varela in (Senge *et al.,* 2005: 29) describes as 'suspension', removing myself from my habitual ways of attending and avoiding the imposition of pre-established frameworks or mental models on what I am describing. Situating my research and practice within 'the new scholarship' (Schon, 1995), I adopt a contemplative stance towards my work. I understand 'contemplative' within the literature of spirituality (May, 2004; Schneiders, 2000) as a technical term which goes beyond the popular meanings of reflecting, examining or planning, to signify a radical, dynamic attentiveness which May (*ibid:* 79), citing St. John of the Cross, likens to the attentiveness given to a loved one or the vigilance of a guard standing alert on a watchtower. While being familiar with contemplation as an expression of my spirituality, adopting a contemplative stance towards my research was a new departure and an experience of vulnerability, as I re-oriented myself from a quest for certainty, predictability and control to an 'openness to mystery' (Hart, 2001: 168). Bringing a contemplative awareness to bear on my methodological, epistemological and ontological assumptions, beliefs and practices involved a radical, disturbing openness to, and engagement with, paradox, ambiguity and unpredictability.

This re-orientation, begun in the First Movement and continuing through all five movements, originated in experiences of resistance, dissonance and contradiction in my work contexts. It marks my entry into a liminal stage of straddling a critical threshold in my educative relationships, a communion, in Gadamer's words (1975: 379), in which we do not remain what we were. Throughout my research, I have adopted as my criteria of social validity Habermas' (1987) principles for achieving intersubjective agreement, ensuring that at all times my research account is comprehensible, sincere, truthful and appropriate to a recognised normative context. Chapter 1 begins this process.

CHAPTER 1

MY 'UNFINISHED SYMPHONY':

CREATING A LIVING THEORY ACCOUNT OF MY PRACTICE

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce my research, a self-study action research narrative of my educative practice conducted with second-level students in schools and young adults in community contexts. In making the 'living I' (Whitehead, 1993) the focus of my enquiry, I am providing my living theory account of my educative process. Rather than passively accepting and uncritically engaging with prescriptive, propositional theory with its emphasis on technical rationality in order to offer an explanation of my practice, my thesis becomes a narrative account of how I have not only generated, but have *become,* my own embodied living theory of educational leadership. In making this claim to knowledge, I propose as one of my epistemological, methodological and ontological standards of judgement the manner in which I have embodied my living theory, described in detail in Chapter 5 (school context) and Chapter 6 (community context).

Locating my research and practice within the new scholarship (Boyer, 1990; Schon, 1995), and conducted within 'the swampy lowlands' where problems are messy, confusing and incapable of technical solution, my thesis traces the emergent and evolutionary development of an embodied epistemology of practice fuelled by generative and transformative metaphors, values and methodologies (McNiff, 2000: 140). Given the emergent and evolutionary nature of my educative practice, my methodology of enquiry reflects, in Schon's (*ibid*: 28) words, experience, trial and error, intuition and muddling through.

This chapter begins with a story, a narrative account of an historical event, that contains within it transformative metaphors of practice that are reflected in the 'unfinished symphony' of my practice. I describe the nature, origins, context and characteristics of both my research and practice. I use story as a key feature of my practice and so I begin this research narrative as I begin many of my leadership sessions with students and young adults - 'But first, let me tell you a story….'

1:1   Symphony – Metaphor of Transformation

Casually dressed men and women worked in clusters on the stage, amidst musical instruments and music stands scattered around. Each group was focused intently on sheets of music, and occasionally one of the members took up an instrument to illustrate a point he/she was making. Further discussion ensued, hands waved, instruments were again used to help the decision-making process, the sheets of musical notation were again consulted, and the process continued until consensus was reached. Instruments were again used to experiment and test tentative conclusions until eventually the group members expressed satisfaction with the result.

The process was repeated throughout the larger group, with each small group working away, seemingly oblivious to other groups working in close proximity. While intense focus and concentration on the task in hand were characteristic of each group, nonetheless, the interaction within the individual groups was significantly different. Some members were vociferous, agitated, constantly in motion, arms waving in broad movements accompanying points being made; others sat or stood quietly, listening intently, saying little, occasionally nodding in agreement or pensively fingering their instruments. A loud cacophony of sound occasionally permeated the auditorium, as individual musicians experimented with varied interpretations of the score.

In the midst of this seeming chaos, one individual moved from group to group, speaking, listening, discussing, occasionally requesting a musician to play some notes, occasionally giving further instructions, asking questions, again requesting a piece to be

replayed, until finally, he expressed satisfaction, checked that all understood and were in agreement before moving on to the next group.

Finally, he returned to a central rostrum, took up his baton, and, with a sharp gesture, brought the orchestra together which then launched into a performance of a Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Time and again, the conductor or individual musicians intervened, dialogue followed, clarifications sought, a piece of the score was rehearsed, fine-tuned and, agreement reached, rehearsals continued apace. This start-stop process continued throughout the morning and afternoon. I was present again on the following day, seated towards the rear of the auditorium, as the process continued with varying degrees of fluidity and cohesion.

Three days later, I again sat in the auditorium, on this occasion a member of an enthusiastic and discerning audience, entranced by the performance of an elegantly dressed and intensely focused team of musicians, led by the conductor waving a baton with swift, fluid movements. Gone were the casually-dressed musicians, the frequent interruptions and discussions – in their stead, a cohesive, committed and collaborative musical community. A key moment for me, one which remains with me to this day, was when the conductor, clasped his hands behind his back and, as if in rapture, swayed in time with the music – he had become one of the audience and momentarily ceded total control to the orchestra. I was struck both by the manner in which he ceded personal power and control and by his confidence and trust in the orchestra members to exercise personal leadership and address the task in hand without his intervention.

Now, many years later, I vividly recall that experience as I engage in research on my educative practice and relationships, particularly in the context of student and young adult leadership development. I begin my thesis with this story, a descriptive narrative of an historical event. In doing so, I highlight the central role of story both in my practice and in its narrative description. Several of the stories influencing my research and practice serve as 'charter texts' (Condren, 1989) - texts which have influenced my beliefs, practice and indeed, my identity. This thesis, my research story, is not *just* a story. A story as Goodson (1998), cited in Bolton (2001) points out, does social and

political work, and is a statement of beliefs, morality and values. Stories possess the power to create generative and transformative metaphors (Todorov, 1990; Owen, 1987) that challenge dominant epistemological and ontological consciousness and disrupt the fluency of accepted, frequently unquestioned, norms, ideologies and practices. Story enables me to work constructively and critically with my own experience and self-understanding within the social, political and professional contexts in which I live and work, creating a critical synthesis of the meaning and significance of my practice and fostering a considered and congruent response as I develop my living theory of practice. In Chapter 3, I illustrate more fully the contribution of story to my research and practice.

This critical synthesis facilitates the manner in which I order my experience and construct reality. The narrative framework allows me to uncover and configure the influences, meanings and values that both form and drive my life; as Steere (1997: 184) points out, we are '*living* stories, both living in them and living them out'(emphasis in original). Mining the narrative and metaphorical content of my story is one strand in the process of developing a living theory account of my educative practice.

1:2   The nature of my research narrative

My narrative describes the interaction of my research and practice as I address the research question 'How do I improve my practice?' (Whitehead and McNifff, 2006) while developing my living theory approach to student and young adult leadership development. I describe how I have addressed my concern about the marginalisation and 'voicelessness' of students in second-level schools and how, through dialogical relationships of mutuality and reciprocity with principals, parents, teachers and students, I have developed leadership processes that foster a partnership model of school community where student voice is recognised and promoted. I facilitate students in actively contributing to a good social order within their school through reflective, dialogical engagement with school partners, leading to committed action. Conscious of teachers' resistance and fears around issues of student leadership, my research also

focuses on how I support principals and staffs in adjusting to more collaborative models of educative partnership.

My narrative describes a second strand of my research, which describes the evolution of a young adult leadership development process where I have recruited and helped young adults to run summer camps for children from disadvantaged or marginalised backgrounds. My practice has led to sustainable processes where young adult leaders now have full responsibility for the camps and while being actively involved in a supportive role, my role is now essentially one of accompaniment. I assign a chapter to describing each of these strands in detail.

The third strand of my self-study action research narrative describes how I have developed my own living theory of educational leadership development through reflective and practice-focused engagement with a variety of literatures, especially the literatures of leadership (Kouzes and Posner, 2002; Nielsen, 2004; Dorr, 2006). I address the concepts of spirituality (Schneiders, 2001; Lowney, 2003) and liminality as components of my living theory of practice. Moving beyond Wenger's (1998) concept of communities of practice and Clarke's (1996) concept of learning communities, I then explain how I have drawn on Groome's (1991) understanding of shared praxis to develop my living theory approach to nurturing communities of shared praxis.

1:3   The reasons for my research

I began my research for personal, epistemological and ontological reasons. On a personal level, I set out to understand my emerging practice as I struggled with my dilemma of 'How do I teach leadership, or conduct leadership development with students and young adults?' I felt challenged to clarify my own understanding of leadership and the models of leadership I espoused and embodied as I addressed the question 'How do I improve my practice?' (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006) and grappled with the practicalities of methodology, content and process. While I was accustomed to didactic and prescriptive approaches, other experiences drew me to adopt more

collaborative approaches that facilitated participants' contribution to their own learning. The experience of the conductor related earlier in this chapter, and the two stories of the *Nuffield Science Project* and *'The Old Woman's Hut'* described in Chapter 2 are examples of key influences on my practice. In the latter stories in particular, my students convinced me of their innate ability to express their leadership capacities in effective ways; my contribution was simply to create and hold a space where this could happen.

I also explore Palmer's question (1998: 7) - 'Who is the self that teaches?' - as a theme in my unfinished symphony and as part of my commitment to improving my practice; through suspension (Senge *et al.,* 2005: 29), removing myself from my habitual ways of thinking, perceiving and responding, I strive not only to 'see my seeing' (*ibid.*) but also to understand my seeing and doing. I achieve this by adopting an action research self-study approach (described in Chapter 2), crossing into new and unfamiliar epistemological and methodological territory, where outcomes are ill-defined and unpredictable. Eschewing the traditional trappings of power and control, my research describes how I have adopted a pedagogy of accompaniment and vulnerability in my educative relationships. I describe how I have invited young people to be contributors to their own learning and co-creators of living leadership theory, while contributing to a good social order in their historical settings.

Consequently, I have experienced the transformative process of what Brookfield (1995: 46) terms 'a counter-hegemonic moment', when I reclaimed my own voice and agency by generating my own living theory of leadership that challenges dominant propositional and exclusional epistemologies and practices of theory generation. I resonate with Richert (1992), cited by Brookfield, when he observes that

> As teachers talk about their work and 'name' their experiences, they learn about what they know and what they believe. They also learn what they do not know. Such knowledge empowers the individual by providing a source for action that is generated from within rather than imposed from without…
>
> Teachers who know in this way can act with intent; they are empowered to draw from the centre of their own knowing and act as critics and creators of their world rather than solely respondents to it, or worse, victims of it.
>
> (Richert 1992, cited in Brookfield (1995: 47)

My narrative traces the manner in which I have acted with intent. Essentially I tell a story, a journey narrative in which I describe and explain how I began with a research issue – developing a student and young adult leadership process – and framed it as my research question: 'How do I improve my practice as I do this?'

Epistemological reasons

I began my research for epistemological reasons when I experienced paradigmatic inadequacy in employing propositional and didactic approaches to leadership development and to student disenchantment (Glavey, 2002). I struggled with the question, 'How do I teach leadership to young people?' An initial review revealed the exponential growth of leadership literature, with myriad definitions, prescriptions and descriptions ranging from the largely theoretical and descriptive (Davies, ed. 2005; Northouse, 2005) to those that prescribe 'tools', 'steps', and 'laws' of leadership (Hughes, 1998; Maxwell, 1998; Landberg, 2000). At that stage of my research, I heartily agreed with Yukl (2002) that definitions of leadership are arbitrary and subjective and there is no 'correct' definition. Significantly, I also noticed the absence of literature relating to student and young adult leadership development - the literature seemed to focus mainly on adults, business and organisations.

I then began to explore the questions 'What form of educative relationship would help young people become leaders?' and 'How can I create a space and process where young people can grow in authentic, effective leadership?' My story of the conductor serves as a metaphor of practice, where the concepts of conductor, symphony and orchestra combined to help me develop a model of practice that addresses these questions. The words of conductor Benjamin Zander (2007) - 'A conductor rules on his power, his ability, to make other people powerful' (Zander 2007: 7) - hint at my epistemology of practice, though I replace the word 'make' (with its connotations of coercion, force, superiority and control) with the words 'facilitate others in making themselves powerful'. I describe in my narrative how I have facilitated young people to find their authentic voice, to recognise that they can contribute effectively to improving their

social contexts and genuinely learn about leadership by being given opportunities to 'do' leadership.

Ontological reasons

My epistemological reasons are closely linked with my ontological reasons. My practice is firmly rooted in my commitment to democratic practice. My narrative describes how I have challenged what Fear *et al*. (2006: 91) describe as 'the hegemony of the dominant paradigm' in educative circles, where students are essentially treated as passive recipients of others' knowledge, are seen but not heard, are frequently voiceless, marginalised and disenchanted (Monaghan and Prendergast, 2002), and are regarded as 'the future' of society, of churches and of organisations. I regard them as being very much part of our present. My account of improving my practice clearly demonstrates that I am not merely an *advocate* of an inclusive ethic that honours the dignity and natality (Arendt, 1958) of students and young people, but that I am also an *activist* in solidarity with young people, encouraging their participation in decision-making processes affecting them, enhancing their capacity to be subjects of their own future and, through emphasis on building community, facilitating their becoming 'agents-subjects-in relationship' (Groome, 1991: 8) in their historical settings. My narrative includes the voices of principals, teachers and colleagues who authenticate the veracity of my account as, for example, a member of a school's senior management team who states that 'there is a greater sense of shared vision in the school as a community, with staff and students working in partnership' (Appendix 2) as a result of my intervention.

I concur with Bullough and Pinnegar's (2004: 319) assertion that 'consideration of one's ontology, of one's being in and toward the world, should be a central feature of any discussion of the value of self-study research'. My ontological values give purpose and direction to my life, are central to my research and practice and serve as standards of judgement by which my living theory can be judged. I subscribe to Christian values that respect each person's natality and dignity and affirm and support life, exemplified in the words of Jesus – 'I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.' (John 10: 10). A central tenet of the faith underpinning my values is that each person is made in

the image of God and the transcendent and transpersonal dimension of the person is an essential dimension of a holistic approach to learning.

Consequently, my ontological stance reflects two core characteristics - presence and compassion. Presence, the quality of my 'I-Thou' (Buber, 1958) relationship with those with whom I come in contact, posits my educative practice as a radically egalitarian enterprise that honours the potential and contribution of each person. Senge *et al.* (2005: 13) portray the active dimension of presence as 'deep listening, being open beyond one's preconceptions and historical ways of making sense'. It involves letting go of roles, identities and modes of control that inhibit the evolution of new life. Presence challenges the positivist view of reality as predictable and capable of being mapped, and demands a radical openness to difference and paradox. In practice, I demonstrate this belief by sitting in a circle during our study sessions, by foregoing title, status and power differential in my educative engagement, by my use of story (e.g. 'Fly, Eagle, fly!' described in detail in Chapter 3) and metaphors (e.g. orchestra, community, webs of interdependence and connectedness) to challenge existing propositional paradigms. I begin my sessions with principals, teachers and students by emphasising that *they* are the experts in *their* practice, and that our time together will be a collaborative and reciprocal enterprise of shared expertise, insight and, hopefully, creative, generative response. As my narrative account unfolds, I will describe and explain how these qualities find expression in my practice.

I understand compassion in its biblical sense (Borg, 1997; Senior and Stuhlmuller, 1984), not as a 'weak' or 'nice' value but as a resolute stance against injustice, marginalisation, indifference, misuse of power, disenfranchisement and politics of control and diminishment – in other words, compassion is essentially political. As Borg (1997: 150) points out, a politics of compassion is a paradigm, a social vision that recognises the impact of social structures on people's lives, challenges all forms of discrimination and diminishment, and fosters a life-giving, life-affirming and inclusive social ethic. Being compassionate, I address what Fear *et al.* (2007: 27) refer to as 'the tyranny of technique' that displaces collaborative enquiry, discovery and learning, as I challenge and transform educative structures, processes and practices that disenfranchise

and disempower. By being compassionate, I emphasise the deep interconnectedness of all creation (Capra, 2002; Wheatley, 2002) and recognise the potential of each person to contribute to improving the good social order of his/her living contexts and historical settings.

Espousing values, however, is easy, living them is another matter entirely and in my narrative I trace the manner in which my practice embodies these values through a pedagogy of accompaniment. I explain how, through an embodied expression of my values, I have come to understand my practice in terms of the Aristotelian notion of *praxis;* and how, in light its collaborative and reciprocal nature, I have come to understand my collaborative engagement with participants as *shared praxis,* where our embodied values of justice, mutuality, interconnectedness and reciprocity underpin our educative endeavours.

My ontic stance reflects my commitment to community, both as a value and a privileged locus of growth and transformation. As a religious Brother actually living in community, I understand the potential of community as an embodied metaphor to foster liberatory educative processes and structures. Conscious of Giddens' (2001) concept of the duality of structure where social structure is perceived both as the necessary condition for action and the result of cumulative action, Bourdieu's (1990) concept of habitus, and Wenger's (1998) concept of communities of practice, I explore the concept of a *community of shared praxis* as a locus of inquiry in developing my epistemology of practice. My narrative tells the story of how research participants and I have embodied this model in school and parish settings.

1:4   What are my claims to knowledge?

I now highlight my claims to knowledge, offering a fuller description and explanation of how I test and justify them in later chapters. I have come to a deeper understanding of my practice, its origins and development, the influences, assumptions, values and philosophy underpinning it, and have adopted the realisation of my values in practice as

the conceptual framework of my research. This commitment to living out my values influenced my choice of self-study action research as my research methodology, and Groome's (1991) shared praxis approach as a methodological, pedagogical and hermeneutical model of engagement that fosters dialogue, mutuality and partnership in learning.

Second, I recognise that I am engaged in the development of new institutional and organisational epistemologies (Schon, 1995) that honour and foster the natality, human potential and capability of young people, develop their leadership capabilities and provide them with opportunities for 'doing' leadership and being generous in the service of others. Freedom is a necessary condition for generative transformative practices (Freire, 1970; Sen, 1999) and my narrative describes how I provide this freedom in open, supportive spaces in a school and local community setting.

My third claim to knowledge is grounded in recognising that facilitating the self-development of young people for self-determination and becoming agents of their own destiny is a highly political act and a threat to the status quo and dominant organisational epistemologies. Through the use of transformative metaphors (e.g. *community, symphony, conductor),* however, I define a process that fosters life-affirming engagement in my educative practice where the voices and contribution of all stakeholders are acknowledged and welcomed. Describing this paradigm in practice throughout this narrative and providing evidence to support my claims, I describe in my final chapter its potential for the education of other social formations.

My final claim to knowledge relates to the place of spirituality in my action research. My narrative describes a dual-strand approach. On the one hand, I describe and explain my personal learning through nurturing, empowering and enabling young people to develop themselves in leadership roles, exemplified by the 'Fly, Eagle, Fly!' story recounted in Chapter 3. On the other hand, and woven through this narrative, is my growing awareness of how my embodied spirituality informs my educative engagement. This is particularly evident in the manner in which I have developed my living theory of educational leadership, of building communities of shared praxis and addressing the

intransigence and resistance of oppressive ideologies and systems. Grounded in Micah 6:8, which posits the values of love, justice, humility and authenticity, and drawing on my experience and understanding of liminality (see Chapter 2), I explain how my spirituality encourages and supports an ethic of risk (Welch, 2002) and a pedagogy of vulnerability, as I cross (and invite others to cross) the threshold of the unfamiliar and challenging territory of new scholarship forms of pedagogy and epistemologies of practice, addressing what Palmer (1998: 50) describes as 'our fearful way of knowing'. I provide documentary evidence to support these claims and now address the criteria or standards of judgement by which my work may be judged.

1:5   My living standards of judgement

Were my research to remain purely at the level of narrative, however, my claims to knowledge would have little validity or significance. Conscious of the fallibility of my critical synthesis and the possibility of ideological bias and illusion, my research addresses the issues of truthfulness and meaning as the basis of the credibility, coherence and significance of my account. I emphasise the 'dialectical reflexivity' (Winter, 2002: 148) of the narrative, acknowledging the contingent nature of my understanding and the possibility of alternative interpretations. The collaborative nature of my research is fuelled by a dialogical engagement with the views, insights and perceptions of others – teachers, colleagues, students and young adults (Appendix 2 and 3).

Having indicated my epistemological, ontological and spiritual values in earlier paragraphs, I am stating at the outset that I choose these values, embodied in practice, as my living standards of judgement and explanatory principles. I am claiming that my living theory and claims to knowledge emanate from my practice and the espoused values underpinning it. My narrative serves as an unfolding process by which I externalise my embodied tacit knowledge (Polyani, 1958) as explicit living theories of learning and practice.

I ground my narrative and my claims to understanding my educational development in Polyani's (1958: 308) view of commitment and responsibility. He describes the principle determining heuristic choice in the course of scientific research as 'a sense of growing proximity to a hidden truth' which emerges within the 'framework of commitment … as a sense of responsibility exercised with universal intent' (*ibid:* 310). Recognising the hazards of self-set standards, I nonetheless align myself with Polyani when he states:

> The paradox of self-set standards is eliminated, for in a competent mental act the agent does not do what he pleases, but compels himself forcibly to act as he must. He can do no more, and he would evade his calling by doing less.

> (Polyani, 1958: 315)

In this way, I am acting 'expressively' - an act, according to Palmer (1990: 24), taken to express a conviction, a leading, a truth that is within me, and an expression of my personal and professional integrity in the swampy lowlands (Schon, 1995) of practice.

As noted earlier, I also draw on insights from Habermas (1987) and Lonergan (1972) to develop my criteria for social validity claims which serve as standards of judgement in fostering intersubjective agreement and understanding. I have worked to ensure that my narrative reflects Habermas' (*ibid: 2*) validity criteria viz. that it is comprehensible, that it is a true proposition, that it is trustworthy and is made with awareness of a recognised normative background. I have also embraced Lonergan's (1972: 20) 'transcendental precepts' as a validity framework for my practice and research by being *attentive, intelligent, reasonable and responsible* (Dunne, 1985: 60).

Finally, I turn to the ethical criteria influencing my action research. From the outset, my ontological and epistemological values are reflected in my decision to conduct my research *with* rather than *on* participants and to regard them as co-creators of their own living theories through a pedagogy of accompaniment rather than one that is didactic and propositional. My status of 'guest' rather than permanent member of staff in my practice settings in schools all over the country presented me with the ethical dilemma of fidelity to my values in contexts and settings that on occasion subscribed to different values and epistemologies. In Chapter 2, I draw on the concept of liminality to explain

the nature of my dilemma and my response to it. Suffice at this point to state that the key ethical dilemma throughout my research was the struggle to avoid becoming a 'living contradiction' (Ilyenkov, 1977) where my espoused values of respect, mutuality and inclusion would be denied were I to adopt a coercive, directive and propositional logic and strategy of educative engagement. As my narrative unfolds, I will describe how I have addressed this dilemma by aligning myself with Schon's (1995) ideas of a new epistemology and adopting 'living logics' (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006: 39) in developing a congruent epistemology of practice. As before, I draw on an extensive body of data to test and ground the validity of my claims to knowledge.

Embracing living logics is a risky business (*ibid:* 40), a dynamic, transformative process that resists propositional finality, and accepts the impermanent, 'for now' nature of my research. How then can it be judged by the reader as a distinct contribution to existing knowledge of my field? Like Hartog (2004), I propose the following questions as an approach in judging my work in addition to traditional processes of critique.

- Does my inquiry account portray a living expression of Polyani's (1958) ideas of 'commitment and responsibility'?

- Are Habermas' (1987) social standards of validity and Lonergan's (1972) 'transcendental precepts' reflected in my narrative account?

- I have articulated my espoused values as my living standards of judgement – does my living theory account of practice demonstrate these values expressed in practice through collaborative, generative, inclusive and caring educative relationships?

- I have expressed concerns about the 'voicelessness' and disenfranchisement of young people – do my theory and practice of educational leadership demonstrate an effective intervention in addressing these concerns in an effective, original and ethically transformative manner?

- Does the narrative of my 'unfinished symphony' provide a critical, congruent and reflective approach to understanding and improving my practice?

Writing this thesis reflects my capacity to imagine both a future where my values are realised and the practical, creative steps to bring it about. Placing my thesis in the public domain reflects my commitment to having the validity of my claims to knowledge critiqued and validated. Having considered the content, purpose and standards of judgement of my research, I now discuss the contexts and settings of my practice.

1:6   My research contexts

In this section, I indicate the contexts within which I work and the links between my practice and research. My work takes place in the following four contexts:

(i)   second-level schools in locations around the country,

(ii)   leadership development for young adults in local communities,

(iii)   therapeutic work with adolescents at risk,

(iv)   leadership development with adult youth leaders at third level.

My report traces my research in the first two contexts – student leadership training in a second level school and young adult leadership training within a local community – but is heavily influenced by my work in the latter two contexts. I describe my work in one school and one local community as exemplars of my work in other locations. Using an action research approach, I draw on Schon's (1995) concepts of 'the new epistemology' and the 'swampy lowlands' to emphasise the complexities of my practice within these contexts where my methods of enquiry reflect experience, trial and error, intuition and muddling through. A living logics approach rather than a positivist one seemed more suited to facilitating the emergent nature of my living theory, the future potential of my educative influence and my lack of clarity about outcomes. Reframing my lack of clarity

in the iterative question, 'What if I did x….?', followed by evaluation of the outcome, helped me address the question 'How do I improve my practice?' (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006) and develop my epistemology of practice.

Second-level school work (My first research context)

I work in Ireland as an educational consultant and trainer for student leadership development in the Christian Brothers Schools Network (approximately 60 second level schools) and in several secondary schools outside this network. In this role, and in response to two documents - *Government of Ireland Education Act 1998* and *Edmund Rice Education Conference, 1997 (EREC 1997),* both of which advocate student leadership development in second-level schools - I have developed and delivered student leadership programmes for student councils, prefects and mentors while also facilitating induction programmes for Year 8 and Year 13 students. This thesis describes in detail my work in one school as representative of my work in other settings.

As an extension of this work I have begun to involve principals and staff in the process of developing leadership roles among students. With time, the systemic nature of my work has become clearer to me, leading to ongoing dialogue and evaluation with all stakeholders within the school. I soon came to realise that developing student leaders was a futile exercise where principals or teachers were, at worst opposed to the concept, or at best, offering begrudging acceptance with minimal support. Let me tell a story of an incident that crystallised my thinking and profoundly influenced my practice.

Having participated in a day-long leadership development process for student councils, twelve committed, enthusiastic and responsible students returned to school with exciting, carefully prepared plans to improve the quality of life in their school. To ensure that my work addresses the real needs of schools, I usually arrange a follow-up visit to meet with principal, staff and students to evaluate the effectiveness of the process, provide support where needed and share examples of good practice. Two months later, I happened to meet one of the twelve students on his lunchbreak and enquired about their progress. He informed me that the students' council, on returning to school, had been refused permission to hold meetings and function in any capacity. He

spoke of the students' anger and disappointment and their decision to disband. I subsequently learned from a member of staff that the principal had bowed to pressure from several staff members who, threatened by the whole concept of student leadership, had refused to support the initiative.

My learning and concerns

This experience and other experiences of opposition and resistance to the implementation of student and young adult leadership processes (personal journal, April 20th, 2001) was a profound learning experience and raised several concerns that form the basis of this thesis. I realised that my personal beliefs and assumptions about developing the leadership potential of young people were not universally shared or accepted. I experienced myself as a living contradiction (Whitehead, 1993) where my values of justice, democracy, autonomy and belief in the potential of young people to contribute to an improved social order, were being denied in practice. My deeply-felt respect for the natality and agency of every person, expressed in freedom, led me to react strongly to young people's lack of autonomy and the realisation that they are essentially voiceless and powerless in educational settings.

I was equally concerned about the power dichotomy that exists between teachers and students; my examination of the literature indicated a dearth of research on the issue of power relationships in schools from the perspective of young people (Lodge and Lynch, 2000). Martin (1997), in a report to the Minister of Education, pointed out that young people, alone among the stakeholders, were excluded from participation in consultation on the exercise of control and power in school settings. It seemed to me that young people were being deprived of autonomy and opportunities to realise their potential and contribute through their commitment and generosity to a good social order in school and society. In Chapter 3, I recount two examples from personal experience where students, on their own initiative, took responsibility for their own learning and for improving their social setting.

My third, and most problematic, concern centred on the nature of my response to this type of situation in particular, and the nature of my intervention in schools in general.

Recognising that any transformative intervention needed to be systemic in nature, I realised that working with students in isolation would be futile. I struggled with the temptation to adopt propositional forms of logic to ensure compliance with *my* way of thinking and acting. Aware of the imperialistic, dominating and coercive characteristics of propositional logics (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006: 36) and their lack of openness to diversity and paradox, I realised that adopting such an approach would result in my becoming a living contradiction to my espoused values of respect for the uniqueness and autonomy of 'the Other' (Buber, 1958) as I stand 'on the threshold of mutuality' (*ibid:* 126). How was I to address adults' fear and concerns about student leadership, recognising as I did that helping students find and use their voice, allowing them to speak for themselves out of their experience, would instigate a discourse about and against power. In fact, in Foucault's (1977) view such a discourse by young people who are normally voiceless and controlled, would be a counter discourse.

Experiencing what Schon (1995) describes as 'the swampy lowlands of practice', accompanied by a sense of dislocation and disorientation, I understood myself to be in a liminal, threshold situation (I discuss the concept of liminality in detail in the next chapter), where my assumptions and beliefs were called into question and the way forward was unclear and indeterminate. I lacked a cohesive theory of leadership and my methodology lacked a cogent philosophical underpinning – this situation marked the beginning of my search for a new epistemology of practice. But first let me indicate the second research context described in my narrative.

Young adult leadership development (My second research context)

This aspect of my work forms the second part of my research project, and involves working with young adults at college level and beyond. This programme is community based and focused on developing leaders who work in their own locality with children from disadvantaged backgrounds. These young adults organise summer camps and other events for the children. Leader-child ratio is 1:1, thus ensuring the maximum personal attention and care for each child. Chapter 6 provides a detailed account of this project, the generative, transformational process involved and its significance in the lives of

participants. I work to empower young adults to develop their leadership skills and express these skills through their commitment and generosity in providing a holiday experience for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. My description of this work is supported by the voices and visual evidence of both young leaders and the children engaged in this process (see Appendix 1, DVD 1 and 2).

I have recruited, selected and prepared these leaders, set up the camps and facilitated the development of local committees of leaders who, while independent and self-regulating, are linked and networking with camps in other areas. My practice and research are aimed at developing self-sustaining communities of praxis, and 'communities of congruence' (Palmer, 1998: 172) with outreach to the disadvantaged and marginalised of our society, thus contributing to creating a good social order (McNiff et al., 1992). My narrative offers descriptions and explanations of this process.

As part of my narrative, I describe my actions, rooted in my values of justice, care, and concern for socially disadvantage children, as I developed this process and the personal and communal learning involved. In extending Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of 'communities of practice', I explore the concepts of communities of praxis and shared praxis while considering models of leadership appropriate to such contexts. I emphasise the value of community for the following reasons: as a privileged locus for personal and communal growth, for clarification and living out of participants' values in a supportive, caring environment; for sustainability, and as a setting where the natality, giftedness and goodness of each person can find expression. I also value community as a powerful antidote to alienation, loneliness and disaffection (Glavey, 2002), where issues of diversity and paradox can be constructively addressed. This belief is supported by my therapeutic work with teenagers at risk who have dropped out of secondary education - many of these young people come from disadvantaged backgrounds, misuse drugs and/or alcohol and generally display a marked distrust of adults and any intervention of support and help.

Additional contextual elements

I also wish to highlight three additional elements that have had a profound influence on my current research and practice – my rural background, my membership of a religious order of Brothers within the Catholic Church, and my extensive experience as a missionary educator in Africa. Here I briefly outline the significance of these elements, a more detailed account will follow in later chapters.

Growing up on the western seaboard, in a rural area, I experienced first-hand the Irish concept of 'meitheal' [pronounced 'meh-hill'] - the collaborative participation of entire communities in harvesting crops, 'saving' turf, repairing and constructing houses and barns and dealing with a variety of crises and emergencies within the community. Within the Irish psyche and cultural tradition, meitheal serves as an archetype of belonging and contributing to one's community, of generative engagement of self with others that fosters the wellbeing of all. It was my first experience of leadership as 'a collective and constantly redistributed function' (Owen, 1999: 4) where the potential and contribution of everyone, from the youngest to the oldest, were acknowledged and celebrated.

I am also a member of a religious order of Brothers who run schools and colleges all over the world and are dedicated to the education of youth, especially the poor and the marginalised. The values of this way of life are those of the gospels and the example of Jesus, which honour the uniqueness, individuality and potential of each person. The essence of Brotherhood is essentially relational and communitarian – I live and work as a member of a 'community of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Clarke, 1996).

The order's motto - '*Facere et Docere*' - reflects the interconnectedness of theory and practice, where one is incomplete without the other; authentic congruence demands that one must 'walk the talk'. In light of the contemplative and reflective nature of community life, communities are potentially communities of praxis and shared practice, concepts I address in detail in Chapter 6 and the process involved in establishing such communities.

Being a member of a religious order within the Catholic Church has exposed me to issues of power, authority and leadership, most of which have been life-enhancing, challenging and fulfilling. However, I have also witnessed and experienced destructive and abusive uses of power and authority which have flown in the face of the founding ethos of both the Church and religious life. Both as leader and follower, I have grappled with issues of power and leadership over many years, and the learning and experience emanating from this struggle significantly influences my current methodology and epistemology. As I write this thesis, I bring to the process a deepened understanding emanating from lived experience as a member of these two institutions in the throes of possibly the most challenging and seismic periods of their history (Arbuckle, 1993), specifically in the areas of community, leadership, authority and values. This experience ensures that the theoretical dimension of my work is both grounded in, and driven by, congruent engagement with practice - it is both lived and living theory.

The third element influencing both my theory and practice is my experience as a missionary educator in Africa, working in a country increasingly impoverished, burdened with debt and ravaged by AIDS. While issues of inculturation - locating theory and practice in cross-cultural settings, adapting to an unfamiliar culture, language and educational system - were the focus of my concern in the early stages of my work, they were replaced in time with the issue of *interculturation,* which posits the inherent ability of cultures to transmit authentic and relevant meaning and life across cultural boundaries. Interculturation proposes, according to Grenham (2004: 74), that diverse cultural worldviews and perspectives encounter, inform and enrich each other through collaborative, respectful and reciprocal interaction. The challenges of interculturation were further highlighted for me through engagement with the Guittierrez (1988) and Boff and Boff (1986) - particularly through the process of conscientisation (Freire, 1973), a mode of learning that critically engages with social, cultural and political paradox. Gittens (2002) portrays conscientisation as a process by which boundaries are shaken, sensibilities shocked, obsolete defences are broken down, and hardened perspectives and philosophical positions are softened. My challenging and enriching experience of intercultural engagement in Africa and the learning involved formed a basis for my current research and practice as a guest and researcher in unfamiliar

surroundings, particularly in settings where I experienced paradigmatic, systemic and ideological resistance and opposition. This influence is particularly reflected in my 'gestures of approach' (Eliade, 1959) and in the model of leadership I espouse. I address these issues in Chapter 4.

While my educative relationships, grounded in first world culture, were having an influence on the local African culture and practice, my reflection alerted me to the manner in which I was being reciprocally influenced - epistemologically, ontologically and methodologically - by the culture of the people among whom I was working in a mutually enriching process. I learned much about models of shared leadership, the dynamics of transition and effective response (Turner, 1969), the value of each individual's contribution in all community endeavour (Donovan, 1978; Owen, 1997) and the importance of community in the development of critically aware, responsible and committed young people. In particular, I came to understand and appreciate the concepts of liminality and rites of passage (Turner, 1969; Bridges, 2001) and will demonstrate in this thesis how these influences, experienced in the past, contribute to current practice, involving young people as co-creators of living theory and practice.

1:7   Location of my research

My research is located in Omagh, a town in Northern Ireland. The hatred, division, violence and suffering which have been a feature of this troubled region for many years have been extensively reported and documented (Daly, 2000; McKittrick *et al.,* 1999). The contextual relevance of the research and practice, documented in this thesis, is significant – my work began in Omagh in the aftermath of the horrific terrorist bomb which killed 29 people and injured hundreds more. Several of the participants of my research are survivors of this bombing and my action research reflects our combined efforts towards creating a good social order (McNiff *et al.,* 1992). The divided, fractious and pain-filled context of Northern Ireland forms the backdrop of my research (Daly, 2000), which describes (in Chapter 6), my work with a group of young adults in

addressing issues of educational and social disadvantage in their local community, and modelling processes and relationships of collaboration and mutuality.

1: 8   My Concerns: What will I do about them?

I now outline briefly the nature of my response and indicate how the steps taken in developing my living theory of educational leadership. Each step will be addressed in detail as the narrative unfolds and in the closing chapter, I will explain the significance of my research and its potential implications.

First, I give an account of my struggle to develop and embody a model of leadership that addressed the problematic nature of resistance, opposition and fear generated initially by my work in educative contexts. While honouring my values and status as guest I describe how, through respectful dialogue and collaborative engagement with management, staff and students, I developed a process whereby student leadership structures are encouraged and fostered. I explain how, using the principles articulated in Micah 6:8 as my embodied value system, I developed a model of leadership that honours diversity, empowers young people and promotes an ethic of care and justice; I then demonstrate this model in practice and its influence on young leaders in Chapters 5 and 6.

Second, in line with Schon's (1995) idea of a new epistemology, I draw on the power of story and metaphor to generate new perspectives on practice - in particular, I explain how I use living logics and metaphors of interconnectedness (Wheatley, 1999; Capra, 2002) and foster generative epistemologies of practice. In particular, I describe a community of shared praxis as a living transformative space (Chapter 6).

Third, I use my experience and understanding of liminality and rites of passage as a conceptual framework to facilitate the development of students and young people in leadership roles, while addressing the anxiety and concerns of adults on the threshold of new and unfamiliar educative relationships (Chapter 5).

Finally, I ensure throughout my research and emerging living theory, that my narrative reflects the polyvocal nature of the contribution of research participants, co-researchers and co-generators of new learning, whose voices are evident in the written and audio-visual data that support my findings (Appendix 1 and 2). Given the emancipatory nature and intent of praxis-oriented action research, I avail of Lather's (1991) concept of 'catalytic validity' in my claim to original knowledge in developing a living epistemology of practice. Catalytic validity resists the positivist demand for researcher neutrality by recognising the reality-altering potential of the research process and the desire of the researcher to channel this potential so that research participants grow in self-understanding and self-determination, through thoughtful reflection on their experience.

'Let me tell you a story…'

I conclude this chapter with two stories which have profoundly influenced and guided both my research and ontological stance in my life and work contexts. Influenced by Arendt (1964), I draw on these stories to maintain the stance of 'judging actor' and to encourage research participants to challenge unquestioned assumptions and to 'see our seeing' (Senge *et al.,* 2005). Part of my repertoire of reflexive tools, I have found both stories make a significant contribution to educative discourse with other partners in our research endeavour (Appendix, 2).

The Guru's Cat:

Each time the guru sat for worship with his students the ashram cat would come in to distract them, so he ordered them to tie it to a pillar when the ashram was at prayer. After the guru died, the cat continued to be tied at worship time. And when the cat expired, another cat was brought into the ashram to make sure that the guru's orders were faithfully observed at worship time. Centuries passed and learned treatises were written by the guru's scholarly disciples on the liturgical significance of tying up a cat while worship is performed.

(deMello, 1987: 73)

Sherlock Holmes' camping trip:

Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson went on a camping trip. As they lay down for the night, Holmes said: 'Watson, look above you and tell me what you see.'

Watson: 'I see millions and millions of stars.'

Holmes: 'And what does that tell you.'

Watson: 'Astronomically, it tells me that there are millions of galaxies and potentially billions of planets. Theologically, it tells me that God is great and that we are small and insignificant. Meteorologically, it tells me that we will have a beautiful day tomorrow. What does it tell you?'

Holmes: 'Elementary, my dear Watson. Somebody stole our tent.'

(*Source unknown*)

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have introduced my research as a living theory account of my practice, described the nature of my research narrative, outlined its purpose and the epistemological and ontological reasons underpinning it. I have explained my claims to knowledge and the living standards of judgement by which they may be critiqued. Finally, I have described my concerns and outlined the steps taken to address them; these steps will be explored in detail as my narrative account unfolds. In the Second Movement, I describe the nature of living theory action research, my rationale for this approach, and describe my emerging epistemology of practice as an explanatory framework for my educative engagement.

SECOND MOVEMENT

Introduction

This movement, comprising critical reflection on present action (Groome, 1991: 187) and engaging reason, memory and imagination, has as its aim the development of a critical consciousness of current practice through deepening the reflective process. This depthing process is a hermeneutic tool that facilitates wholeness and congruence by integrating all dimensions of practice in life-affirming relationships and provides an opportunity to sense the ultimate in the simple, ordinary experiences of daily life (Au, 1990). Schooled in and accustomed to a positivist, scientific approach to research, adopting an action research self-study approach proved a significant challenge for me. Essentially, I experienced this approach as a methodological, epistemological and ontological 'dig', a befriending of my inner self, that bears a striking resemblance to the dynamics of the Fourth Step of Alcoholics Anonymous, 'making a fearless moral inventory', and to the dynamics of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises (Lowney, 2003; Fleming, 1978) that evoke a creative, holistic and congruent response to daily life. Lowney (*ibid:*. 111) lists, and my experience of the Exercises causes me to concur with, the following outcomes: an ability to reflect systematically on personal strengths and weaknesses, an integrated world-view, vision and value system, an enhanced appreciation of self, others and all creation. However, I also recognise that attaining one's peak potential is an ongoing, sustained and developmental struggle, hence my metaphor of 'unfinished symphony'.

The dynamics of the Second Movement

My experience of this movement reflects several characteristics. It is both a prelude to and a recurring, energising element of practice, akin to Schon's (1983) reflection-on and reflection-in-action. Following Groome (1998), I use *reason* to grow in critical consciousness of interests, assumptions, prejudices and ideologies that permeate my practice; *memory* to unearth the biographical, historical and social influences affecting

my research and practice (the two stories in Chapter 1 and the stories of the *Nuffield Science Programme* and *The Widow's Hut* in Chapter 3 facilitate this process), and finally, *imagination* brings into focus the potential and possibilities of reflective practice in historical settings.

Second, I understand this movement as contemplation in and on action, where contemplation is any way in which participants can, in the words of Palmer (1990: 17), 'unveil the illusions that masquerade as reality and reveal the reality behind the masks.' Using a contemplative approach to dominant ideologies, epistemologies and structures, I avail of this process to challenge life-destructive practices, foster living logics, and critique the disclosive nature and value-system of normative epistemologies. Chapters 3, 5 and 6 demonstrate this process in action.

Third, a contemplative stance has helped me to address the action research questions - 'What is my concern?' 'Why am I concerned?' 'What do I think I can do about it?' (McNiff and Whitehead, 2002) - and become aware of experiences of dissonance and contradiction in my practice settings.

A fourth characteristic follows from this. A contemplative stance, as I have experienced it, induced experiences of being 'a living contradiction' (Whitehead, 1993) at a personal and social level – personal, where my practice contradicted my espoused values, and social, where my espoused and embodied values were challenged by organisational or structural norms, discourses or practices. In Chapter 2, I describe the ensuing experience of liminality and 'value-based marginality' (Daloz *et al.,* 1996: 74) as I develop my 'mattering map' (*ibid*: 214) of meaning, purpose and engagement.

From critical consciousness to embodied response

My understanding of the aim of critical reflection is improved practice through ethical, embodied response to my concerns. Recognising that change or transformation in my social or educational settings begins with my being the difference that makes the difference, later chapters of this thesis describe how I have developed my epistemology of practice, my living theory and living forms of explanation of how I have improved

my practice and contributed to the education of the social formations (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006) of which I am a part.

Using a self-study action research approach, I am placing myself, the living 'I', as the focus of my research and demonstrating how I theorise my practice and educative relationships as an educator. This chapter traces the challenges I faced in adopting an unfamiliar action research approach over my customary positivist research methodology and explores the 'implicate order' (Bohm, 1980), the 'inner landscape' underpinning my living theory of practice described in later chapters.

CHAPTER 2

ACTION RESEARCH:

CROSSING THE THRESHOLD OF THE FAMILIAR

Introduction

In this chapter, I address the issue of choice of research paradigm, the nature of action research and its use in my research projects. Section 2 deals with the transformative and generative potential of metaphor in generating new theory and improving practice. In section three, I develop the Aristotelian understanding of *praxis* and, drawing on the concept of *shared praxis* (Groome, 1991) and Lave and Wenger's (1991) idea of 'legitimate peripheral participation', describe my emerging epistemology of practice as an explanatory framework of my educative engagement. I then explore the concept of liminality in developing my understanding of Whitehead's (1993) concept of 'living contradiction', the experience of vulnerability and contradiction in developing an epistemology of practice that challenges and critiques dominant educational discourses. Finally, I consider issues of authenticity, validity and evidence in support of my claims to knowledge

2:1   Action Research: Paradigm of choice

Stenhouse (1975) suggests that research entails critical and self-critical enquiry, conducted in a systematic manner, which can contribute to the development of knowledge. Beginning a critical exploration of my educative practice and developing my own living form of theory (Whitehead, 1993: 54), necessitated a search for an appropriate research paradigm defined by Bassey (1990) as

> a network of coherent ideas about the nature of the world and the function of
> researchers which, adhered to by a group of researchers, conditions the patterns

of their thinking and underpins their research actions.

Authentic research also requires evaluative criteria to test the credibility, validity and reliability of my theory and knowledge claims, given that the generation of theory or knowledge is not value-free, but is, in fact, a highly politicised act (McNiff and Whitehead, 2005). This thesis explains how I have monitored the nature of my educative influence in the two settings already mentioned, and how, in the process, I have generated my own living theory of educational leadership. I trace the development of my knowledge, the origins, influences and events that have contributed to its development, and the challenges and refinements that subsequent experience, cognition and critical consciousness have visited upon it. I then address the transformative potential and significance of this synthesis of embodied knowledge in my educative settings.

Three factors influenced my choice of action research as my research methodology of choice. The first was my experience of paradigmatic inadequacy and paradigmatic dissonance where the positivist/empiricist and hermeneutic/interpretive models were found wanting. Having had extensive experience and considerable satisfaction in the use of both of these modes of research, I was now experiencing the first of what Bennis and Nanus (1997: 13) refer to as 'axial points', moments when previously unquestioned assumptions and methodologies were called into question and experiencing myself as 'a living contradiction' (Whitehead, 1993) where positivist and interpretive paradigms seemed to negate the ontological, epistemological and methodological dimensions of both my research and practice.

Usher (1996: 12) outlines some assumptions of a positivist paradigm, specifically a world existing independently of the knower, perceived as essentially rational, understandable, controllable and quantifiable. Objective truth exists within pre-determined parameters and is subject to 'intersubjective validation' - the belief that different observers exposed to the same data will come to the same conclusions and agreement (Bassey, 1990: 36). The goal of research is the development of universal laws

for a world that is perceived as ordered and patterned in a cause and effect manner. Consequently, the research methodology of this paradigm reflects characteristics of predictability, objectivity, rationality and universality. Hart (2001) describes the deficiencies of such an approach:

> We never experience the other's subjectivity; the other remains merely an object for our consumer scrutiny and, thus, alienation and violence are more easily perpetrated.
>
> (Hart 2001: 115)

The form of theory generated in an interpretive tradition is likewise propositional and is derived from the observation of practice from an external, independent perspective. Whereas a positivist approach emphasises prediction, objectivity and control, descriptions that offer understanding, interpretation and meaning are characteristic of an interpretive model. McNiff (2000b: 165) highlights some of the problematics of this form of enquiry, specifically the mediated nature of the world represented in interpretive research, where experience described is not the researcher's. Questions surround the generation of meaning, interpretation and the role of the researcher. McNiff draws attention to the 'perpetuation of dialogues of asymmetrical voices' (*ibid*: 167) where decisions about whose voice is heard, whose interpretation is accepted, and whose experience is acknowledged are controlled by the researcher. Schon (1995: 26) also draws attention to the dominance of propositional theory, the superior role of the researcher and the separation of research and practice within this paradigm.

The paradigmatic dissonance I experienced related to the points raised in previous paragraphs. The positioning of a disinterested, objective researcher standing outside the research context was inappropriate for both the content and conduct of my research. In making myself the focus of my research, and engaging in a pedagogy of accompaniment, my research was being done *with* rather than *on* participants and reflects the voices of all participants. My research also reflected the dynamic interplay of theory and practice where theory and learning were frequently practice-driven. Hirst (1966), cited in Carr and Kemmis (1986), is apropos here:

> To try and understand the nature and pattern of some practical discourse in terms of the nature and pattern of some purely theoretical discourse can only result in its being radically misconceived.
>
> (Hirst (1966), in Carr and Kemmis, 1986: 99)

Values also have a significant place in my practice and research. Far from being value-neutral, which is an assumption of most positivist approaches, the value-driven nature of my practice will emerge as the thesis unfolds. At this stage, I simply indicate that my practice is about justice, democratic participation and collaborative practices, values difference and paradox, and promotes shared and distributive leadership reflected in 'a dialogue of equals' (McNiff, 2000: 167). In Chapter 1, I have described my values as living standards of judgement for my action research. It is clear that both the positivist and interpretive paradigms were inadequate for my research process as I strove to develop a holistic, evolutionary and value-driven educative practice marked by a shift of emphasis from giving what one knows to sharing what one is (Au, 1990: 21).

The second factor having a bearing on choice of research paradigm was the experience of confusion, inhabiting, as it were, a 'cloud of unknowing' (Johnston, 1995: 69). What began as a 'simple' exercise in compiling a student and young adult leadership programme soon revealed itself to be a multi-faceted, multi-layered educative, ideological and epistemological challenge. Finding myself grappling with Schon's (1995: 28) idea of the swampy lowlands of professional practice where problems are 'messy, confusing, and incapable of technical solution' was, initially, an unnerving experience for one accustomed to solving problems through a positivist research approach. I grappled not only with personal epistemological and ontological issues, but also with issues of relevance and rigour, use of power and authority, of knowledge generation and its application. In Chapter 3, I describe how I drew on prior experience and tacit knowledge (Polyani, 1958) to create an educative environment in the swampy lowlands of practice.

The inadequacy of a technical rational approach which regards practice as the application of theory to living contexts was very clear. It was equally clear that any

52

method of enquiry would be characterised by trial and error, intuition and muddling through (Schon, 1995). I resonated with Bohm's (1996) description of the attitude necessary for dialogue - an attitude of exploration and emptiness, without fixed assumptions, and an empty space with many avenues of exploration. It was the first of many experiences of liminality (discussed later in this chapter), of crossing the threshold of the familiar, that necessitated the interrogation of personal experience, assumptions and values, leading, in turn, to questioning dominant educational and institutional discourses and practices.

This period of my research I termed the 'What if…?' period, characterised by uncertainty, lack of clarity and rigour, and driven by questions such as *'What if I tried x..?'; 'Supposing I did x or y happened?'; 'What if.....then what?'; 'What if I approached the person/topic/challenge this way....?'* (Personal journal, 2001). Gradually, during this time of impasse, I recognised that the common factor in the contextual, epistemological and ontological dilemmas I was grappling with was myself, the 'living I' (Whitehead, 1993); it was the single factor I had some control over and could change. This in turn led to change in research focus - I began asking the question *'What am I concerned about and what can I do about it?'* By chance, I was introduced to action research and recognised its potential for addressing my dilemma. In particular I felt encouraged that conditions favourable to action research included the freedom to admit limitations, opportunities to invent and encouragement to 'try it out' (Corey, 1953: 86ff). My questions now became 'What is my concern?' (McNiff and Whitehead, 2005) and 'How do I improve my practice?' (*ibid:* 2002). I also began to regard my practice as a form of practical theorising, where my practice-driven research generated my living theory of practice while providing the opportunity to engage with different problems at the same time (McNiff, 1988: 45). I also recognised the experience of impasse, discussed later in this chapter, as a constituent part of the research paradigm shift that had occurred.

The final factor influencing choice of research paradigm was my awareness of research and study where dominant theory, epistemology and institutional consciousness have been critiqued and challenged. McNiff (2000: 179), drawing on the insights of Said

(1994), highlights the power of 'grand narrative' to block or suppress other narratives. Gilligan (1993) and Eisner (1988) offer an alternative voice and perspective to dominant discourses in the fields of psychology and archaeology - Eisner speaks of opening a door to reveal new knowledge about the past and a new view of a potential future. In the fields of spirituality, theology and biblical studies, a feminist critique offers alternative, generative perspectives to the dominant patriarchal consciousness and structures of hierarchical power, control and domination (Schussler-Fiorenza, 1989; Schneiders, 2001). Condren (1989: xviii) writing on women, religion, and power in Celtic Ireland, also raises serious questions about the 'charter texts of the Celtic, Jewish and Christian traditions'. She offers alternative interpretations to the cultural anomalies derived from these texts, their contribution to cultural awareness and their importance in the formation of national consciousness.

The ethical dilemma of research paradigm selection is underlined in the old proverb – 'Where you plant your feet determines what you see.' Keegan (1985: 7) and Meier (1994: 6) alerted me to the limitations and disclosive potential of research and the dangers of drawing from the data 'conclusions one wants rather than conclusions the data warrant'. Wheatley (1999: 64), drawing on insights from quantum physics, also stresses that research and observation cannot be neutral. In light of the above, and conscious of Schussler-Fiorenza's (1989: xxi) reminder of the need for 'a transformation of the scientific imagination' and 'a hermeneutics of suspicion', I opted for an action research self-study approach in light of its polychromatic and polyphonic characteristics, its potential for exploring and explicating my values and concerns, and its conformity with my ethically-driven commitment to research *with* rather than *on* participants. Action research also generates an epistemology of reflective practice, of reflection in and on action, appropriate to new theories of discourse, described by Schon (1995) as 'the new scholarship'. It provides a forum for 'other voices' - the voices and experience of *all* participants in the research process (Appendix 2 & 3).

Bearing in mind the setting of my research - the troubled, divided and conflict-riven region of Northern Ireland - action research provided an opportunity of exploring how my embodied ontological values and explanations of my own learning and that of others

could contribute to a more just and caring society through the education of social formations. As such, my research is an adventure in hope, explored in detail in Chapters 5 and 6.

In Chapter 1, I described the concerns underpinning my research and practice, but action research allowed me to address other 'spin-off spirals' (McNiff, 1988: 45) of concern at significant stages of the process. A key concern related to the 'commodification' of education and learning, where educational discourse is being colonised by the discourses and practices of business, management and consumerism (Pring, 2000: 24; Law and Glover, 2000: 150). While there has been significant quantitative development, serious questions are being raised about the qualitative dimension of education, given the extent of alienation and marginalisation of young people that currently exists (Boldt, 1997; McVerry, 2002).

Giroux (1994), Levin (1999) and Fullan (2001) attest to, and my research confirms, the experience of students as significantly voiceless in educational discourse. Elsewhere (Glavey, 2002), I have addressed the issue of student disaffection and alienation. My research describes my efforts to develop a model of emancipatory educative interaction that gives a voice to the voiceless and marginalised and engages young people as active agents in their own learning. In doing so, I hope to transform negative experiences of fear, exclusion and powerlessness through educative processes that are participative, just and democratic.

This concern is closely interlinked with Kavanaugh's (2000: 38) description of the 'commodity form' of person linked with models and patterns of knowing more appropriate to objects and commodities which lack autonomy and creative potential. My own values resonate with his description of the 'personal form' (*ibid*: 65) of perceiving and valuing men and women as persons whose fundamental identities are fulfilled in covenantal relationships. He describes a covenantal relationship as a 'mutual commitment of self-donation between free beings capable of self-conscious reflection and self-possession'. My values are rooted in the Christian tradition while accepting that such values are not exclusive to this tradition but are expressed where life-

enhancing and generative relationships facilitate the emergence of full human personhood. In addressing this concern, and bearing in mind Kavanaugh's (*ibid:* 110) comparison of these two forms of consciousness, my research is aimed at collaboratively developing communities where mutual commitment and shared meaning foster communities of shared praxis.

I felt that an action research self-study approach, driven by the question - 'How do I improve my practice?' (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006) - had the potential to generate responses to my concerns and provide epistemological and living standards of judgement for my claims to knowledge. The remaining chapters demonstrate how I am achieving these aims and developing new living theory of educational leadership.

I highlight the paradoxical nature of the contribution that concepts and experiences of 'weakness' - liminality, vulnerability and spirituality - have made to making claims to new knowledge and professional and contextual improvement. Referring to the major values embodied in the occupational culture of teachers, Fraser (1997) lists privacy, territoriality and hierarchy. My claim to knowledge offers an alternative perspective where contrasting values foster empowered and sustainable educative relationships, and shared searching and risk-taking generates new theory and vision. I am engaging in new discourses of power and control, of shared knowledge and distributed leadership by choosing educative relationships of influence over coercive interaction.

Perhaps the most significant professional improvement has been in closing the gap between what Elliott (1991) terms the discursive and practical consciousness, between theory and practice. I concur with McNiff *et al.* (1992) that personal and professional development are inseparable by coming to the realisation that action research is neither an addition to nor an imposition on my practice - my research *is* my practice. My research is the locus of ontological, epistemological and methodological congruence, integrity and commitment as I embody both theory and practice in the process of knowledge creation (Whitehead, 1993). I have experienced my research as addressing Palmer's (1998: 7) question - 'Who is the Self that teaches?' - seeking 'the teacher within', where identity and integrity seek to honour the nature of my true and undivided

self. In generating a new epistemology of practice, I am aware of a deeper inner connectedness reflected in a significant shift in emphasis from 'giving knowledge' to nurturing educative relationships.

These interventions are significant on a number of levels. First, they reflect the linking of learning and practice, of theory and action - theory both drives and is driven by practice. Reflection is a core element of the process so that all participants are in fact, reflective practitioners, inspired by a democratic, collaborative and humanitarian ideology. Working in the 'swampy lowlands', they are active knowers coming to their own understanding of the nature of their lives, generating new epistemologies of praxis while simultaneously generating new and transformative metaphors of response.

Second, they become their own embodied living theories of practice, embodied in their commitment to forming a community of shared praxis and distributive leadership as they address issues of voicelessness, alienation and marginalisation within their own environments.

Morton, cited in Palmer (1998: 46), suggests that one of the great tasks of our time is to 'hear people to speech'. I have come to understand this process as a key element of my praxis. It is particularly gratifying to recognise (Appendix 1) that these young leaders I work with are themselves hearing others to speech, as described in Chapter 6.

Third, I understand my work with research participants as improving my professional practice and contributing to a good social order (Whitehead, 1993). This has particular significance given the location of my research. McNiff (2001), referring to education in Northern Ireland, highlights the metaphors of alienation and fragmentation which result in lack of social cohesion, binary divisions and 'them and us' attitudes. I suggest that the participants of my research are themselves 'living metaphors' that challenge metaphors and structures of alienation. They engender hope by offering an alternative vision of dialogue and collaborative engagement.

2:2 The nature of action research

Carr and Kemmis (1986) define action research as follows:

> Action research is simply a form of self-reflective inquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out.
>
> (Carr and Kemmis, 1986: 162)

The origin of the term 'action research' is generally attributed to Kurt Lewin, whose approach involved a series, or spiral of steps – planning, action and fact-finding about the result of the action (1948). Corey (1953) also attributes the term to Collier, a Commissioner of Indian Affairs (1933 - 1945) in the context of his writing and work in social planning. Whatever its origins, and despite its decline in the 1960s, it is clear that today action research has gained a significant foothold in contexts of professional learning, particularly in community-based and educative settings; that multiple understandings of the nature and conduct of action research exist side by side is also evident (www.jeanmcniff.com; www.bath.ac.uk).

McNiff and Whitehead (2000: 200) locate action research within the critical theoretic research paradigm, and suggest three general approaches - interpretive, critical and living theory, each with their distinctive assumptions, ontology and epistemology. I locate my research and practice within the latter approach in the belief that it best facilitates my personal professional development, provides adequate explanation of this development and fosters the clarification and living out of my values in educative relationships. According to Whitehead (1993: 80), a living form of theory is constructed from the researcher's explanation of his/her educational development where ethical values are embodied in practice. In conducting an action research self-study approach to my practice, my claim to know my own educational development is the unit of appraisal I use to test my claim to new educational theory. The key elements of this approach include the following: the centrality of myself, 'the living I' (Whitehead, *ibid.*) in the process, ongoing personal learning as a vehicle of improving practice and/or its setting, with research conducted within collaborative, generative and educative relationships.

Given the contested nature of the nature, purpose and conduct of action research and resisting any attempt to codify it, this next section reflects my emergent understanding of action research through my engagement with the literature and its practical application in my practice settings.

Conducting my research

I begin my enquiry by addressing Whitehead's (1993) question 'How do I improve my practice?' and I have drawn on the work of two authors, McNiff and Groome, in designing a systematic, ethical and rigorous research process to address this question. McNiff (2005: 29) offers a generic action plan of a series of questions to be answered:

What is my concern?

Why am I concerned?

What kind of evidence do I produce to show I am concerned?

What can I do about it?

What will I do about it? To which I add - How will I do it?

What kind of evidence do I produce to show that what I am doing is having an educational influence?

How do I evaluate that influence?

How do I ensure that any judgements I make are reasonably fair and accurate?

How do I modify my practice in the light of my evaluation?

I have already outlined my concerns earlier in this Chapter 1 and, in Chapters 5 and 6, I explain how I have addressed each of these questions in my practice. I explore issues of validity, rigour and evaluative processes later in this chapter.

Through action research I have come to know and understand my practice in terms of *praxis,* defined by Groome (1991) as purposeful human activity, holding in dialectical unity both theory and practice, critical reflection and historical engagement.

Having decided to adopt action research as my research model, and maintaining the metaphor of symphony, I found it helpful to adapt Groome's (1991) 'shared praxis' model of five 'movements' on which to structure my research, a model that reflects the 'unfinished symphony' of my educative relationships and praxis, which I have outlined in the Prologue to this thesis.

Using this framework, I have composed a 'symphony' of personal experience, knowledge and living values, guided by reflective practice. My research has been conducted in a systematic manner, and was monitored and subject to evaluative processes by myself, participants and critical friends (Appendix, 2 & 3). Data, using a variety of media, written, aural and visual, has been regularly gathered and filed and forms the evidential basis of my claims to knowledge. Given the participative nature of my practice, my research reflects due attention to ethical principles and considerations throughout and are reflected in the living contexts of my practice.

Action research – fostering a culture of engagement

My journey into action research had its origins in experience of impasse and paradigmatic inadequacy with accompanying feelings of impotence and frustration. The inadequacy of a scientific research paradigm exhibited itself in two ways - one, the remoteness and objectivity of the researcher was in marked contrast to my experience of being 'inside' the situation and of being personally involved; two, it failed to address many of the issues of the swampy lowlands of my practice where, according to Schon (1995), lay the problems of greatest human concern. Reflecting on my practice, I gradually became aware of the 'legitimation gap' between theory and knowledge generated by 'pure' research and the practical, experiential knowledge generated by the practitioner in and through reflective practice (Carr and Kemmis, 1986: 158; Pring, 2000: 120).

Finding that much of the literature was prescriptive, propositional and didactic, I reflected on various aspects of my work, and surfaced key insights which had a bearing on my research. I recognised the wealth of my own tacit knowledge (Polyani, 1985) and practical knowledge at my disposal. From my understanding of spirituality and spiritual practices, I recognised the value of reflective practice and the place of spiritual and human values in daily living (O'Murchu, 1997; Lowney, 2003). My therapeutic practice and my extensive experience as a Third World missionary educator alerted me to the necessity of partnership models and the involvement of all participants in developing generative, transformative and sustainable processes. Finally, my lived experience of community as a member of a religious order reflects ongoing grappling with issues of community, mutuality, power and collegiality (Flannery, 1988; Christian Brothers, 2002). In light of these factors, it seemed that the nature of an action research methodology best facilitated the development of a culture of engagement.

Engagement, like leadership, resists categorisation or clear definition - one recognises it as it occurs. However, genuine engagement possesses certain features and characteristics which I will address briefly here - I demonstrate it in practice in Chapters 5 and 6. Donovan's (1978: vii) idea of accompaniment offers a challenging description of the dynamics of genuine engagement.

I now highlight the key features of my understanding of engagement as reflected in my practice. First, true engagement involves an ontological stance, a way of being in the world that is ethically congruent and value-driven, and embracing values of mutual recognition, respect and shared meaning. The image of 'going', of journey, is central to engagement; it involves action, movement, displacement, new horizons of 'higher universality' (Gadamer, 1979: 305; Schneiders, 1989) that demand courage, a commitment that recognises the correlation between the personal and the universal (Polyani, 1958: 302) and a willingness to challenge one's most deeply-held beliefs and assumptions. Engagement embraces paradox, difference and contradiction and generates context-appropriate responses.

Second, the metaphor of 'going with' raises the issue of accompaniment, of evolving, emergent relationships and expanding boundaries that reflect discovery, mutuality, reciprocity and shared struggle and commitment. Accompaniment also initiates and fosters new discourses of power, of authority and leadership (Schneiders, 2001; Nielsen, 2004) and shared praxis (Groome, 1991). Engagement is an invitation to be people of the question, whose essence according to Gadamer (*ibid:* 299) is to open up possibilities and keep them open in a context where the contribution of each participant is recognised and valued. Finally, engagement cannot be separated from its social context where educative inquiry addresses the 'lived reality' of its setting. Like action research, engagement is potentially subversive in challenging what Brueggeman (1988: 13) terms the 'dominant consciousness' that equates the established order with the public good. An alternative consciousness is evoked and fostered by engagement with the reality of the social context through critique accompanied by responsive and responsible action. The generative nature of my engagement ensures that my responsive action is life-giving and life-enhancing. This dynamic is an essential element of my understanding and practice of action research, and serves as a standard of judgement for the effectiveness of my practice.

2:3   The contribution of an action research approach to my living theory

In this section, I describe the place of action research in my work and its contribution to current praxis. This exploration reflects the reciprocal relationship of theory and action and the learning that accrues from adopting an action research approach and its expression in daily practice. Later chapters will demonstrate the process involved. I also acknowledge the subjectivity and particularity of this section as my experience may not be representative of others' experience. My choice of an action research self-study methodology was influenced by my commitment to living my values and realising them in practice. This section demonstrates some characteristics of this approach.

Action research facilitates critical engagement

I work in a variety of educational and therapeutic contexts - with adults and with young people. What is striking about these varied settings is the variety of cultures they possess. Defining 'culture' is difficult and problematic, 'chameleon-like' (Brennan, 2001) in its meaning, with no fixed or agreed-upon understanding (Gallagher, 1997; Brennan, 2001). Geertz (1975) cited in Brennan (2001: 42) defines culture as

> an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which [people] communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about, and attitudes towards life.

> (Geertz, (1975) in Brennan, 2001: 42)

Shorter (1988: 5) regards culture as 'essentially a transmitted pattern of meaning embodied in symbols, a pattern capable of development and change, and it belongs to the concept of humanness itself'.

Given the values I hold around the dignity of the human person, I resonate with the understanding of culture as a sacred dwelling-place (Eliade, 1957) providing the locus, language and context for people's quest for identity, meaning, significance, and community. For Gallagher (1997), critical engagement with a culture is to forego two opposing temptations: an uncritical acceptance of the prevailing culture, and an outright condemnation of the culture.

Action research facilitated this critical engagement, openness and authentic dialogue within the cultures I work with, and fostered my understanding of cultural meanings and symbols, which Brennan (2001: 43) terms 'webs of significance' Warren's (1998: 22) methodology of 'cultural agency', akin to Freire's (1973) cultural action, helped me appreciate significant features of critical engagement: the ability to navigate the labyrinth of differing cultures, the ability to think about how meaning is created, in whose interests it is created and what sort of rendition of reality it is and, finally, the ability to make sound judgements about this meaning.

Critical engagement helped me walk a fine and balanced line between being a 'terse adversary and an innocent accepter' (Gallagher 1997: 131) of the cultural settings of my practice; the former is critical, harshly judgemental and dismissive; the latter is non-challenging and passively accepting, naively regarding everything as good. In the course of my research, I used the stories of 'The Guru's Cat' and Sherlock Holmes (Chapter 1) as metaphors of critical judgement. In experiencing situations and experiences of cultural dissonance, critical engagement raised questions regarding images and stories that claim to portray reality and truth. Questions I found suited to this context and formed part of my teaching methodology are also cited by Gallagher (p.130):

> Who is imaging your life for you?
>
> Who is telling you stories that claim to show reality?
>
> What stories are being told?

Action research as emancipatory

Many writers on action research highlight its emancipatory and democratic principle (Carr and Kemmis, 1986; Parker, 1997; McNiff *et al*. 2000; McNiff and Whitehead, 2005.) Action research possesses emancipatory potential to free people from domination by others and also by forces which people may neither be aware of nor understand (McNiff *et al.* 2000), to unmask and address ideologies and oppressive systemic forces (Scott and Usher, 1996), and to raise consciousness leading to action and to change that foster social transformation (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006).

Ideally, this emancipation occurs in the context and among the people with whom one works. I experienced my research as 'evolving' emancipation - emancipation from uncritical ideology, assumptions, biases, prejudices, paradox, and ineffective pedagogies. Apps (1985: 151), cited in Brookfield (1987: 12), defines emancipatory learning as freeing people from 'personal, institutional, or environmental forces that prevent them from seeing new directions, from gaining control of their lives, their society and their world'. As well as technical and practical improvement, the

emancipatory nature of action research contributes to changing the conditions within the system itself that impede improvement (Zuber-Skerritt, 1996).

Emancipatory learning has occurred at significant moments in my research, described as 'nodal moments' (Bullough and Pinnegar 2001: 16) or as 'axial points' (Bennis and Nanus, 1997: 13) which I explain more fully in the next section.

Action research facilitates emancipation through enlightenment, alternative modes of seeing and transformation of consciousness, facilitated by spirals of planning, acting, observing, reflecting, re-planning (McNiff, 1988: 43). The emancipatory nature of my action research approach is reflected in the manner in which I have 'gone with' (Donovan, 1978) participants to new epistemological and paradigmatic practices (Chapters 5 and 6), engaged in educative discourses of power, autonomy and vulnerability, explored collaborative, dialogical and reciprocal models of leadership and recognised participants as co-creators (Capra, 2002) of my living theory.

Action research as the locus of 'nodal moments' and 'axial points'

A concept reflected in my experience of emancipatory research and practice is the concept of 'nodal moment' (Bullough and Pinnegar, 2001: 16). A nodal moment occurs where there is new insight, a new awareness of connection and a new pattern of thought, action or direction emerges. Bennis and Nanus (1997: 13) refer to 'axial points' - a similar concept to nodal moments - where 'some new height of vision is sought, where some fundamental redefinitions are required, where our table of values will have to be reviewed'.

Nodal moments / axial points are lived moments when one experiences what Capra (2002: 108) terms 'critical instability' and Conn (1986: 288) calls 'impasse' or 'imaginative shock'. For Capra, such moments are moments of 'uncertainty, fear, confusion, self-doubt' preceding 'the emergence of novelty'. For Conn, impasse moments reflect the awareness 'that our categories do not fit our experience, and throws the intuitive, unconscious self into gear in quest of what the possibilities really are.' In such moments, upsetting, confusing and disturbing as they frequently are, I have been

challenged to tap into the core of myself, my integrity was in crisis (in the Chinese sense of facing both danger and opportunity). Faced with a new reality, the danger lies in reverting to old formulae or customary response; opportunity lies in new, creative and imaginative perspectives and responses.

Such moments are regarded as 'epiphanies', when a new awareness occurs. In the Christian context, the Feast of the Epiphany heralds a manifestation of a core truth - the Incarnation - which transforms one's understanding of the meaning of life, of humanness, and of relatedness. Johnson (2000: xxvii) quotes Joyce's (1944) reference to epiphany as 'a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself.' She defines Joyce's understanding of epiphany as 'a moment in which the radiant whatness and full significance of a thing suddenly becomes apparent'. A particularly powerful nodal moment occurred when I encountered the fear of teachers when I began my work in schools (see Chapter 3). Touching and engaging one's integrity, one's spirituality, one's core - these moments demand that one acts 'expressively' (Palmer, 1990: 24). For Palmer, to act expressively is not to achieve a goal outside oneself but to express a conviction, a truth that is within the deepest part of self. Refusing to act in such a situation is a denial of one's integrity. My narrative describes and explains several experiences of personal nodal moments in later chapters.

Action research necessitates action

The call for action, possessing the qualities of natality and plurality (Arendt, 1958) arose through a shift from the data of sense to the data of consciousness, which reflected wonder, questioning and insight (Dunne, 1985). I was challenged to move beyond experience and understanding to decision and congruent action. This call for action is emphasised in the literature.

McNiff *et al.* (2000), Sallis and Jones (2002) and Whitehead and McNiff (2006) address the issue of change and improvement as an outcome of research. Parker (1997: 38) suggests that the detachment and non-involvement of traditional research proved to be an 'inadequate springboard for change and improvement'. McNiff (2000: 56) highlights

the need for generative transformational theories and living logics which explain the generative transformational processes of real life. My living theory account of practice details in the remaining chapters my search for generative transformational logics, expressed in historical settings through the formation of a community of shared praxis (Chapters 3 and 5).

Action research requires ongoing commitment

Parker (1997: 47) raises the issue of commitment when he describes the researcher's struggle to achieve 'freedom from prejudice, partisanship, and other such habits as close the mind and make it unwilling to consider new problems and entertain new ideas'. Action research, I have found, is an evolving process, an unfinished product, a praxis of alternating analysis and action, embracing contradiction and paradox. It demands what Warren (2003) terms 'self-implication', a way of binding oneself to, of inserting oneself in one's educative contexts. In the words of the motto of my own order, it is a commitment not only to teach (or research) but actually to *model*, to be a living example of what one teaches. My commitment to congruent response has kept me in an ongoing state of dislodgement and dislocation from deeply-held beliefs, valued convictions and unwavering certitudes; equally, it has spurred me on in pursuit of new horizons of learning and practice which can lead to personal, social and institutional transformation (Appendix 2). I have found that being a liminal, or threshold, person is no dour endeavour (Warren, 2003: 522); it can be exhilarating and celebratory, but it comes with a cost - the concept of liminality is explored below.

Action research as an adventure in hope

I regard action research as an adventure in hope, and the action researcher as a 'purveyor of hope' (Looney, in Furlong and Monahan, 2000: 111; Bennis and Nanus, 1997: xiii). The underlying belief driving the researcher-practitioner is that generative transformation (McNiff and Whitehead, 2000) is possible. In modelling my theory, I strive to 're-pattern' (Gula, 1989: 146) my own imagination to engage with dimensions of reality previously outside of my conscious awareness - the voicelessness of young people is one example. Others (e.g. principals, teachers and students) are then invited to

see differently and to respond differently (Glavey, 2005). Action research is, therefore, a potential barrier to cynicism and scepticism and an antidote to despair by engendering hope for a better world (Daloz *et al.,* 1996; D'Sousa, 2001). Flannery (1988: 931) maintains that the potential to influence the future of humanity exists in those who provide reasons for 'life and optimism'.

In critically exploring my practice in all its dimensions, I engaged an action research spiral of planning, acting, observing, reflecting, re-planning (McNiff, 1988: 43), a process similar to the 'praxis circle' - insertion, social analysis, reflection, pastoral planning (Holland and Henriot,1988: 9). Facilitating an extension of improvement to the wider context of my practice, I engaged participants in an invitational process that facilitated change *with* others rather than managing change *for* them (Appendix 2).

The narrative and dialogical discourse of hope in my thesis is the discourse of the swampy lowlands where I invited others to accompany me on a journey of exploration to a place none of us had been before. It is the language of hope that sustained me as I engaged in a method of enquiry whose description includes words like 'experience, trial and error, intuition, and muddling through' (Schon, 1995: 43). In essence, my engagement with action research involved holding up a lens - through which I have first gazed and gained a new perspective - so that others in turn, can both gain and explore *their* new perspective. I trust that I am providing 'a foothold for others' (Schussler-Fiorenza, 1989: xxiv) to participate in an imaginative and courageous reconstruction of human, historical reality through a shared, unifying vision expressed in shared praxis.

Brueggemann, a noted Old Testament scholar, claims the task of prophetic ministry is 'to nurture, nourish and invoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us' (1988: 13). I suggest this is an apt description of action research. Brueggemann (*ibid:* 23) further suggests that the task of alternative consciousness is to both criticise and energise - criticism, understood as critical and reflective engagement with lived reality; energising as proactive, congruent response, a response stimulated, not by the dominant consciousness or paradigm, but by imaginative, creative '*grappling*' with what might or could be. I

concur with Brueggemann (1988: 25), citing Ricoeur, that people are changed, not by ethical urging but by transformed imagination. Both my theory and practice are rooted in the belief that a key feature of leadership is openness to transformed imagination which, in turn, leads to generative transformation in me, in others and in our social and educational contexts. This openness reflects a grounded, ontological stance that believes new futures and possibilities are not only possible but can be joyfully and enthusiastically embraced. Such embrace, I believe, is an act of, hope.

Action research as contemplative action

Allied to the 'reflection-in-action' and 'knowing-in-action' that Schon (1983, 1995) speaks of, I felt challenged to add another dimension to my understanding and practice of action research - 'contemplation-in-action', a concept echoed in Palmer (1990: 15). The literature on contemplation and spirituality is extensive (Monbourquette, 2001; O'Murchu, 2000; Schneiders, 2000). Given the myriad understandings of spirituality and contemplation available, clarification of my personal understanding of these terms is appropriate at this stage.

Contemplation has been defined as a long, loving look at the real, as unveiling 'the illusions that masquerade as reality and reveal the reality behind the masks' (Palmer, 1990: 17). I differ with Palmer's concept of contemplation-and-action; I prefer the term 'contemplation-in-action', reflecting my belief that contemplation and action are inextricably linked. Schneiders (2000) and Merton (1973) stress the reality that contemplation, far from being the domain of the religious virtuoso, with its elitist undertones, is in fact, the preserve of each person.

Being contemplative is not to inhabit the realm of esoteric knowledge, experience and cognition; it is engagement with, listening to and questioning the lived reality of the swampy lowlands. Contemplation is the ability to see beneath the surface, beyond labels, stereotypes and paradigms, facades of certitude, power and control. This is the subversive quality of action research, its disturbing vision and insight that, in the words of O'Murchu (2000: 95), 'penetrates beyond all the superficialities and all the limitations that give the semblance of control and the claim to speak in the name of

truth'. It is not technique or skill but a quality of presence that begins with awareness, develops through focused thought or reflection, and leads to responsive and responsible action. 'Nodal moments' and 'epiphanies'- described earlier in this chapter - are frequently the outcomes of contemplative practice.

I also understand contemplation as the foundation of 'generative transformation' (McNiff and Whitehead, 2000). When I am contemplative, I am engaged in a process of personal, inner transformation, what Habermas (1974: 2) terms 'a processes of enlightenment'. I am 'pondering', not in the Greek sense of intellectually reflecting on life's mysteries, but in the Biblical sense of 'in the heart', of physically, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually engaging with life's mysteries, questions, contradictions and paradoxes (Rolheiser, 1999). This is how I address Whitehead's (1993) concept of being a 'living contradiction'- by living the question (or experience of paradox) not purely in a critical, analytical manner, but with a quality of expressive (Palmer, 1990: 24) responsiveness that is reflective of the values I espouse (Chapter 1). A contemplative stance generates a transformation and restructuring of consciousness, an alternative consciousness, resulting in a radically different and sensitive way of knowing, perceiving and responding. This consciousness is visible in my educative practice and relationships and in my living theory of educational leadership and shared praxis. I will demonstrate this in greater detail as this thesis unfolds.

Action research as an expression of my spirituality

Carroll and Dyckman (1981: 79) define spirituality as the 'style of a person's response before the challenges of everyday life' within historical and cultural contexts. For Schneiders (2000: 343), it is a 'quest for life-integration through self-transcendence towards the ultimate value one perceives'.

In claiming that my practice is holistic, that I attempt to help the students develop to their full potential, I address not only the intellectual, cognitive dimensions of the person but also the behavioural, affective and spiritual dimensions. In critically exploring my practice through action research, I critique the manner in which I address each of these

dimensions in those with whom I engage. Rather than seeking to *define* spirituality perhaps it might be more enlightening to explore the concept of *being spiritual.*

Being spiritual

I understand being spiritual as a *quest*, a search for personal integration, self-transcendence and self-transformation that develops all dimensions of self - cognitive, affective, spiritual, behavioural, intellectual. It is ongoing, developmental (Au, 1990) and necessarily incomplete, as growth involves continual change. Ideally, the spiritual quest is a process of maturation and growth in wisdom that occurs as the search proceeds (Steere, 1997).

This process is integral to both my action research and praxis as I strive to improve my practice and the quality of my educative relationships. I concur with Pannikar's (1980) idea of the 'monk archetype', cited in Schneiders (2000: 6), as the universal paradigm of spirituality that informs the struggle of all who strive towards full humanity. For Pannikar, a renowned authority on religions and inter-religious dialogue, this paradigm is not exclusive or specific to a particular religion or religious tradition, nor to individuals who live within the institutional monastic tradition, but is, in fact, an anthropological constant. The function of this archetype is, according to Pannikar, to focus a person's deepest aspirations toward fullness of life, integration and transcendence, leading to lived expression of these aspirations in the constant and evolving realization of the true self. This self-realization is variously understood in different religious traditions, institutional and native, as wholeness, salvation, liberation, redemption or integration (Schneiders, 2000: 8).

My research and praxis are not value-free; a core value pertains to my belief in and recognition of the spiritual dimension of the human person, an innate quality of human nature and existence. Consequently, a key concern underpinning my praxis, particularly in fostering communities of shared praxis, is 'What quality of educative relationship provides a nurturing environment that acknowledges and nourishes the growth of each individual in his/her journey towards integration and transcendence?' Using a 'humanitas anthropology' (Groome, 1998: 75), which regards humanness as gift,

celebrates it as essentially good while being tolerant of its imperfections, underlines the manner in which I respond to this question and forms the focus and content of the remaining chapters.

I understand being spiritual as lived engagement with, and committed participation in, the swampy lowlands of practice rather than on the high ground above the swamp. Being spiritual has little to do with esoteric, remote, other-worldly activity or theory; spirituality is essentially experiential in nature, reflecting, paradoxically, the giftedness/weakness, limitation/ potential of the human condition amid the cognitive and affective dimensions of lived reality.

These characteristics of being spiritual closely parallel my experience of engaged action research. Spirituality as a driving force towards wholeness (the root meaning of 'holy') is congruently responsive to the swampy lowlands, the existential dimensions of daily life. While a significant component of spirituality is transformation, an essential outcome of authentic spirituality is a deepening relationship of connectedness (McFague, 1987; Wittberg, 1996; O'Murchu, 1997). This connectedness, in turn, expresses the radical interconnectedness of all creation and the radical equality of all persons, and fosters an ethos that reflects a social organism of life-affirming, generative relationships.

As Cady *et al.* (1989: 6) is at pains to point out, however, this oneness does not result in fusion where individual identity is lost; instead, it leads to what she describes as 'differentiated connectedness', a connectedness that is interdependent while honouring diversity, individuality and identity. She uses the web of life as an image which captures this form of connectedness, a connectedness that is communal and community-oriented and dismissive of an attitude that is exclusively self-concerned and self-serving. An action research approach, I have found, facilitates awareness and development of this network of relationships. Furlong and Monahan (2000: 134) see connectivity as a key component of a 'curriculum of transformation', and my research and praxis are aimed at the development of communities of meaning, learning and practice which nurture

persons who reflect autonomy and relationality, individuality and partnership (Groome, 1998).

Establishing connectivity is both an integral component of my practice and a facilitative element of my research. Action research as an instrument of connectivity facilitated the evolution and development of my educative praxis; it went further and facilitated, for myself and my students, the co-evolution (Capra, 2002: 80) of our educative relationship and shared praxis, discussed later in this chapter. Addressing the question 'Who is the self that teaches?' through action research, I am becoming increasingly aware that I am also addressing the question 'Who for me is the self, the Other, that is taught?' (Buber, 1958).

Action research, I believe, facilitates, through reflective practice, a sharing of spiritualities and engagement at the deepest level of self and one's unique identity. This sharing honours ownership of identity while resisting its potential colonisation (McNiff, 2001). Buber (1958: 62) aptly describes such process as both 'the spiritual form of natural detachment…and the spiritual form of natural solidarity of connection.'

The term 'horizon' occurs frequently in the literature of spirituality (O'Murchu, 1997; Palmer, 1990) as the background against which everything is experienced, valued and acted upon, giving a particular quality and depth to one's vision, activity and participation in the world. Gadamer (1989: 305) suggests that acquiring a horizon means learning to look beyond, rather than away from, what is close at hand with a view 'to seeing it better, within a larger whole and in truer proportion'.

O'Murchu (1997: 33) highlights the characteristics of 'horizon' as opposed to 'boundary'. A boundary often encloses, fences in, can be stultifying and rigidly orthodox, ritualistic, and exclusive, blocking movement towards new awareness and growth (Rayner, 2007). Gadamer (1989: 304) speaks of the closed horizon as 'an abstraction', given that the historical movement of human life is never static or bound to one standpoint. Horizon, on the other hand, speaks of an open system, inclusive of variety of perspective touching the heart and the imagination, nourishing hope, optimism and possibility while promoting fullness of life at all levels, personal,

interpersonal and planetary. It suggests a process reflecting constant change and evolving awareness and response, never closed and always in motion, something, as Gadamer (*ibid:* 304) suggests, into which we move and which moves with us. Horizon, unlike boundary, resists foreclosure and completion, is always in motion and hints at unlimited potential and possibility.

My self-study action research explores the genesis and development of my personal horizon (see Chapter 3) - my praxis engages with that of others. At this nexus lies the problem of the ethical use of power as several horizons converge. A key challenge permeates the nature of my engagement - the preservation of 'differentiated connectedness', being aware of and honouring the integrity and uniqueness of the Other (Buber, 1958), the possible emergence of the 'power shadow' (Guggenbuhl-Craig, 1971: 10), which consciously or not, seeks to dominate, subjugate or colonise the learner.

In grappling with the nature of life-enhancing educative relationship, I have found Gadamer's (1989: 305) idea of 'transposing ourselves' helpful. For Gadamer, transposing oneself consists neither in empathy for, nor in subordination of, another person to our own standards. It always involves rising to 'a higher universality' that both facilitates awareness of otherness, the indissoluble individuality of another, while overcoming the particularity of self and other.

Implication and Application

A central dimension of critically exploring my practice through self-study action research is the recognition and honouring of my personal spiritual horizon while acknowledging and honouring the spirituality of others. Spirituality is primarily concerned with human activity and experience, with the depth dimension of human existence, with meaning, motivation and direction. Action research enables me to bring to conscious awareness what gives meaning to my life and practice and provides motivation, commitment and direction in my educative relationships; equally, it provides a backdrop, a horizon that challenges the congruence of my theory and practice. In critically exploring my practice, I am coming to understand the place of

spirituality, my own and others', in my educative relationships as the source of uniqueness and personhood. Action research facilitates my attentiveness to lived experience through my efforts to create what Eliade (1957: 20), O'Murchu (1997: 36) and Palmer, (1998: 74) refer to as 'sacred space', a nurturing ambience and context, where one's individuality, personhood and spirituality can flourish within a community of learning. For Eliade, sacred space is the locus of transformative experience, of creative and imaginative self-renewal and attentiveness to unfolding meaning, where each person can 'try to respond to the demands of inner truth' (Merton, 1965: 140). This space is characterised by compassion, courage, justice, and service within life-enhancing and empowering relationships. While I regard the locus of my educative relationships as 'holy ground' (Exodus 3: 5), it is not thereby reflective simply of comfort, mutual and uncritical admiration, freedom from risk, challenge, conflict or accountability; instead, the focus is on personal transformation, my own and that of my students, which hopefully will contribute to social transformation of our lived contexts. The structure of this space strives to foster personal and communal growth, integrity, reflection and dialogue through processes of mutuality, collaborative endeavour, shared power and vision while engaging with issues of ambiguity and paradox. In the remaining chapters, I explain these values in greater detail, using them as living standards of judgement of my emergent living theory.

Action research as the ground for individual and shared transformation

While self-study action research is focused on improvement of my practice, I have come to appreciate its potential for individual and shared transformation. Addressing my concerns, I have grown in awareness of the power and pervasiveness of dominant cultures, ideologies and paradigms. Congruent engagement with the metaphors, language, stories and unquestioned assumptions underpinning the dominant culture, coupled with experiences of paradigmatic inadequacy and impasse, raised the challenge not simply of improvement, but of personal, communal and contextual transformation. Transformation involves crossing the threshold of the familiar and being grounded in the embodied living of an alternative vision of reality. Through the experience of liminality transformation goes beyond mere improvement. In unmasking and coming to grips with

my own prejudices, unquestioned epistemological, ontological assumptions and cultural biases, action research has challenged me to hold the tension between being what Gallagher (1997: 131) terms 'a tense adversary and an innocent accepter' of cultural colonialism; the 'living I' of my research and practice, in turn, posed a challenge to the dominant cultures, educative and systemic, of my work contexts.

Transformation involves a 'crossing over', a going beyond current forms to new ones, embracing a new mode of consciousness, relationship, and existence. Haughton (1967) describes transformation as giving birth to the whole human being; it is both an outcome and a process. Hart (2001: 150), citing Pagels, speaks of 'a migration into newness'. The creative and regenerative nature of transformation, however, fosters what is in essence a lifelong process of alternative discourses of power, agency and involvement supporting multiple perspectives and resisting what Chomsky (2000) calls 'domesticating education'. Levin (1999), Giroux (1994) and Fielding (2001) attest to, and my research confirms, the experience of students as significantly voiceless in educational discourse. One of my claims to knowledge is that in transforming my practice by resisting the 'commodification' of education, appreciating and harnessing the giftedness and 'natality' (Arendt, 1958) of each individual, I am developing a model of emancipatory educative interaction that gives both voice and role to the voiceless and marginalised, engaging young people as active agents in their own learning and transforming negative experiences of fear and power within educative processes. In Chapter 5, I demonstrate how the release of power is grounded in empowering interaction and shared praxis.

Transformative self-study action research is in essence relational where 'I-Thou' (Buber, 1958) becomes the 'We' of community, reflecting mutuality, collaboration, shared vision and collective responsibility. Communities of shared praxis resist the trap of restorationism and the passive acceptance and assimilation of dominant educational and cultural consciousness and discourses. These communities, I have found, embody new discourses of shared power and distributed leadership, where meaning, values and shared vision are negotiated and where contradiction, paradox and diversity are recognised and honoured. Mutual discovery takes time, patience and perseverance. While the focus of my research has been the transformation of my practice, I have been

inexorably led to explore experiences of community and shared praxis - Chapters 5 and 6 demonstrate how this experience virtually eliminated the research-practice divide, fostered learning in social contexts and contributed to the education of social formations (Whitehead, and McNiff, 2006).

Transformation - Riches and Risks

Transformation comes with a cost. I have come to understand the transformative nature of action research as providing, personally and communally, a 'curriculum of inner significances' (Hart, 2001). As Halton (2004: 133) points out, action research is not an easy option and the riches/risk dialectic of transformation is aptly captured in Hart's description of transformation as a

> dialectic of expression and reception, contraction and expansion, self-separateness and union, autonomy and interconnection, intention and surrender, initiating and allowing, control and flow, structure and freedom.

(Hart, 2001: 153)

I now explain how the concept of liminality assisted my understanding of action research and provided a philosophical and practical response to experiences of living contradiction.

2:4   Action Research as liminal experience

In critically exploring my educative practice through action research, I have found it helpful to draw on insights from anthropology and previous involvement in cross-cultural education to understand the process of how I have come to know and understand current praxis. Placing myself at the centre of my research, I have discovered how prior experience of liminality has facilitated understanding of experiencing myself as a living contradiction (Whitehead, 1993), where espoused values are negated by me, by others or by social structures. My understanding of liminality serves as a conceptual framework for appreciating and negotiating the arduous threshold journey from living contradiction to living and embodied congruence. This journey underpins my claim that

I am coming to know my own educational development, that I am creating a living educational theory of leadership and contributing to the education of social formations.

Specifically, I draw on the insights of van Gennep, a Dutch anthropologist who published *Rites de Passage* in 1909, in which rites of passage, particularly those associated with key transition or threshold experiences in life, were identified and analysed for the first time. He identified rites associated with three stages of transition – separation, transition and incorporation - and he used the term 'liminality' to describe the middle phase, the neutral zone (Bridges, 1995: 35) of the transition process. The word (from the Latin word *limen,* 'threshold') relates to the experience of moving from one reality across the threshold of another. Encountering life on the threshold is fraught with danger, much like the Chinese understanding of crisis as both danger and opportunity. It is a turning point, a time of decision. The liminal person is no longer in his/her familiar world nor yet integrated into the new.

These insights were largely unexplored until Turner (1969) adapted van Gennep's model for his own analysis of the character of transition, which he described as 'separation, liminality, and reaggregation' (Turner 1969: 95; Drumm, 1998: 22). I will discuss these concepts under three headings: the nature and characteristics of liminality, its relevance to action research, especially in relation to the action research spiral (McNiff 1988: 44) and Whitehead's (1993) concept of living contradiction, and my lived experience of being a liminal person within my educative practice.

Nature and characteristics of liminality

Rites of passage are the locus of a community's invitation to its members to accept new meanings, perspectives, roles and responsibility within the circle of community. They comprise three distinct, but linked stages of separation, liminality, and re-aggregation. As such, a rite of passage is an experience of displacement leading to transformation through rituals which focus on experience of marginality or of being at a frontier (O'Murchu, 1999: 48) where the community invites the liminal person to assume a new role within the community (Turner 1969; Kiriswa, 2002). Puberty rites, e.g. the *siyumboka* ceremony among the Bulozi tribe of Western Zambia where I worked for

many years, are an obvious example; rites associated with birth, adulthood, marriage and death welcome a person to a new role or position in the community. Interestingly, much of the current writing on the three-stage process of liminality is found in the literature on religious orders as they grapple with the rapid rate of change in today's world (Arbuckle, 1991; Whitehead and Whitehead, 1992; Monbourquette, 2001); and in the literature of spirituality (Parker, 1997; Drumm, 1998; Schneiders, 2000).

Initial (Separation) stage

The initial stage involves separation from the familiar and taken-for-granted securities of the person's current reality, from the structures of the group or community or from role and lifestyle. Characteristic of this stage are feelings of restlessness, uprootedness, searching for meaning or new direction, disillusionment, confusion, insecurity, anxiety and concern (Turner, 1969). One's familiar identity is unsettled, vulnerable, questioned; familiar ways of behaviour and response are no longer adequate or become obsolete altogether. There is an ill-defined and underlying sense of unease, a sense of dis-identification, an awareness that something needs to change while simultaneously being unclear as to what that change might be. Typical responses to this experience range from denial, resistance, and defensiveness to creatively engaging with process and growth in enlightenment and new insight.

Separation stage: What is my concern?

I associate this stage with the questions which initiate a self-study action research process of enquiry - 'What is my concern?' and 'Why am I concerned?' (McNiff and Whitehead, 2002: 7). My concern centred round how I would devise and deliver a leadership development programme for students in second level educational contexts (Project 1), and for young adults engaged in working with children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Project 2).

My initial personal concerns revolved around issues of content and methodology, epistemology and ontology. Soon, however, I began to experience the fear and anxieties (expressed and non-verbal) of a systemic nature within the institutions where I worked.

The management and staff of some schools expressed serious concerns and fear regarding the outcome of leadership development among their students. My notes of this period reflect their concerns regarding boundaries, discipline, status of teachers, issues of trust and fears of 'revolution'. In some cases, students who had undergone a leadership programme were not permitted to function as student leaders on returning to school (Personal journal, 2000).

Encountering this manifest injustice and disregard for the generosity, commitment and enthusiasm of students was an experience of what Goleman *et al.* (2002: 108) termed a 'discontinuity' - the glaring gap between my espoused values and lived reality. I experienced myself as a living contradiction where my espoused values and my understanding of my practice were in conflict with the reality I was engaging. I experienced 'dissonant internal chords' (Kouzes and Posner, 2002: 394), the striking awareness that my assumptions, perspective, epistemology, ontology and methodology were being called (covertly and overtly) into question. I could not at that point in time adequately justify or explain my practice and its philosophical underpinnings. I experienced disconnectedness, characterised by unsettling feelings of 'disengagement, disenchantment, disidentification, disorientation' (Sammon, 1983: 26), as I began to enter the transition or neutral stage of liminality.

The liminal stage.

The next stage, the neutral (Bridges, 2001) or liminal stage, is a period of transition, when the initiate inhabits the betwixt and between stage of what has been and what will be (Bredin, 1986: 133). It is a time of testing, characterised by absence and stripping away of familiar, supportive and taken-for-granted structures. I experienced it as being thrown more on my own resources and challenged to create a new world of meaning and values (Bredin, 1986: 133; O'Murchu, 1999: 54). It involved a deeper *inward* journey, an experience of inner re-structuring and alignment, what Bridges (2002: 47) calls an 'inner sorting process'. Realising I was at an epistemological and ontological crossroads, I concurred with Nemeck and Coombs' (1988: 33) three qualities of critical thresholds - radical (affecting me to my roots), irreversible (having passed a threshold,

there was no way back to pre-liminal experience) and successive (one leads on to the next). Crossing thresholds (epistemological, ontological and methodological) was leading me to a more qualitative way of being and a more transformed manner of becoming (*ibid:* 35). I describe and explain my response to this process in the remaining chapters.

The literature of spirituality attests to this stage as a key moment on life's journey, a moment when transformation begins and transcendence is possible. There are frequent allusions to, and use of, the images of womb, tomb, Dark Night of the soul, exodus, wilderness and death and dying coupled with resurrection (Drumm, 1998; Fiand, 2001). Turner (1969: 95) uses terms like death, being in the womb, darkness and eclipse to describe this period of transformation. The central message of these metaphors has been accurately summed up by Wheatley (1999: 119) when she states that 'growth always requires passage through the fearful realms of disintegration'.

The first task in navigating a transition is, according to Zullo (2001: 19), to name what is ending. Endings can vary in range from being gentle, almost imperceptible, to endings that are stressful, traumatic and destructive, but all are challenges to assess the truth of one's self-understanding, perspective and beliefs about the world and one's place in it. Capra (2002: 104) speaks of the wide range of intensities that can occur during this process which Turner and Turner (1978) call an 'archaeology of experience', ranging from 'small sudden insights to painful and exhilarating transformations'. Liminal time is a time for creatively, imaginatively seeking and navigating one's way towards a new vision, epistemology or ontology, a new metaphorical construct, frequently in the face of opposition and the desire for structure and control. It is a time when root paradigms which have guided social interaction over long periods of time are challenged by the anti-paradigmatic process of liminality.

Paradoxically, increased vulnerability and enhanced potential are characteristic elements of liminality (Turner 1969; O'Murchu, 1999; Zullo, 2001). This experience can be frightening or enlightening (Goleman, *et al.,* 2002) as one experiences being at the cutting edge, at the margins. It is about growth and risk - risk of collapse and

breakdown, or breakthrough into a new reality, facilitating what Capra calls 'the emergence of novelty' (2002: 104) and 'the gift of a new future' (Wheatley, 1999: 119).

In transition, social hierarchy, difference, distinction and privilege are abrogated, and I encountered other people and lived reality in new, reflective and unmediated ways (Drumm, 1998: 22), leading to an experience of comradeship, which Turner called *communitas* (1969: 96). This comradeship does not recognise distinctions of rank, status or gender and engenders a radically altered perspective on lived reality. It is marked by collaboration, dialogue and enthusiasm, built around a common vision, sustained by hope, idealism and willingness to risk (Gittens, 2002: 20). As such, communitas is anti-structure and counter-cultural, activating change and providing social and cultural critique, challenging the status quo where key societal and community values are compromised (O'Murchu, 1989: 37; Arbuckle, 1991: 36). A feature of the liminal phase is a radical commitment to life-enhancing relationships frequently alien to dominant institutional epistemological and ontological perspectives. Two models of human interrelatedness are highlighted - juxtaposed and alternating (Turner, 1969: 97). The first reflects structure and control, differentiation, separation and hierarchy, while the latter is characterised by limited structure and relatively undifferentiated status, by egalitarian and communitarian relationships of mutuality and interaction (Buber, 1958: 131). In Chapters 5 and 6, I illustrate how I have addressed this issue through my efforts to develop communities of shared praxis in living contexts.

Transition stage: 'Why are you concerned? What do you think you could do about it?'

This stage was an experience of being at the margins, of growing awareness and dismay at the significant epistemological and ontological gap between my practice and the contexts within which I worked. However, using an action research approach I was enabled to name what was happening, understand my concerns and also to recognise and tap into the reservoir of my tacit knowledge (Polyani, 1958) and understanding that had accrued from prior experiences of liminality while working in Africa. The reflection-in-action of action research opened up to me a new vista of prior understanding implicit in my methodology, epistemology and ontology but existing outside my consciousness.

The generative capacity of action research (McNiff 1988: 43) facilitated 'spin-off spirals' of investigation within this liminal space, addressing issues of participation, control, individual power, uniqueness, models of leadership and systemic change. For the first time, I understood my practice as *praxis* and began to see the value of conceptualising my work with others as *shared praxis*. In my work with students and young people, I also became aware of the central 'gift' of marginality (Daloz *et al*., 1996:76) - greater self-awareness, greater awareness of others, the power to empathise with difference, with the Other (Buber, 1958) and develop a more critical perspective on the systems to which I belonged, in the belief that I was standing at the centre of a larger and more adequate whole (Daloz, *et al.,* 1996).

Consequently, I began to realise that my educative intervention in schools and locality was inviting others (principals, staffs, students and young people) to the brink of new and unfamiliar awareness, perspectives and relationships. Awareness of my own experience of being on the margins enabled me to empathise with *their* fears, concerns and resistance. As a result, and within this larger whole, I adjusted my approach to embrace concepts of justice, mutuality, reciprocity and natality as living standards of judgement of my practice. I began to adopt a dialectical, dialogical approach rather than a positivist, propositional one, foregoing status, authority and power in my educative relationships. I describe this process in Chapters 3, 5 and 6.

The third phase - Re-aggregation.

 In the third phase of transition, re-aggregation into society, the liminal person, his/her identity strengthened by the experience, is challenged to bring his/her experience to bear on a world that is reflective of hierarchy, status, roles and ambivalence towards the stated values of society. Thus, the liminal person becomes a potential 'agent of transformation' (Sellner, 1990: 92) while the experience and memory of liminality / communitas become a subversive presence and the source of community renewal and transformation.

Re-aggregation: 'What will I do?

One cannot remain in liminal space forever, though action research spirals (McNiff, 1988: 44) are akin to the notion of liminal spirals, which as Eliade (1957: 184) points out, involve cycles of regression into chaos as a prelude to new stages of growth; struggle, transformation and integration are part and parcel of our developing and evolving selves. Liminal space is temporary and geared to changed, energetic, self-confident re-engagement with one's context and environment; to do otherwise is to regress (Arbuckle, 1988: 16; O'Murchu, 1999: 28; Bridges, 2001: 51).

Two indicators of readiness to move from liminal space and to do something about one's concerns are, according to Zullo (2001: 21), resonance and resolve. Resonance has to do with making a right decision that resonates with one's deepest values and beliefs - 'this is the right course of action to take right now!' Resolve is the conviction and ability to overcome resistance in whatever form, and to take responsive and responsible action.

Liminal space, I feel, is an integral element of my understanding of action research and its place in my epistemology of practice. Negotiating the three stages of transition parallels McNiff and Whitehead's (2000: 51) movement from deep tacit knowledge, through transformed and transformative practice, to explicit awareness. It is a process appropriate to the new epistemologies (Schon, 1995) which, far from dealing with abstract issues unrelated to real life situations and capable of mechanistic and orderly conclusions ('the high, hard ground'), is, in fact, inserted in real life contexts ('the swampy lowlands'), which lack precise, clear-cut answers and frequently reflect inspired, intuitive guesswork and educated hunches.

How was I challenged?

- First, I experienced the demand and challenge of congruence, not only to espouse my values but to embody them in practice.

- Second, I became aware of the 'power shadow' (Guggenbuhl-Craig, 1986; Corey and Corey, 1997) in educative relationships, where manipulative and dominating hegemonies can thrive, frequently to the detriment of the receivers; I was aware

of my personal 'power shadow' in the temptation to resort to propositional, dogmatic and authoritarian approaches in my educative interventions. Nouwen (1978: 6) highlights this issue when he speaks of authoritarian, hierarchical educative relationships as 'a violent process'. Genuine self-study action research, I feel, leads to a deeper awareness and understanding of personal and institutional shadow issues.

- A third challenge in my experience of action research liminality was the felt need to develop a coherent model of educational leadership to underpin my praxis. I describe and explain this process in detail in Chapter 4, but images of developing webs of influence, creating and holding a space that facilitates generative transformation and leadership 'of the heart' began to emerge.

- Four, my impatience with the statement 'Young people are our future/ leaders of the future' began to influence my practice and my decision to provide opportunities for them to exercise leadership 'in the present'. I demonstrate my commitment to this in practice in Chapters 5 and 6.

- Five, I describe, in the remainder of my thesis narrative, how I addressed three ethical issues - my position of 'guest' rather than permanent staff member in my work situations; the manner in which I invited others to engage in their personal experiences of liminality in the transformation of their practice, what Fullan (2001: 45) terms 'reculturing'; and finally, how I understand 'improvement' or generative transformation – I address this issue in my final chapter.

In critically exploring my practice and recognising its qualities of 'work-in-progress', 'unfinished symphony', I have come to an awareness that its evolution is a reflection of many liminal experiences of change and transition. For Bridges (2001: 3), change is an external process, whereas transition has a deeper internal significance; he suggests that change is situational, whereas transition is reflective of the psychological, emotional process involved in engagement and coming to terms with new epistemological and ontological awareness.

Engaging in an action research approach of self-study, I have found that the concept of liminality, experienced initially in a cross-cultural, third world context, has facilitated awareness both of the process of action research and the manner in which I have come to know and understand my practice. It has also facilitated awareness, hitherto unacknowledged, of a deep reservoir of tacit knowledge (Polyani, 1958); action research has helped me make this knowledge more explicit and raise to consciousness the underlying value system of my praxis. Understanding action research as a rite of passage has helped me understand the process and dynamic of action research and its contribution to developing my new epistemology of practice. I now discuss the contribution of metaphor and story to this new epistemology.

2:5   Metaphor and Story: sources of transformative engagement

Schon (1995: 28) highlights a key dilemma that surfaced at an early stage of my research - the dilemma of rigour and relevance - as I was faced with choosing as the locus of my research the high hard ground overlooking the swamp or the swampy lowlands below. In addressing my concern - 'How can I improve my practice?' - I resonate with Schon's description of 'uncertainty, complexity, uniqueness and conflict' reflected in my efforts to develop an epistemology of practice related to the 'New Scholarship' proposed by Boyer (1990) and Schon (1995). My work contexts were not simply a setting for the application of knowledge but also for the generation of new knowledge, specifically knowledge generated in and through action as I brought to expression the narrative of my emergent learning and self-understanding. Crossing the threshold of the familiar, from propositional modes of thinking and acting to living inclusional ones, my emergent self-understanding and method of inquiry were facilitated in three ways: embodiment of a new, inner sensibility, use of metaphor and story, and adopting Groome's (1991) concept of shared praxis as a mode of inquiry and engagement.

Embodying a new inner sensibility

The first major setback of my research occurred in crossing the threshold of the familiar (positivist, empirical research) to the unfamiliar (self-study action research). Accustomed to and experienced in the use of the former, engaging action research as a mode of inquiry quickly highlighted the need for a new sensibility at odds with the objective, detached and remote approach of the positivist paradigm. The early stages of my research reflected, in Schon's (*ibid:* 28) words, 'experience, trial and error, intuition or muddling through', but insights from Celtic Spirituality, Liberation and Christian Feminism theology laid the foundation of a new sensibility appropriate for Schon's (1995) idea of new scholarship and accompanying epistemology of practice. I am indebted to McFague (1987) for her description of a new sensibility, one which I have endeavoured to embody in my practice and research. This new sensibility is characterised by

> the felt awareness of our intrinsic interdependence of all that lives, a holistic, evolutionary, ecological vision that overcomes ancient and oppressive dualisms and hierarchies, that encourages change and novelty, and that promotes an ethic of justice and care; one characterised as well by a profound acceptance of human responsibility for the fate of the earth, especially in view of a nuclear holocaust, and therefore by the willingness to think differently, to think in metaphors and models that support a unified, interdependent understanding of God-world and human-world relationships; and finally, one characterised by the recognition that although all constructive thought is metaphorical and hence necessarily risky, partial and uncertain, implying an end to dogmatism and absolutism, it is not thereby fantasy, illusion or play.

> (McFague, 1987: 27)

This new sensibility served several purposes in the course of my research - as an ontological and epistemological stance, a look-out point on the universe (Teilhard de Chardin, 1964: 90), as a horizon (Gadamer, 1989: 245) or backdrop to practice, and as a repository of espoused and lived values underpinning my claims to knowledge and professional development. In developing coherent patterns of meaning and response in complex situations of paradox and ambiguity, I express this sensibility in the quality of my educative relationships and certain habits of mind (Daloz *et al.,* 1996: 108) and heart. These include the habits of dialogue, of interpersonal perspective recognition, of

critical, systemic thought allied to a dialectical and holistic response. Later chapters demonstrate this sensibility embodied in living contexts.

Metaphor and Story – How do they mean?

The power of story and metaphor was particularly significant in developing my epistemology of practice. The question 'How does metaphor / story mean?' as opposed to 'What does metaphor / story mean?' I have adapted from an approach by Biblical scholars (O'Donoghue, 1988; Brown *et al.,* 1990) in the study of parables. I have found this approach congruent with action research, as it brings together not just the content (theory) of metaphor / story but also invites engagement or response (action). Metaphor (from the Greek *meta,* meaning 'over, across, beyond', and *pherein, '*to bring, to carry, move') serves as a bridge, threshold (limina) to another reality and involves a shift in beliefs, values, or relationships. It possesses the qualities of immediacy and transcendence; because metaphor raises doubt about its precise meaning and points beyond current context to another order of reality, the reader is teased into active and expanding contextual analysis.

Let me give an example. The title of my thesis, 'Helping Eagles Fly!', at first glance seems contradictory and paradoxical. Eagles do not need help to fly, but the story narrated in Chapter 3 presents an alternative scenario where dominant perspectives prevented the eagle from becoming what he/she was born to be. As a personal epistemological tool, I use this metaphor of practice to remind me of the natality of each young person I work with, to help them attain their highest potential through an ethic of care and respect, embedded in my practice. I demonstrate in Chapter 3 how I have used the story of the eagle as a metaphor to transform human and educative relationships; in Chapter 6, I demonstrate how young leaders themselves express this ethic of care for disadvantaged children, and include visual evidence on DVD 1 (Appendix 1).

I have found that the polyvalent nature of metaphor fosters dialectical reflexivity - a central quality of action research - because of its ability to sustain multiple interpretations. I use metaphor and narrative as forms of dialectical and living logic, to bring participants to the threshold of new understanding and insight, but participants

have to make their own judgements and decisions to fill the gaps in the data supplied. To critically assess the correctness and accuracy of judgements and assumptions, however, necessitates dialectical engagement with the metaphor or narrative; this engagement in turn has the potential to move researcher and reader beyond experience, understanding and judgement to decision, commitment and action. By going beyond linear propositional Aristotelian logic (McNiff and Whitehead, 2002), metaphor honours participants' freedom to respond, a core value of my research and practice. Metaphor and story are not effective or operative until appropriated in freedom, a freedom rooted in the uniqueness of every person.

The use of metaphor and narrative has contributed to my research by addressing questions of meaning. Ricoeur (1976), cited in O'Murchu (1997: 14) suggests that we use metaphor to unravel 'the surplus of meaning', the deeper meanings of our lives. Addressing questions of meaning, e.g the 'Why?' and 'So what..?' questions, provides a stimulus for the creative imagination and expanded consciousness by expanding horizons and boundaries of understanding. Aligning metaphor and story with the 'What if?' question, invariably served as an antidote to moments of 'not knowing', uncertainty and contradiction. In such moments, I used metaphor and narrative as a hermeneutic tool to foster emergent meaning and resonance while ensuring the alignment of values and practice. 'The Guru's Cat' and the 'Sherlock Holmes' story functioned in this way to highlight anomalies of practice, critique unquestioned orthodoxies and challenge normative perceptions. Using metaphor and story as personal and institutional hermeneutic tools in my action research is a way of suspending our assumptions, sharing the consciousness we already have (Bohm, 1996) so that we can, together, 'see our seeing' (Senge *et al.,* 2005). I use metaphor and story (see Chapter 3) as a form of 'participatory thought' (Bohm, 1996: 84) - 'participatory' in its two meanings of partaking *of* (absorbing insight, energy and wisdom of the metaphor) and partaking *in* (by congruent response in concrete action). In Chapters 5 and 6, I demonstrate this process through the use of metaphors of *community*, *symphony*, *heart* and *shared leadership.*

Metaphor also serves the purpose of dialectic retrieval of values, vision and shared purpose. Its retrospective, current and prospective potential is reflected in the manner in which metaphor operates in a pattern of orientation, disorientation and re-orientation (Brown *et al.,* 1990: 1367). Carr (1988: 102) highlights two essential 'moments' of interpretation **-** unmasking regressive meaning and logics while restoring and re-appropriating generative and transformative meaning. I have come to understand, and my research confirms, that in these moments of interpretation, appropriation and response, I tap into a wealth of tacit knowledge (Polyani, 1958) while generating living educational theory.

Metaphor as forging identity

Engaging with metaphor in a self-study action research approach, I have found, touches the deepest dimension of self and forges enhanced self-awareness of one's identity. Metaphor, story and symbols function evocatively in contrast to the propositional forms associated with technical-rational theory. Using metaphor, story and symbol in reflective practice helped me reframe experience and activate transformative response in light of espoused values. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) draw attention to the effectiveness of this process in encouraging narrative unity and identification of 'the self who teaches' (Palmer, 1993: 4). The knowledge generated by metaphorical and dialectical engagement underpins an 'ontology of becoming' in contrast with the more static dynamics of an 'ontology of being' (McNiff and Whitehead, 2000: 42). Metaphor, story and symbol are productive of reality - hence the importance of choosing transformative and life-enhancing ones. Metaphor holds in tension two dimensions of reality - the 'is' and 'is not' - and functions in my research process by constantly projecting new challenges and possibilities (see Chapter 3).

Metaphor and story have social and political influence also. In coming to understand my practice as contributing to the education of social formations (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006), I experienced the power of metaphor, story and symbol to harness the power of shared meaning to develop social structures and practices that are inclusive, collaborative and life-enhancing. This awareness took on greater significance in the

conflicted context of Northern Ireland where my research is located. Communal engagement with 'metaphors of wholeness' (McNiff and Whitehead, 2000: 301) evokes an alternative consciousness and perception that project new possibilities, criticise the dominant, domesticating consciousness, and energise individuals and communities to bring to expression their hopes and yearning for a better world. Engaging in self-study action research in social contexts, I have been awakened to the shattering, evocative nature of metaphor, story and symbol that 'breaks fixed conclusions and presses us always towards new, dangerous, imaginative possibilities' (Brueggemann, 1988: 6). I have found that replacing metaphors of fragmentation (McNiff, 2001) with generative life-affirming ones, alters the theory and content of educative discourse and practice, and locates my practice firmly in the new scholarship of embodied epistemologies (Schon, 1995).

2:6   Praxis and Shared Praxis

Realising my espoused values in practice forms the conceptual framework of my research. My commitment to living in the direction of my values influenced my choice of research methodology and helped me understand my work and research in terms of *praxis*. Praxis is one of Aristotle's tripartite modes of engaging ethically and intelligently in the world. The others are *theoria,* theoretical knowledge as an end in itself, and *poeisis*, a way of knowing that is creative, productive and technically oriented. Praxis is not simply action based on reflection; it also embraces and embodies certain qualities - respect for life, commitment to human wellbeing, truth and justice. As Carr and Kemmis (1984: 190) point out, *praxis* is rooted in the commitment of the practitioner to wise and prudent action in practical, concrete and historical contexts; as such it can only be understood in terms of the values, understandings and commitments that inform it.

Praxis as a hermeneutical process is a unified process of understanding, interpretation and application (Gadamer, 1989: 308). In placing myself at the centre of my research into my praxis, I am forging links of congruent connectivity between my emerging

epistemology of practice and my ontological commitments. It is a process of self-implication (Warren 1998), of active self-insertion in living contexts. In developing a new, more holistic epistemology of practice, I draw on Groome's definition of praxis as

> purposeful human activity that holds in dialectical unity both theory and practice, critical reflection and historical engagement.

(Groome, 1991: 136)

My commitment to praxis is grounded in two other significant elements of practice that link theory and practice - my spirituality and the motto of the order I belong to. In Biblical spirituality, two concepts are closely linked: *devekut,* closeness, clinging to God in contemplation, and *tikkun o'lam,* meaning 'repairing the world' or working for justice for all. Neither is complete without the other - true contemplation necessitates committed historical engagement with living contexts. The cycles of action and reflection articulated in action research find an echo in many spiritual traditions, and their commitment to creating a just, meaningful and caring world (Macy, 1998; Flanagan and Kelly, 2004). The order's motto stresses the link between theory and practice: effective teaching is rooted in 'doing', in living embodiment of one's values; equally, beliefs, values and theory are challenged and influenced by ethical ontological engagement.

Shared praxis

My praxis reflects several significant nodal moments as the research progressed. Initially, my research was focussed on improving my practice, but gradually I became aware of its potential for improving its contextual setting. The reflective nature of praxis soon highlighted the contribution of participants in my research; the collaborative nature of my practice, reflective of mutuality and reciprocity, fostered a growing awareness of the emergence of a *community* of practice (Wenger, 1998; Clarke, 1996) and learning. This awareness in turn generated transformed relationships embracing mutual engagement, a joint enterprise, a shared repertoire of values, goals, discourse (Wenger, 1998: 73) and negotiated meanings. As I grew to understand my action research as praxis, this understanding was accompanied by a growing conviction that the

contribution of *participants* in my research - parents, principals, teachers, students, youth leaders - could also be considered as praxis. The awareness that learning contributes to social structure gradually fostered an understanding of my praxis as contributing to the formation of communities of praxis. Given the dialectical, collaborative and participative nature of my educative engagement, I now understand my praxis as fostering communities of *shared* praxis.

Shared praxis – Five Movements

Groome's 'five movements', described in my prologue, made a significant contribution to the development of my praxis and the manner in which I have come to know and understand my unfinished symphony. A shared praxis model provided me with a structure of inquiry in using a self-study action research approach. It also underpinned a model of practice that resists colonialist tendencies and ideologies, facilitates ownership and empowerment by all participants and invites them to become 'co-creators' (Capra, 2002) and co-generators of theory and shared tacit knowledge. A shared praxis approach fosters models of effective practice defined by Lonergan (Macy, 1998: 157) as reflecting attentiveness, intelligence, reasonableness and responsibility. It supports emergent community structures and creative change by discovering what is meaningful and, by improved relationships of universal participation, fuelled by a belief that living systems contain their own solutions (Wheatley, 2005: 107). Later chapters will demonstrate these processes in action.

2: 7   Issues of validity, authenticity and epistemological standards of judgement

Practitioner action research is not universally accepted as a valid form of educational research, (Winter, 2002; McNiff and Whitehead, 2005), partly because action research practitioners themselves have not fully defined appropriate standards of judgement, although this situation is being remedied (Hartog, 2004; Glenn, 2006). The purpose of this section is to test the validity and authenticity of my knowledge claims against my

epistemological, ontological and methodological standards of judgement, and ground them in an evidence base communicated through a variety of media. In placing my own living theory, practice and claims to knowledge in the public domain to be explored, critiqued and challenged I am thereby ensuring that I am not ascribing to my work the 'status of dogmatic subjectivity' (Polyani,1958). Placing my work in the public forum (Glavey, 2002, 2005) through writing, dialectical engagement with validation groups, critical friends and research participants, is also an expression of an ethic of care. As with my commitment to supervision in therapeutic contexts, I acknowledge my commitment to ethical, caring and rigorous research practices that reflect the qualities of connection, particularity of responsibility, commitment and reciprocity (Sernak, 1998) as core elements of this thesis.

Movements Three and Four (see Prologue) are operative in this phase of my thesis, where I explore the literature of good research practice and use it as an evaluative and critical backdrop to my own research, where the narrative of my research engages the wider story of research in the literature. Given the vastness of the literature, I highlight authors whose writings have provided markers for guidance and evaluative processes in my work.

Winter (2002: 151), in addressing issues of validity and authenticity in narratives of action research, proposes two principles central to this dilemma.

First, the *dialectical principle* highlights the plurality of perspective reflective of all participants in the research process which is, of its very nature, collaborative. The polyphonic nature of my thesis is clearly evident in the video material showing young people in leadership roles in school and in their local community (DVD 1 and 2, Appendix 1), and in the young people's accounts of their own practice (EDO, 2005, 2006). The emancipatory nature of action research makes audible the voices of those culturally marginalised or disenfranchised in educational or communitarian contexts. However, my practice strives to bring more than young people's *voices* to audibility. Their active and engaged *presence* is also brought to bear on lived contexts, making a valuable, visible and practical contribution to creating a good social order. It is clear

from video evidence that it is my practice to adopt a supportive role (DVD 1 and 2, Appendix 1) while leaving all leadership roles to the young people themselves. In claiming to honour the uniqueness and natality of each individual, my research narrative (supported by data and evidence) is reflective of communitarian and collaborative processes. My thesis reflects the multiple 'I's' of self-study narrative enquiry (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990: 9).

Second, *the reflexive principle*, which emphasises the dialectical reflexivity of the narrative and reflects awareness of the contingent nature of my account. The constant and ongoing cycle of practice leading to new learning which in turn fosters new practices, is a consistent theme throughout. I am not making explicit generalisations outside of a specific context. However, I can claim that the process has been successfully employed in different locations and contexts, nationally and internationally. Central to the reflexive nature of claims I have made is the enlistment of management, staff, students and young adult participants in the reflective process, and samples of their self-reflective learning form part of my evidence archive (Appendix, 3 and 4). As my narrative unfolds, Winter's (1989: 151) idea of 'cognitive modesty' necessarily underpins the trustworthiness of my claim to have grown in understanding of my practice and the development of democratic and transformative educative relationships and structures.

Lomax (1999) lists communitarian and collaborative processes as two key criteria in judging the validity of a self-study action research report. She also draws attention to the 'practical' element of this form of research in judging its quality as a process of disciplined intervention which embraces the dialectic of values and action. Both Lomax(1999) and Whitehead (1993) emphasise the embodiment of values as a core element of action research where experience of contradiction or denial of values facilitates emergence of the meaning of espoused values (I will return to Whitehead's contribution on values later in this section). While clarifying values and devising strategies for their realization in living contexts is important, Lomax (*ibid:* 117) suggests that the process of achieving such criteria be marked by awareness and consideration of issues rather than the prescription of outcomes. I regard my work as praxis,

demonstrating concern for the transparency of the research process and the educational intentionality of interventions I have proposed or initiated. Grounding theoretical frameworks in my practice and fostering democratic and cooperative relationships, I include video, audio and written reports from participants as aesthetic criteria for testing the validity of my claims to knowledge and monitoring my educative influence in generating new living theory.

I have already drawn attention to my use of Lonergan's (1972) transcendental precepts as criteria for the authenticity of my research narrative. Lonergan suggests that being *attentive*, *intelligent*, *reasonable* and *responsible* are fundamental internal processes of knowing that make us authentic human beings. By attending to the data of experience and practice, I have moved by way of intelligent enquiry to understanding and making the data intelligible. Being reasonable entailed judgement of the truth or falsehood of my understanding, leading to responsible decisions about what is good, followed by responsible action to bring about that good. There are four corresponding levels of consciousness: empirical, intellectual, rational and responsible, which have provided me with a conceptual framework for my research narrative. Lonergan (1972) summarises the process as follows:

> There is the *empirical* level on which we sense, perceive, imagine, feel, speak and move. There is the *intellectual* level on which we inquire, come to understand, express what we have understood, and work out the presuppositions and implications of our expression. There is the *rational* level on which we reflect, marshal the evidence, pass judgement on the truth or falsity, certainty or probability of a statement. There is the *responsible* level on which we are concerned with ourselves, our own operations, our goals and so deliberate about possible courses of action, evaluate them, decide and carry out our decisions.

(Lonergan, 1972: 9, emphasis in original)

Lonergan highlights the need for a reflective dimension to these processes, a dimension similar to the reflective process of action research. He contrasts 'undifferentiated' consciousness - when the researcher is not addressing the four precepts in an intentional, self-aware and self-conscious manner - with 'differentiated' consciousness when the researcher consciously applies all of the transcendental precepts to assess and review the

quality of how each individual precept is being enacted. This is one of the key areas where Lonergan contributes to my research process.

However, Lonergan makes a further contribution to my 'research consciousness' in alerting me to my experience of being a living contradiction (Whitehead, 1993) when using his methodological process. I suggest that Lonergan's process is potentially individualistic and subjectivist, and lacks the communitarian dimension that Winter (1989) and Lomax (1999) regard as an essential ingredient of action research methodology. I also agree with Groome's (1991: 481) assessment that Lonergan pays little attention to the socio-cultural and contextual aspects of knowledge, practice and interpersonal relationships that inhibit personal and social transformation. Avoiding the pitfalls of subjectivism and objectivism necessitates participation in communities of dialogue, challenge and support (Daloz *et al.,* 1996). It is in this context that Winter's 'dialectical reflexivity' and Groome's (*ibid:* 121) 'dialectical appropriation' make a significant contribution to the rigour and authenticity of my research and practice. The importance of the communitarian dimension of my work is evident in the visual images of the 'circle of friends' as the dominant image of my educative relationships and ecological sensibility (DVD 1, Appendix 1).

Conversations of Inner Significance

Self-study action research can be difficult. Using Lonergan's transcendental precepts as a way of ensuring rigour and authenticity means constantly facing new epistemological, ontological and methodological questions (Gadamer, 1989: 299). As Dunne (1985: 62) points out, 'there is tension in authenticity,' which results from a continuous flow of appropriate attention, intelligence, judgement and decision about situations at hand. There is tension also in genuine engagement with Winter's dialectical reflexivity and Groome's 'dialectical appropriation' of incoming data, experience and knowledge that significantly challenge, modify and transform one's cognitive structures. Two elements of my practice and research - conversations and language - have addressed this issue of dialectical tension and communitarian practice.

I have been influenced by Habermas' (1974) concept of 'ideal speech situation' as an approach to developing conversations that facilitate what he terms 'processes of enlightenment'. I have used as a living standard of judgement my commitment to communication that is truthful, honest, open and trustworthy, resists impulses of domination or manipulation, and finally, facilitates respectful and unforced agreement.

Recognising the power of language in structuring reality, I have paid particular attention to my use of language in educative discourse. My concern is to embrace language and metaphor that foster the new sensibility (McFeague, 1987) and the new epistemology of Schon (1995), avoiding the use of language and metaphor that supports hierarchical, dualistic and individualistic relationships and structures. Given the communitarian and collaborative nature of action research (Lomax, 1994; McNiff *et al.,* 2000; McNiff and Whitehead, 2005), I strive to nurture educative relationships that reflect collaboration, mutuality, interdependence and care, thus avoiding what Reuther (cited in McFeague, *ibid:* 14) calls the 'tyranny of the absolutising imagination.'

Values as standards of judgement.

Having drawn on the insights of Winter, Lomax, Lonergan and Habermas (above) in developing rigorous and ethical standards of practice and research, I turn now to the ideas of Whitehead and McNiff (2006) to articulate and explain my use of values as standards of judgement in testing the validity of my research claims and supporting body of evidence. Using Groome's (1991) five movements of shared praxis as both structure and process, I demonstrate how values, espoused and embodied, are at the heart of my research. The meaning of my values is expressed, not only in linguistic discourse, but emerges in daily practice.

Whitehead (1993: 55), drawing on Polyani's (1958) ideas on commitment and responsibility, suggests that, from a living theory perspective, a commitment to understanding the world from one's point of view, claiming originality and exercising judgement responsibly, and doing so with universal intent, determines the nature of the unit of appraisal of one's claim to knowledge. Drawing on this idea, I propose that the

unit of appraisal of my research is my claim to know my own educational development and learning as I address the question, 'How do I improve my practice?'

Using my values as my living standards of judgement

How have I used my values, espoused and embodied to improve my practice? In the first instance, my values have been brought to consciousness, emerging through the reflective process and engagement with experiences of contradiction, paradox and challenge. Polyani's (1958) concept of tacit knowledge has a parallel in *tacit values*, values that are largely beyond overt awareness, yet profoundly influence daily living. In addressing the 'why?' question in exploring the ontological, epistemological and methodological dimension of my practice, my system of values has come to full conscious awareness. Drawing on life-affirming values - justice, mutuality, embodied respect for natality and individuality - as explanatory principles, with attitudes and practice having an expressive function, I use these values as living standards by which I, and others, can judge both my practice and theory emanating from it. In the following three chapters, I have outlined in detail the genesis and application of the values underpinning my living theory of practice.

If values are not to remain at a conceptual level, they must be expressed through commitment and engagement. In this way, my values become living standards of judgement; espousing values has little credibility unless accompanied by action where values are lived and embodied. Whether or not I am embodying my values can only be judged on the evidence provided. As McNiff and Whitehead (2005) point out, understanding our values as standards of judgement addresses the question 'To what extent do I show that I am living in the direction of my espoused values?' Let me give an example.

Visual evidence on DVD 1 (Appendix 1) clearly shows that all my group sessions occur in a circle. This is an expression of my belief in the uniqueness and individuality of each individual and the circle emphasises equality, lack of hierarchical status, shared leadership, connectedness and recognition of each individual's contribution. Epistemological values are expressed in inclusion, bonding, freedom,

interconnectedness, interdependence and communitarian practices. Pedagogical values facilitate openness, shared insight and ownership of reciprocal processes, decision-making and action-planning. Within the circle, each individual's store of tacit knowledge, deeply rooted in his/her life experience, consciousness and values, can be acknowledged and harvested in the interests of the group's vision by facilitating learning conversations (Sallis and Jones, 2002: 18) within a community of shared praxis. It is important to remember, however, that while it is possible for the purpose of analysis and description to differentiate between values, in living contexts embodied values form a holistic and fluid whole that is frequently operative outside the consciousness of the practitioner/researcher.

The challenge of commitment.

A key challenge facing me as I placed my 'I' at the centre of my research and generation of living forms of theory, was the maintenance of a congruent and dialectical relationship between my inner world and the outer world of practice and research. Expanding on Palmer (1998: 149), I believe that authentic and rigorous research and good educative relationships are founded on the identity and integrity of the teacher/researcher. Conscious of the danger of 'dogmatic subjectivity' (Polyani, 1958) and the 'shadow' lurking in helping relationships (Guggenbuhl-Craig, 1971; Corey and Corey, 1997), I draw on Polyani's (1958) concept of commitment to address this challenge and provide further criteria for my claims of authenticity.

For Polyani (*ibid:* 315), using commitment as a framework within which one believes something to be true is to establish 'the concept of competence which authorises a fiduciary choice made and timed, to the best of the acting person's ability, as a deliberate and yet necessary choice'. Polyani further asserts that a 'competent mental act' is rooted in the integrity of the individual; the researcher's acts are integrally congruent, and while outcomes may vary from person to person and are not the result of arbitrary process, they retain universal intent.

Devising a mode of practice reflecting Polyani's commitment centred on a shared praxis approach, already discussed, and the development of habits of mind (critical, rigorously

evaluative and reflective) and heart (relational, collaborative and reciprocal) that inspired all stages of research. Drawing on Daloz *et al.* (2000: 108), I highlight five habits in particular:

- *the habit of dialogue*, grounded in the understanding that meaning is constructed through ongoing educative interaction with others;

- *the habit of interpersonal perspective-taking*, the ability to see through the eyes of others and respond to the feelings and concerns of others;

- *the habit of critical, systemic thought,* the capacity to identify parts and the connections between them as coherent patterns, and reflectively evaluate them;

- *the habit of dialectical thought,* the ability to recognise and work effectively with contradiction, paradox and difference by reframing my response and resisting premature closure;

- *the habit of holistic thought,* the ability to intuit life as an interconnected whole in a manner that fosters wisdom and insight. (Italics in original)

As a practical expression of my commitment to collaborative and transparent practice, I invite teachers to be present when I am working with their students, and to participate in the group process. There are two advantages to this practice: one, teachers are familiar with the process their students are engaged in, and two, teachers can themselves use the process as a springboard for further learning. Accepting teachers as partners in the process also encourages invaluable feedback and critique.

2: 6   Literature in self-study action research

I continue my story by focusing on methodological issues. Movements 3 and 4 of my self-study draw attention to the place of literature in a self-study action research report. Significantly, the literature review is not conducted as a trawl of the literature to form hypotheses, nor develop a body of theory against which my inquiry and theory can be

critiqued or benchmarked. Winter's (1989) claim that theory in action research is a form of 'improvisatory self-realisation' emphasises the emergent nature of insight, understanding and appropriation of values. The place of literature in this context is interactive in nature, maintaining a critical and dialectical hermeneutic between text and practice.

The literature brought to bear in action research as I have experienced it, was not confined to any one discipline, but ranged over many disciplines and unfolded as the research progressed. In practical terms, the literature evolved as an accompaniment to the shifting focus of concern as I continuously addressed the questions 'What is my concern?' and 'How can I improve my practice?' My initial concerns tended to be of a practical nature in compiling a programme of training, but unfolding and emergent awareness resulting from reflective practice, raised serious epistemological, methodological and ontological concerns amid experiences of contradiction, which highlighted issues of espoused values, social justice, power, authority and voicelessness.

No one body of literature adequately addresses all the issues raised; hence, the felt need to explore a range of literatures which affirmed, challenged and called beyond current levels of understanding and practice. In making a conscious decision to adopt a self-study living theory approach to practice and generate my own living theory, I adopted a dialectical and dynamic interface, involving self, the writings and ideas of others and the living contexts in which I work, aimed at providing a coherent explanation and 'negotiation of meaning' (Wenger 1998: 52).

According to Wenger (*ibid:* 52), negotiation of meaning involves the interaction of two constituent processes - participation and reification. Participation consists of shared experiences and negotiations resulting from social interaction among people, embracing both action and connection. Reification is a process of giving form to experience by producing concrete representations of practice - rituals, rules, tools, documents. Within the former process, the 'hidden participants' - writers and theorists in many disciplines - contributed to my unfolding narrative by questioning, clarifying, challenging assumptions and expanding horizons.

Coming to understand my praxis as developing communities of shared praxis, I, like Groome (1991, 1998), draw on the Christian Story as the key body of literature underpinning my research. Recourse to various literatures was particularly significant at nodal moments or axial points, moments of impasse and contradiction where assumptions, values and accepted theory were called into question. Aside from the obvious literatures of research and leadership, my emergent living theory engaged with the literatures of counselling and psychotherapy, spirituality and biblical studies, organisational theory, theology, missiology and anthropology. In developing my theory of community as the locus of shared praxis, I have drawn on my extensive experience of community living and the vast literature of religious life. Throughout this thesis, I indicate my indebtedness to the theory and insights of a multitude of 'hidden participants'.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined aspects of the process of crossing the threshold of the familiar - the nature of action research, the transformative and generative potential of metaphor, the place of shared praxis as an explanatory framework of my emerging epistemology of practice and, finally, the contribution of the concept and experience of liminality to understanding Whitehead's (1993) concept of living contradiction. I have addressed issues of validity and authenticity in testing my claim to knowledge, and briefly indicated the contribution of a variety of literatures to my research and practice. This contribution will become clearer as the narrative unfolds. Finally, I have outlined the effects of crossing the threshold of the familiar on my inner landscape by adopting an action research approach.

In the next two chapters, I explore the influences, experiences and theories that underpin my practice and indicate the values embodied in it.

CHAPTER 3

'FLY, EAGLE, FLY'

Introduction

These words, the title of a story which I recount in this chapter, and attributed to Aggrey, a Ghanaian, and retold by Gregorowski (2000), carry within them the central purpose and motif of the unfinished symphony of my emerging practice - that each person who is part of my educative relationships will be enabled to discover and strive to achieve their maximum potential. Desmond Tutu, in the foreword to the book, highlights the frequency with which the opposite occurs where people spend their lives within limited and limiting horizons. Instead, he suggests, 'we should be straining to become what we have within us to become' (Tutu, 2000, foreword). I first heard this story while working as a missionary educator in a remote area of Central Africa. It has had a profound influence on my practice and I adopted it as a metaphor of my living theory of educational leadership.

In this chapter, I highlight some of the key influences on my research and practice, and their expression as generative and transformational elements of current educative relationships. Staying with the metaphor of unfinished symphony and movements, I now address Groome's (1991: 215) Movement 3 - 'making accessible Christian Story and Vision' - in greater detail and show its relevance to current practice. Conscious that Groome is writing in the context of Christian religious education, I concur with the concept of the Christian Story, Vision and life-affirming values as the foundation and inspiration of my life. While honouring denominational allegiance and conscious of how it shapes my interpretation and response, I also value the contribution and inspiration of story from other sources and disciplines, and acknowledge its power for personal and organisational transformation. I use story, not as an object of belief, but as something that mediates meaning, something to live within and explore its disclosive power. A story can shape and reshape the imagination, the repository of images that shape our

experience of reality. My experience of living and working among indigenous traditions - Native American, African and Celtic - reveals the power of story as a method of transmitting the wisdom, history, tradition and values; it can also serve the function of integrating mind, body and heart - the Sufis, Buddhists and Jesus have used story in this way.

Essentially hermeneutic in nature, Movement Three facilitates interpretation and explanation of the content of story, fosters dialogical engagement by both story tellers and story listeners in 'owning' the story, and opens the way to generative and congruent response. I draw on Groome's (1991: 223) three types of hermeneutic: a hermeneutic of *retrieval* to reclaim and access the truths and values mediated through story or text; a hermeneutic of *suspicion* that both uncovers distortion and false consciousness and seeks out 'dangerous or subversive memories' excluded or hidden by dominant ideologies; and finally, a hermeneutic of *creative commitment* that develops more adequate, more generative and life-affirming understanding and generates a response that leads to personal, social and organisational transformation. As Henderson (2001: 19) points out, 'hermeneutics can simply be explained as the challenge of acting out of a deep sense of integrity or conscience'. In the following sections of my thesis, I tell stories of practice which offer an insight into the deeper truth of current practice, a key to my private mythology and reveal my emergent identity, ontological stance and epistemology of practice.

The first section offers an example of my use of story in my practice. Section 2 illustrates how two stories of personal experience influence my educative relationships, while in the third section, I offer an example of a life-affirming and life-challenging pedagogy from a different culture and discipline which has enriched my own pedagogy. Section 4 offers a brief sketch of transformation in action, through the intervention in Irish education of Edmund Rice, Founder of two religious orders of Brothers, and, in Chapter 4, I describe how I strive to inculturate his values in a creative response to the possibilities of today's changing cultural and social contexts. Finally, I explore the story of leadership, seeking a model of leadership relevant to my work and embodied in my practice.

3:1 'Let me tell you a story…..'

Thus I begin many of my sessions with the variety of groups I work with. I will begin this chapter with two stories, but first let me explain the important epistemological contribution that story makes to my practice. I use 'Fly, Eagle, Fly' (Gregorowski, 2000) as normative of the many stories that permeate my practice and include participants' responses as illustrative of the impact a story can have.

(Note: While I focus on story in this section, similar dynamics surround my use of poetry, photographic images, movies and songs. When working with groups over a period of time, I encourage participants to use *their* stories, images and songs.)

Fly, Eagle, Fly!

A farmer went out one day to search for a lost calf. The little herd boys had come back without it the evening before. And that night there had been a terrible storm. He went to the valley and searched. He searched by the riverbed. He searched among the reeds, behind the rocks and in the rushing water. He wandered over the hillside and through the dark and tangled forests where everything began, then out again along the muddy cattle tracks. He searched in the long grass, taller than his own head. He climbed the slopes of the high mountain with its rocky cliffs rising to the sky. He called out all the time, hoping that the calf might hear, but also because he felt so alone. His shouts echoed off the cliffs. The river roared in the valley below.

He climbed up a gully in case the calf had huddled there to escape the storm. And that is where he stopped. For there, on a ledge of rock, close enough to touch, he saw the most unusual sight - an eagle chick, hatched from its egg a day or two before and then blown from its nest by the terrible storm. He reached out and cradled the chick in both hands. He would take it home and care for it. And home he went, still calling in case the calf might hear.

He was almost home when the children ran out to meet him. 'The calf came back by itself!' they shouted. The farmer was very pleased. He showed the eagle chick to his wife and children then placed it carefully in the warm kitchen among the hens and

chicks and under the watchful eye of the rooster. 'The eagle is the king of the birds,' he said, 'but we shall train it to be a chicken.' So the eagle lived among the chickens, learning their ways. His children called their friends to see the strange bird. For as it grew, living on the bits and pieces put out for the chickens, it began to look quite different from any chicken they had ever seen.

One day a friend dropped in for a visit. He and the farmer sat at the door of the kitchen hut, smoking their pipes. The friend saw the bird among the chickens.

'Hey! That's not a chicken. It's an eagle.' The farmer smiled at him and said, 'Of course it's a chicken. Look - it walks like a chicken, it eats like a chicken, it thinks like a chicken. Of course it's a chicken.' But the friend was not convinced. 'I will show you that it is an eagle,' he said. 'Go ahead,' said the farmer.

The farmer's children helped his friend catch the bird. It was fairly heavy but he lifted it above his head and said, 'You are not a chicken but an eagle. You belong not to the earth but to the sky. Fly, eagle, fly!' The bird stretched out its wings as the farmer and his family had seen it do before, but it looked about, saw the chickens feeding, and jumped down to scratch with them for food. 'I told you it was a chicken,' the farmer said, and he roared with laughter.

Next day the friend was back. 'Farmer', he said, 'I will prove to you that this is no chicken, but an eagle. Bring me a ladder.' With the large bird under one arm, he struggled up the slippery thatch of the tallest hut. The farmer doubled up with laughter. 'It eats chicken food, it thinks like a chicken. It is a chicken.' The friend, swaying on top of the hut, took the eagle's head, pointed it to the sky, and said, 'You are not a chicken but an eagle. You belong not to the earth but to the sky. Fly, Eagle, fly!' Again the great bird stretched out its wings. It trembled and the claws that grasped his hand opened. 'Fly, Eagle, fly!' the man cried. But the bird scrambled out of his hands, slid down the thatch, and sailed in among the chickens. There was much laughter.

Very early next morning, on the third day, the farmer's dogs began to bark. A voice was calling outside in the darkness. The farmer ran to the door. It was his friend again. 'Give me one more chance with the bird,' he begged. 'Do you know the time? It's long before dawn. Are you crazy?' 'Come with me. Fetch the bird.' Reluctantly the farmer went into the kitchen, stepping over his sleeping children, and picked up the bird, which was fast asleep among the chickens.

The two men set off, disappearing into the darkness. 'Where are we going?' asked the farmer sleepily. 'To the mountains where you found the bird.' 'And why at this ridiculous time of the night?' 'So that our eagle may see the sun rise over the mountain and follow it into the sky where it belongs.' They went into the valley and crossed the river, the friend leading the way. The bird was very heavy and too large to carry comfortably, but the friend insisted on taking it himself. 'Hurry,' he said, or the dawn will arrive before we do!'

The first light crept into the sky as they began to climb the mountain. Below them they could see the river snaking like a long, thin ribbon through the golden grasslands, the forest and the veld, stretching down towards the sea. The wispy clouds in the sky were pink at first, and then began to shimmer with a golden brilliance. Sometimes their path was dangerous as it clung to the side of the mountain, crossing narrow shelves of rock and taking them into dark crevices and out again. They were both panting, especially the friend who was carrying the bird. At last he said, 'This will do.' He looked down the cliff and saw the ground thousands of feet below. They were very near the top.

Carefully the friend carried the bird onto a ledge. He set it down so that it looked towards the east and began talking to it. The farmer chuckled. 'It talks only chickens' talk.' But the friend talked on, telling the bird about the sun, how it gives life to the world, how it reigns in the heavens, giving light to each new day. 'Look at the sun, Eagle. And when it rises, rise with it. You belong to the sky, not to the earth.'

At that moment, the sun's first rays shot out over the mountain and suddenly the world was ablaze with light. The golden sun rose majestically, dazzling them. The

great bird stretched out its wings to greet the sun and feel the life-giving warmth on its feathers. The farmer was quiet. The friend said, 'You belong not to the earth but to the sky. Fly, Eagle, fly!' He clambered back to the farmer. All was silent. Nothing moved. The eagle's head stretched up; its wings stretched outwards; its legs leaned forward as its claws clutched the rock.

And then, without really moving, feeling the updraft of a wind more powerful than any man or bird, the great eagle leaned forward and was swept upward, higher and higher, lost to sight in the brightness of the rising sun, never again to live among the chickens.

Story builds community

In beginning with a story, I am drawing on my experience of the *seanchai,* the traditional storyteller that was a feature of Irish rural life prior to the advent of television. He was both receptacle and curator of a vast collection of stories that embraced history, traditions, customs, codes of behaviour, and reflection on bygone times. Aside from entertainment value, the *seanchai* functioned as a form of 'social magnet', bringing people together to share food and drink and also to engage in an experience of communal listening and response.

By beginning with a story, I extend a gentle, non-threatening invitation to participants to bond through a shared experience of listening to and engaging with the story, generating conversation about the experience and inviting individual and shared response. Invitation to participate honours the individuality, the natality of each person, reflects the spirit of 'going together to a new place' and offers an opportunity of engagement, of self-implication with new possibilities of being and relating

> *Chris:* '*You've all just heard the story – share with the person beside you your reaction to the story, what was it about, what was the point of the story.'*
>
> *Responses:*

'We were delighted the eagle escaped from a hostile environment.'

'We think the story is about freedom/ escape from threatening environment being true to oneself / how one person can make a difference / not being afraid to disagree with others / standing by one's beliefs.'

It reminds me of Mr/Miss X (a teacher) who always encourages us.'

(Personal journal, October 2004)

Speaking to one other person is usually experienced as non-threatening, gives each person an opportunity to speak and have their voice heard, and encourages them to participate and contribute to the next section of the developing programme.

Story facilitates reflective practice

A story facilitates reflective practice first by provoking curiosity. Compare the effects of two different introductions: (a) 'Today we are going to study models of leadership….' and (b) 'A farmer went out one day to search for a lost calf' (Gregorowski, 2000: 1). Curiosity pertains to the movement of the story, to character interaction and relationship, and to final outcomes. Dynamic engagement with story can, potentially, help listeners to both remember and re-member their ontological being. Examples of such stories are the Christian Story, the Exodus story, and many stories found in native traditions, myth and legend. By telling a story, I am inviting listeners to participate in what Groome (1993: 32) terms 'a remembrance of being', of identity and of who one is in historical contexts; to re-member is to respond dynamically and generatively to what one is called to be by congruently addressing the 'so what?' question of every story. Dynamic memory can empower 'doing' which flows from authentic 'being'.

Chris: *'Is there anything in this story that reflects your own experience?'*

Responses:

'The farmer and the children remind me of how people are put down by others.'

'I feel sometimes like the eagle must have felt, when I experience peer pressure in school or with my friends.'

110

'Sometimes it's easier to go with the crowd. I admire someone who can do things without being afraid of what people think.'

'I don't stand up for myself as well as I should and I don't speak out when I see someone being unfairly treated.'

(Personal Journal, October, 2004)

Story evokes imagination and living logics.

One of the negative outcomes of positivist pedagogy is the colonisation of the imagination, and disregard of the emotions. Story as part of an alternative pedagogy evokes a formative influence by involving the listener's imagination. Schneiders (1986) highlights the faculty of the imagination as

> our constructive capacity to integrate our experience into dynamic and effective wholes which then function as the interpretive grids of further experience.

(Schneiders, 1986: 16)

Listening with the imagination helps us hear the truth in new ways and serves as an antidote to hopelessness by evoking and fostering new possibilities, futures and horizons. As Wenger (1998: 178) points out, creative imagination is rooted in social interaction and communal experience, a mode of belonging and connectedness that expands identity and contextual and communal awareness.

Story evokes imagination by generating nodal moments and forked road situations (Dewey, 1933), through experiences of perplexity and impasse where new solutions and dialogical responses are called for. The locus of shared praxis occurs at such moments of shared story and experience. Imagination not only reveals new possibilities and new futures, it also evokes the power and energy to participate in bringing them to fruition.

> *Chris:* *'Imagine yourself as one of the following in the story - the farmer, the eagle and the farmer's brother. What kinds of leadership are found in this story?'*
>
> *Responses*
>
> *'We sometimes put each other down by slagging, making jokes.'*

'We work well as a team, always supporting each other.'

'I would like to think of myself as a leader who encourages others.'

'The man who believed in the eagle and encouraged him to be an eagle.'

'The farmer didn't allow the eagle to be himself. I think a leader is someone who brings out the best in people.'

'Miss X is like the brother in the story – she never lets us off with anything unless it's our best work. She's tough but fair and is there for us.'

<div align="right">(Personal Journal, October, 2004)</div>

Story possesses generative and transformational potential

Finally, I tell stories to unlock the potential for individual, communal and contextual transformation among the listeners. I do this by drawing on the emancipatory and subversive nature of story. Emancipation as I use the term draws on Stenhouse's (1983) understanding of the essence of emancipation as

> the intellectual, moral and spiritual autonomy which we recognise when we eschew paternalism and the role of authority and hold ourselves obliged to appeal to judgement.

<div align="right">(Stenhouse, 1983: 163)</div>

Story fosters emancipation by challenging how we structure experience. It does this by arresting the listener by its vividness or strangeness and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought (Dodd, cited in Donohue, 1988: 5). Story is essentially open-ended, admits of multiple interpretations and new perspectives, and resists passive assimilation by honouring the autonomy of the listener. The polyvalent nature of story fosters dialogue and freedom of response. In using story as an expression of my commitment to democratic educative processes, I consciously avoid any colonialist or coercive tendencies by inviting listeners to respond congruently and in freedom to the content, characters, relationships or plot. Stories transcend boundaries of time, identity, context and possibility and embrace deeper awareness of reality, meaning and potential.

The subversive nature of story resides in its ability to evoke, nourish and nurture an alternative perception and consciousness to that of the dominant culture. Brueggeman (1988: 13) suggests that an alternative consciousness criticises and critiques dominant consciousness, while energising individuals and communities to foster and nurture a new reality. Ireland's historical evolution owes much to the contribution of storytellers who, through eight hundred years of oppression, kept a dangerous and subversive memory of freedom and independence alive through story, poetry and song. Story challenges the manner in which we structure experience, resists the passive assimilation of cultural, social and organisational myths and prescriptive propositional theory, frequently portrayed as complete visions of reality or practice. Story also possesses the potential to undermine and subvert disempowering, asymmetric discourses and ideologies.

> *Chris:* *'Does this story have anything to say about your school / local community? What might you do to improve things?'*
>
> *Responses:*
>
> *'There's a lot of bullying in our school. I'd like to change that.'*
>
> *'We're often treated like kids, so as a student council member we'd like to show the Principal and teachers that we can be trusted and can make a contribution to the school.'*
>
> *'I'd like to make a difference in the lives of the kids we bring on Camp.'*
>
> *'It would be great if the Principal really believed we can improve things.'*
>
> *'We really don't have a voice in our school. I want to be able to make a difference and provide a voice for students' concerns while I'm on the Student Council.'*
>
> *'As an Edmund Rice Camp leader, I know I can make the children's lives happier even if it's only for one week of the year.'*
>
> (Personal journal, October 2004)

Story as the site of living contradiction

Congruent use of story as a pedagogical and epistemological tool functions as a two-edged sword in challenging me, not only to encourage young people to engage with the

story, but to do so myself. Invariably it is here that I experience myself as a living contradiction, where the story indicates dissonance with my practice and questions my willingness to be personally challenged by the content, message and dynamics of the story, and acknowledge the ways in which I exhibit a shortfall between my espoused epistemological or ontological values and my living practice.

Gregorowski's story presents an ongoing challenge to embody both espoused values and theory and generate my own living theory. Specifically, the story challenges me to address the following questions:

> Does my epistemology of practice foster generative and transformative educative relationships?

> Do I espouse and model a form of leadership that recognises, encourages and supports participants in achieving their maximum potential? (Lowney, 2003).

> How are issues of power, control and influence addressed in my practice?

While being familiar with the use and power of story in therapeutic contexts (Parry and Doan, 1994; Corey, 1996; Steere, 1997), my research revealed the leader as storyteller as a common theme in the literature (Owen, 1999; Kouzes and Posner, 2003; Lowney, 2003). Having witnessed the power of story in my practice, I can concur with Gardner's (1995: 9) statement that leaders achieve their effectiveness through the stories they relate. That the young leaders I work with use stories in their own training sessions is testimony to the effectiveness of story to bond, inspire, challenge and encourage.

The use of story has an unexpected outcome in helping me come to understand my epistemology of practice as, paradoxically, an epistemology of vulnerability. I will return to this idea in greater detail in a later chapter 5. Suffice at this stage to note that storytelling evokes a sharing of experience and the articulation of tacit knowledge while shifting the locus of power and control to the group. Instead of a unilateral exchange of knowledge, story's capacity for 'exquisite interconnectedness' (Wheatley, 1999: 158), fosters a dialogue of equals, initiates a critical, dialogical and democratic pedagogy

(Dewey, 1938) and contributes significantly to developing an educative relationship of shared praxis.

3:2   Two Stories from my practice

In this section, I relate two stories that have profoundly influenced my current epistemology of practice and contributed to the development of my living theory of educational leadership.

(a)   The Nuffield Science Programme

Having been blessed with several dedicated and affirming teachers at primary and second level, who encouraged and applauded every effort made by even the weakest student, and who transmitted to me and my fellow-students a thirst for knowledge and a love of learning, I endeavoured to follow their example when I began my own teaching career. One of the resources available to me at that time was the Nuffield Science Programme, a well-structured programme that made science exciting and interesting for teacher and pupil alike. One particular module remains clearly in my memory, a module that explored pond life. The source book had a flow chart listing all the possible avenues of science exploration in the humble pond.

My pupils, all 10 year old boys, set to with gusto, each group working on a different aspect of pond-life. Initially, I provided a lot of guidance, help, support, but as their confidence grew, I became more of a spectator and occasional sounding-board. The classroom became a research laboratory, the walls were covered with pictures, charts, drawings; tadpoles, frogs, insects abounded, while miniature jungles of plants, weeds and assorted greenery encroached on all available classroom space. The classroom became a hive of activity, and furniture was frequently re-arranged to facilitate research groups. Even my own desk and chair were commandeered in pursuit of scientific learning, and it became quite common for me to sit with one industrious group, while another group had their work spread out on my desk. It was with extreme reluctance that they disengaged from this activity to attend to other aspects of the curriculum, and it was

common practice for students to remain after school, continue working during break-time and on weekends. Feedback sessions were lively affairs, with intense discussions, arguments and sharing of ideas. Even parents were recruited to act as referees, sources of information and gatherers and providers of resources.

Reflecting on this whole experience, I was struck by several aspects of it. I was amazed at the way in which these 10 year olds, of mixed ability and differing social backgrounds, were able to grasp the dynamics of research and apply them with little assistance from me. They were able to organise themselves, share resources, and work effectively as team members where completion of the task superseded any competitiveness. With minimal input from me, they were able to negotiate working arrangements, allocate duties and responsibilities, track down information and resources, and, where necessary, to seek help.

It was also a salutary learning experience for me as a newly qualified teacher, struggling with the need to be "in control", instead adopted a supportive, secondary role in the learning process rather than a more didactic, prescriptive and authoritarian one. It was also a profound experience of being part of what Sergiovanni terms a 'community of learning' (Sergiovanni 1996), all the more striking in that it was unplanned, unintentional and spontaneous. No amount of educational theory could have replicated the learning for me as I witnessed the ease with which this group of 10-year-olds adopted a leadership role in becoming architects of their own learning. I have incorporated my learning from this experience into current practice.

First, this group of 10 year-olds became a community of learning, self-regulating, self-organising and self-motivating. All were deeply involved, even the 'weaker' students, those who daily struggled to learn, often with little visible success, and tended to be overshadowed by their more academically-able classmates. My concern then, and now, was 'How can I provide an educative environment that is collaborative and inclusive, facilitating the participation and contribution of all participants in generating effective learning outcomes?'

Second, a profusion of hidden and heretofore unrecognised talents materialised during these sessions – organisational skills, leadership skills, artistic skills, communication skills and interpersonal skills - frequently in children who tended to be shy, awkward and introverted. It raised questions for me regarding my understanding of intelligence and how one is intelligent. Several children with learning difficulties in some subjects proved to be gifted organisers, artists, and managers during the project. In current practice, the insights of Gardner (1993) regarding a spectrum of intelligence, or multiple intelligences, have been both enlightening and challenging. In devising a leadership development programme, I have found it helpful to be guided by the question: 'What methodology and process will help identify and 'lead out' (educo) the natural gifts, talents and competencies of participants while challenging them to engage in developing other, less familiar competencies?' I will address this question in more detail in Chapter 4.

Third, and perhaps most significantly, was the manner in which the locus of power constantly shifted throughout the project, as individual children took responsibility for ensuring the project moved to completion. Leadership became a shared and distributed function, lacking competitiveness and hierarchy, and marked by mutual respect and collaboration. As I reflected on the manner in which these young children engaged in the task with little or no involvement on my part, I also reflected on the type of leadership I was exhibiting. I have come to understand that a role of leadership is that of 'climate-maker' - facilitating a process and providing a 'climate' where students' self-discovery, empowerment and learning can occur.

In the months following, I was to witness further examples of this process – one in particular related to after school activities, where they collaborated with me in setting up an after-school club, with its own rules and regulations, where our classroom, the school playground and the gym, were used for a variety of activities. A system of peer-supervision was introduced, pupils took responsibility for equipment and materials, and for two years an effective system, organised, monitored and directed by the pupils themselves, ensured that sports, music, arts and crafts and board games were available to the entire class after school. The fact that there was never a complaint from the principal

or the cleaning staff speaks volumes for the pupils' extraordinary sense of responsibility and leadership in ensuring their programme ran smoothly and efficiently.

(b) *The Old Woman's Hut*

A second experience which was to profoundly influence my current educative practice occurred ten years later on another continent, in a secondary boarding school in a remote part of Africa, with an enrolment of 280 students. I worked with a group of students who met weekly to engage in a reflective process of personal development. It also involved giving an hour of their free time each week to helping others – visiting a patient in hospital or at the leprosarium, gathering wood for an elderly villager, helping an elderly person with maintenance of their hut or vegetable garden, and running a literacy and bible programme for villagers who had no access to education.

In response to a request from the local parish council to help rebuild an old woman's hut in a village near the school, fourteen students readily agreed to engage in the project. They visited the old woman, drew up a plan of action and each took responsibility for different aspects of the task. I volunteered to drive the school tractor to the forest to collect wood and to the riverbank to bring mud and sand for the walls of the hut. Fourteen students were present on the first occasion but gradually the numbers increased as other students offered their services. They formed a committee, held regular meetings after evening study and devised a plan of action. My role became one of accompaniment. The experience of witnessing the ingenuity, commitment, enthusiasm and genuine kindness of these students as they went about their tasks without any supervision on my part was a fascinating experience. Intuitively, I maintained a mentoring, supportive role, and the group increasingly took responsibility for all aspects of the task - timetabling, work rota, and equipment. Soon, interest in the project grew and an increasing number of students got involved. At the time of completion, virtually every student in the school had participated, and the old woman was 'adopted' by the students who continued to help her with maintenance, gathering firewood, helping her tend to her vegetable plot and regularly bringing her food from the school kitchens.

However, there were other unexpected benefits. It led to an extraordinary unity in the school where senior and junior students had worked side by side – the shared experience and satisfaction of a task well done eroded the hierarchical relationship among the students. It also eroded the animosity and suspicion that existed between students affiliated to different church groups, as they engaged in a common task which reflected, in a concrete manner, their church's commitment to care of one's neighbour. Interest in the personal development programme grew and clusters of students began to meet weekly on campus to reflect on their lives and their contribution to creating an improved social order in the nearby villages. Stronger links were formed with local communities - discussions were held with village elders to set up a support network for elderly villagers, and the support of children from the leper community with their school work. One group formed a bible study group and visited the local villages each week to assist villagers in understanding the Sunday readings. The students had realised that the villagers had difficulty in understanding the priest who was not fluent in their language. The senior students, who spoke and wrote English fluently as a result of their schooling, assisted local people in writing letters and completing official documentation. Students also contributed significantly at parish and village council meetings at local level and in their home villages during school holidays. I continued in a supportive and facilitative role as the students themselves developed their own leadership structures and reflective processes.

The two experiences described formed a watershed in my professional development and the learning involved has been integrated and embodied in my emergent epistemology of practice. Key features of that learning are as follows:

- I experienced education as something done *with* students rather than to them and that in a democratic, dialogic pedagogy, students jointly co-create educative processes and play a central role in generating educational outcomes.

- While the outcomes of both incidents were unplanned and spontaneous, I now strive to foster educative relationships and environments where the

uniqueness and natality of each individual is honoured, fostered and challenged. I develop this theme more fully in Chapters 5 and 6.

- It was my first experience of collective, collaborative learning that re-figured the traditional hierarchical teacher-student relationship and modelled an epistemology and methodology of accompaniment. These experiences also reflected a model of leadership that reflected collaboration, mutuality and reciprocity where leadership operated as a collective, shared and constantly redistributed function (Owen, 1999).

- Possibly the most significant paradigmatic shift for me was the transformation of a deficit-based epistemology to one that recognised the student as possessing enormous potential, talents, experience and tacit knowledge as assets for learning. This shift in consciousness has been further reinforced by engagement with the insights of Gardner (1993) and Cooperrider (1990) which is reflected in the design of leadership development programmes and process discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

- My experience with African students led me to understand and appreciate the value of reflective practice, of reflection in and on action (Schon, 1983) by myself and by my students. Unlike Schon for whom reflection seems to have been a solitary process, my practice is informed by reflection as a social, collaborative process within a community of learning and practice. Current practice fosters and models such an approach (Chapter 6). This experience significantly influenced my choice, years later, of an action research approach to current research and practice as an epistemology of practice appropriate to the 'new scholarship' (Schon, 1995).

- Finally, both experiences demonstrated the potential of teaching and learning for creating a good social order within both the school and local community. The situation with 10-year old students reflected a marked improvement in attendance, better relationships with teachers, a greater interest and enhanced enthusiasm for and participation in their own learning. My African

experience convinced me of the ability and willingness of young people, inspired by values of social justice and human dignity, to take thoughtful and committed political action within their local community to influence processes of change. Current practice reflects this conviction (Glavey, 2002, 2006) and parallels recent service-learning initiatives in third level institutions (Service Learning Academy, 2006).

3:3 The Dojo: Locus of Transformation

(Note: *Dojo* (doh'joh) *Jp.* 'the place of the way'. A training hall where martial arts are practiced.

Sensei (sehn'say). Teacher, master, instructor. (Farkas and Corcoran, 1983)

As a practitioner of three martial arts, I have experience of being both teacher and student, and have integrated this learning into my work in educational settings. When the word 'do' ['*Jp.* 'way' or 'path'] is used as a suffix to a particular style of the martial arts e.g judo, kendo, karate-do, aikido, it indicates more than just a means of combat. It indicates a discipline and philosophy with moral and spiritual connotations; the ultimate aim is enlightenment, personal development, respect for others, commitment to learning and living in right relationship and harmony with all human beings and with the earth (McCarthy, 1995: 69). A martial art is a path, a 'way', a set of stepping-stones that guide the practitioner, leading him/her away from the pitfalls and self-regard of the ego to become a wiser, more generous person who benefits self and society (Lewis, 1987). Transformation of society begins with transformation of self. There are several features of the martial arts that find expression in my current educative practice.

Sacred space of learning

On entering and leaving the dojo, practitioners always pause and bow respectfully to the place where they engage as a community of learners in personal and communal learning and transformation. The way of harmony and enlightenment is not seen as a solitary

endeavour nor is learning, for advanced practitioner or novice, ever complete. All (sensei and students) are co-learners engaged in the process of learning. The ritual of bowing to fellow-practitioners is understood as honouring the uniqueness and individuality of a companion on the path of learning, and defeat in combat is never regarded as a source of shame but as fertile ground for new learning. Reflective practice is a core element of the martial arts and the dojo is a space of both challenge and support. The dojo addresses both the explicate and implicate order of reality (Bohm: 1980) and of knowing that foster wholeness. Methodology, epistemology and ontology are conceptual structures or categories; they are also developmental processes which find their meaning in the manner in which people live their lives (McNiff and Whitehead, 2000: 140). Reason (1994) emphasises the link between learning and practice:

> A discipline is a practice that develops mind, body and spirit: it draws attention to intuitive or spiritual questions of purpose and meaning; to intellectual questions of understanding; and to practice questions of behaviour; and it places these in the context of the practitioner's physical and social environment

> (Reason, 1994: 40)

My concern has been to foster and sustain a sacred educative space in which learning and growth towards wholeness can occur. Space reflects a variety of complex elements - the physical layout of the room, the atmosphere of welcome, spirit of hospitality and acceptance that permeates the space, the ethical, emotional and normative patterns of engagement and the process of learning that emerges. Hence, my commitment to sitting with participants in a circle (DVD 1, Appendix 1), a form of engagement that reflects and fosters respectfulness and collaborative commitment to a form of learning that promotes community. Sitting in a circle is a gesture of approach (Eliade, 1957) and democratic process. The learning space I strive to foster reflects many of Palmer's (1993: 74) 'paradoxical tensions' in that it has both boundaries and openness to new discovery, is both hospitable and challenging, gives voice to the individual and the group, honours both individual story and tradition, respects the integrity of each individual within a supportive and challenging community (Wenger, 2002) and promotes 'inner work'. As I will demonstrate more fully in Chapter 4, the five

movements of my research closely parallel the process of a sacred learning space. A shared praxis approach fosters and supports a co-constructed learning space.

Sensei and student – co-creators of learning

Embodied in my current practice are characteristics of the sensei-student relationship which occurs in the dojo and fosters a culture of democratic, empowering and transformative learning.

The sensei experiences self as essentially a 'work in progress', no matter how highly graded or experienced. His/her inner attitude reflects the conviction that learning ends only with death; knowledge and expertise are subjected to an ongoing process of re-negotiation, renewal, revision and re-conceptualisation (Parker, 1997: 50). This is reflected in belt colour and grading system. Beginning with white, each belt marks a stage in learning; achieving black belt (1st *dan*) is seen as the beginning of the advanced learning process. However, a sensei, on achieving the almost mythical 12th *dan*, reverts to the white belt of the beginner.

Consequently, the sensei-student relationship reflects a pedagogy of accompaniment and an epistemology of alongsidedness, reflected in the respectful bow exchanged before practice. The sensei-student boundary is gradually dissolved. There is shared responsibility for learning and development; the student maintains a central rather than a peripheral role throughout, and shared meaning is derived from and created through training with fellow-students. There is a shift from an external locus of control and discipline centred in the sensei, to an inner one that promotes self-discipline, self-mastery and inner freedom. The student contributes to learning outcomes, becoming more autonomous in a learning community or collegial setting through skill development, participating in decisions and forming judgements (Schon, 1983: 302). Advancement is predicated on a willingness to share in the teaching role of the sensei and contribute to the learning and training of others. While all students are expected to learn all the techniques relevant to their grade, the sensei encourages each individual to build on his/her strengths and talents to develop particular proficiency in some aspect of the art. For example, a short person might specialise in hip techniques which are

difficult for a taller practitioner, whereas leg techniques are more suited to a tall participant.

In attempting to improve my practice, I have adapted my experience as both teacher and student of the martial arts, to develop my own pedagogy of accompaniment. In doing so, I am aware that I am engaging in a new form of educative partnership, what Fielding and Rudduck (2002) term a 'radical collegiality'. My decision to adopt this approach is rooted in my commitment to honouring the authentic selfhood of each student and 'leading forth' ('educo') their potential, gifts, talents and tacit knowledge.

I have already mentioned sitting in a circle. When initially working with groups in institutional settings, I find chairs are usually arranged in theatre style. When participants are seated, I ask them what it is like to be looking at the back of people's heads. After the usual negative responses, I ask them to suggest a more suitable arrangement for our learning space. A circle is the obvious response, but in naming that and re-arranging the chairs accordingly, participants are taking ownership of both learning space and process. By sitting in the circle, I am acknowledging my own status as a fellow-traveller on the path of learning; likewise, I am eschewing the traditional teacher-student boundary, shifting from a hierarchical mode of interaction and status, and inviting participants to embrace a more collaborative relationship where power, authority and leadership are shared and distributed functions of our learning relationship. Reason (1994) aptly describes the dynamic and outcome of this manner of engagement:

> Further, a discipline is necessarily self-transcending: while the initiate may productively 'follow the rules', the mature practitioner uses rules in order to develop a quality of attention and behaviour which, while born out of and nurtured by the practice and its rules, moves beyond them.

(Reason: 1994: 40)

As a response to Palmer's (1998: 7) question - 'Who is the self that teaches?'- and inspired by Donovan's (1978) approach to missionary work among the Masai of East Africa, I have abandoned the use of titles like 'Sir', 'Teacher', 'Brother' and use my Christian name as an expression of my own natality. This decision was not based on

bravado or desire for cheap popularity - in fact, my journal for the early stages of my research highlights the fear and anxiety that was a prelude to making it. Rather, it was based on a desire to encourage a mode of engagement that fostered community, honoured democratic principles and reflected a coherent commitment to promoting student voice and agency that was not tokenistic, manipulative or merely decorative (Fielding and Rudduck, 2002: 5). Paradoxically, the vulnerability I experienced in adopting a more personal, participative and reciprocal approach seemed to encourage a relationship of welcome and hospitality. I can claim, and my evidence file confirms, that this process cultivates a greater sense of membership, of self-worth, of learning and of agency (*ibid:* 6). I will address the concept of vulnerability in educative processes and relationships more fully in Chapter 5.

These actions led me to the disturbing realisation of how the issue of fear and discourses of power and control are features of the dominant educational paradigm, in particular power which stems from hierarchical patterns of social relationships (McNiff, 2000: 103; Hart, 2001: 43). Palmer (1998) speaks of the teacher's 'fearful heart' and of our fearful way of knowing. He points out (*ibid*: 45), and my research confirms, the marginalisation of young people that has its basis in fear - young people who fear authority and those in power over them, and experience themselves as essentially voiceless in educational discourse, and teachers whose epistemologies of practice are rooted in fear and control, avoiding discourses of connectedness, reciprocity and community.

In addressing my own fear and anxiety while engaging in educative discourses of mutuality, shared power and leadership and developing communities of shared praxis, I was sustained by my experience of learning and teaching the martial arts and the accompanying unconditional receptivity to outcomes which training had inculcated. The shift from a more conventional, didactic framework to one where I no longer controlled movement towards predetermined goals and objectives and engaged in emergent process generated considerable personal anxiety. Locating my research and practice within the new scholarship, I also recognised how self-study action research was threatening

dominant educational paradigms, as I experienced fear and resistance from people in power in educational and community settings.

My situation (in the early stages of my research) was further complicated by my lack of confidence in the philosophical underpinnings of my practice, lack of clarity about direction and outcomes, and a methodology and method of inquiry that were unproven and redolent of Schon's (1995: 28) description of experience, trial and error, intuition and muddling through. However, the experience of dissonance and liminality which accompanied the experience of opposition, also facilitated growth in understanding the generative and transformative potential of my practice to initiate and sustain a discourse and curriculum of 'inner significance' (Hart, 2001: 153). How this is achieved forms the content of Chapter 6.

3:4 Brotherhood - a generative, transformative epistemology of accompaniment

A key element of my emergent epistemology of practice which contributes to the generation of new living theory, is a return to and re-visiting of sources from which I have drawn to provide sustenance, nourishment and guidance in the past. The purpose of Groome's third movement in the unfinished symphony that is my thesis is essentially orientation, of finding my bearings within a horizon (Gadamer, 1989) of significance that constitutes my sense of what is good, generative and transformative. The transition from a didactic educative framework - where students' voice is severely limited and curtailed, where the conventional role of the teacher as the source of knowledge and expertise is control, provision of information and working towards predetermined educational objectives - to a more collaborative, emergent educative process was a source of considerable anxiety. In crossing the threshold of the familiar and experiencing myself as a living contradiction, I was challenged to demonstrate that I was not 'undermining the system' nor initiating 'the first step in the revolution' (Teachers' comments, personal journal, October, 2000). During this difficult period of my research, I engaged in an interrogation of my congregational history and the charism and founding

vision of Bl. Edmund Rice, the Founder of the Christian Brothers, in search of guidance, support and clarity. Religious orders are currently experiencing enormous turmoil and uncertainty at a time of rapid change (Arbuckle, 1988). As a result, they are returning to the founding vision, inspiration and purpose of their foundation with the purpose of re-visioning and re-orienting their mission to address the needs of today's world (O'Murchu, 1997; Wittberg, 1996; Schneiders, 2000, 2001). In this section, I wish to explore the transformative vision of Edmund Rice, its relevance for today and its influence on my research and practice.

Edmund Rice – Transformation in action

Edmund Rice was born in 1762, a period of appalling degradation, poverty, injustice, exploitation and oppression in Irish history (McLaughlin, 2006). According to the Protestant historian Lecky (1913), the object of the Penal Laws was the total suppression of the Catholic religion in Ireland, to make the Catholic majority poor and to keep them poor…to degrade them into a servile state (Rushe, 1995: 4). Catholics were excluded from public life, education was forbidden, and ownership of land was prohibited and carefully controlled. Priests were hunted down and killed, and there was no formal system of education for Catholic children other than that provided by wandering teachers in hedge schools. The *Querist* asked 'whether there could be on the face of the earth any Christian or civilised people so beggarly, wretched and destitute as the common Irish' (cited in Rushe, 1995: 7).

At seventeen, Edmund left home to go to work with his uncle, a thriving merchant in Waterford, who paid for his education and apprenticed him to his trade of victualling and ship-chandler. Eventually his uncle signed the business over to him and under his management and with the easing of the Penal Laws, the business flourished and he became a very wealthy man. He was happily married, but his young pregnant wife died tragically, leaving a baby daughter with a disability, whom he cared for during her lifetime.

This tragic event was a turning point in Edmund's life. He threw himself into his business, but the reflective, contemplative side of his character emerged more than ever.

He attended daily Mass, and unusually for a lay person of that time, he assiduously studied the Bible and the works of St. Teresa of Avila. His life took on a pattern of what I now understand as action research, and his prayerful reflection led him to act on his concerns by visiting the area of the city where the impoverished, marginalised and disenfranchised people lived. He began to visit prisons, bringing food and financial donations to the prisoners and frequently accompanied condemned prisoners to the gallows. As a reflective practitioner, he considered leaving Ireland and giving his life in God's service by joining a monastery on the continent. While sharing this idea with the sister of one of his closest friends, there was a loud commotion on the streets outside where a group of ragged, starving youths were arguing and fighting. She said to him, 'Well, Mr. Rice, you are thinking of burying yourself in a monastery on the continent. Will you leave these poor boys uncared for? Can't you do something for them?' (Blake, 2006: 20).

This was a nodal moment for Edmund. He abandoned the idea of leaving Ireland, and began visiting the slums to reach out to young people. He soon realised that food and hand-outs were not enough - reflecting deeply on the situation, he came to the conclusion that what was needed was an educative process that would help young people not only to grow mentally, morally and religiously but also to challenge the social order that kept them subservient and downtrodden.

Edmund as Action Researcher

Edmund's approach to his work and major life decisions contributing to the creation of a just and equitable social order display all the characteristics of an action research living theory approach (McNiff, 2000: 217). The *Positio* (a document presented for a person's canonisation) provides an apt living theory description of Edmund's process of making decisions about the nature, goals and direction of his life, in terms of what he held to be of value (*Positio,* 1988: 15). Accounts of his life (Rushe, 1995; Houlihan, 1997) attest to his pattern of following an action research spiral of planning, acting, observing, reflecting and re-planning (McNiff, 1988: 43) in addressing his concerns - the poverty, marginalisation and disenfranchisement of people, religious discrimination and injustice,

128

unemployment, ignorance and exploitation. He took action to address these concerns by giving up his wealth, social standing and his business to devote his life to educating and addressing the needs of disadvantaged young people; he built schools and created a system of education that was extremely advanced for the times and established a community of Brothers, the first of its kind in Ireland, to carry out this work; and finally, his insistence on ongoing reflection on practice and evaluation of outcomes in formal and informal dialogue with all participants (Houlihan, *ibid:* 89) in his work.

In all his endeavours to provide education for the poor and marginalised, three values underpinned his vision of education - his profound respect for human dignity, a profound sense of human equality, and an unshakeable commitment to contributing to the reign of God on earth, characterised by peace, justice, equality and an end to poverty that plagued the society of his time (Blake, 2006). While being open to considered and reflective experimentation, he was swift to take action when the ethos and values of his school system were threatened (Blake, 2006: 42). Edmund ensured at all times that the 'lifeworld' and 'systemworld' (Habermas, 1987) of his school system fostered generative and life-enhancing outcomes. His commitment to unlocking and liberating the potential of each person, especially the poor and marginalised, is obvious when he wrote to a friend: 'Were we to know the merit of only going from one street to another to serve a neighbour for the love of God, we should prize it more than gold or silver' (Pirola, 2000: 36). His belief in the potential of each pupil, even the most disruptive and unruly, is evident in a letter (1832) to the Brothers in Gibraltar who were experiencing great difficulty with their pupils. 'Have faith', he wrote, 'the good seed will grow up in the children's hearts later on'. Edmund Rice understood the integration of religious and secular education as an intrinsic dimension of the school curriculum, and pursued an integrated and holistic approach to education, often at great cost to himself. In his first school, he established a bakery to provide hungry children with food, later adding a tailoring shop to clothe children who attended school dressed only in rags. He established a lending library in the school and encouraged pupils not only to help develop each other's reading skills, but to bring books home to teach their parents to read and write. Night classes for parents soon became a feature of his epistemology of practice in transforming the social context of his time (*Positio*, 1988).

This brief summary of Edmund Rice's epistemology of practice is included here, as his example strongly influences my own practice. His influence is felt to this day in schools throughout the world and core characteristics of Edmund Rice schools include the following: evangelisation of the modern world through living of Christian values, awareness of the spiritual dimension of the person; building of Christian community through respectful and caring relationships; compassion for the weak and poor of society; concern for the whole person, striving for excellence and development of each person's potential; teaching understood as a vocation, and finally, education as a process of transformation leading to a just, equitable and caring society (Christian Brothers, 1997).

Edmund Rice's story forms part of Movement Three, as a generative and transformative theme or motif woven through my practice with its power to inform my educative relationships. In embracing the eight criteria above as embodied standards of judgement (Whitehead, 1993) and 'marks of authenticity' (Newman, cited in Groome, 1991: 503) of my research and practice, I highlight in this thesis my commitment to (a) developing communities of shared praxis, (b) honouring the natality, uniqueness and agency of each participant, and (c) an ontology of Brotherhood, as core elements of my emerging epistemology of practice. While I intend to explore the concept of Brotherhood in the Edmund Rice tradition in greater depth in Chapter 5, at this point I briefly outline its contribution to my emergent epistemology of practice.

Being Brother is essentially to be in life-affirming relationships with others. By establishing a Brotherhood, Edmund Rice was making a bold statement of solidarity with people, especially the poor and marginalised, and turned his back on the power and hierarchical authority of clerical status. Brotherhood only has meaning within a community of practice (Blake, 2006) where reflection and contemplation are essential elements, and where new and transformative discourses of power and influence challenge dominant hierarchical ideologies and relationships of control and domination. By being Brother, I espouse and embody life-affirming educative relationships that reflect equality, mutuality, collaboration and reflective dialogue. Service of others is driven by the conviction of universal human equality before God. I will devote the next

two chapters to developing these concepts. In this next section, I explore my understanding of leadership and its place in current practice.

THIRD MOVEMENT

Introduction

The Third Movement of my Unfinished Symphony is a process of hermeneutic engagement where I introduce the elements of 'reality check' and 'sounding board' for my practice, and explore writing, theory and concepts of leadership already existing in the public domain. In adopting a self-study action research approach with the purpose of developing practical judgement and improving my practice, I employ the 'text' of different authors in a Socratic role, as a sounding-board (Carr and Kemmis, 1986: 203) against which to explore the rationale, genesis and process of my own living theory. Embracing the dynamic, dialectical tension of engagement with, and interpretation of, existing theory, while concurrently striving to develop generative and transformative leadership practices in living contexts, is an essential feature of developing a shared praxis approach to my work. As Gadamer points out (1989: 295), hermeneutical consciousness bonds or connects with the traditional text (in this Movement, the 'text' in question relates to leadership literature) in seeking understanding while being aware that this bond or connection is not founded on uncritical, unquestioned unanimity. For Gadamer, hermeneutic work 'is based on a polarity of familiarity and strangeness', the experience of resonance and dissonance that accompanies engagement with the thought of others. I locate the locus of my hermeneutic engagement within this tension, in Gadamer's words, the 'in-between' (p.295) of these polarities. For Ricoeur (1974: 30), hermeneutics involves both *interpretation*, bringing to understanding what was unknown or foreign, and *explanation*, making something meaningful and comprehensible to others. These are not simply juxtaposed as separate ways of understanding, but exist in a dialectical relationship which results in comprehension, or what Ricoeur terms 'appropriation'. The purpose of appropriation is to have my own pre-understanding challenged, enlarged and transformed and find expression in my practice.

Linking the objective (theory) and existential (living contexts) in dialectical relationship and meaningful discourse is an integral element of a hermeneutic approach which fosters the development of living theory. By adopting a hermeneutic engagement approach throughout my research and practice, I am conscious that within this dynamic I am both interpreting the text and being interpreted *by* the text, which serves to critique my self-understanding, epistemological assumptions and ontological stance. Engagement with the literature provides me with an opportunity to critically examine the legitimacy (the origins and validity) of my pre-understanding and fore-meaning (Gadamer, *ibid.* 267).

Conscious of the variety of interpretive approaches available (Brown *et al.,* 1990: 1160), and the reality of multiple interpretations (Ricoeur, 1974), I make no claim to posit an ideal univocal interpretation. I have found the insights of Biblical scholars and exegesis helpful in developing an approach to the 'text', and have adopted a contextual approach within a linguistic/ literary paradigm which includes both reader and his/her lived context in the process of interpretation. In this approach, I refrain from treating the text as the object of analytic, investigative procedures to extract theoretical, univocal and intrinsic meaning, but I engage the text from within an actual concrete, living context in a process of achieving both meaning (Brown *et al.,* 1990: 1159) and openness to new possibilities. Meaning, therefore, is not *exclusively* determined by the author. A contextual approach is concerned with the literary world projected 'in front of' the text rather than its historical genesis 'behind' it. Ricoeur and Schneiders (cited in Brown, 1997: 28) draw attention to the three 'worlds' that give meaning to a text: the world *'behind'* the text, the experience that precedes and generates the text; the world *'of'* the text itself, reflecting the experience and understanding of the author; and finally, the world *'before'* the text, where the reader interacts with and interprets the text by entering into it, appropriates its meaning through dialogue, and responds ethically and congruently within the reader's own living, concrete context. While being aware of the first two 'worlds' that Schneiders refers to, it is this latter 'world' that is my primary focus, as I strive to develop and implement a model of leadership that promotes and fosters a community of shared praxis.

Third Movement: Origins and Rationale

This Movement is rooted in my lived experience and sprung from epistemological and ontological shock when I was jarred into a new cognitive and epistemological awareness, where I found my personal assumptions and unquestioned certitudes challenged and called into question. The circumstances were as follows:

Story of Practice 1

> I was blithely extolling the enormous potential and benefits of student leadership to a principal of a school I visited to arrange a training programme. He listened for a time, then bluntly interrupted with the following:

> 'There will be no student leadership training in this school. They're (students) fine as they are. The only leadership they need, I provide it. Students have a voice in this school and they use it to answer 'Yes, Sir!'

On a different occasion, I was having a similar conversation with a staff member of another school, who listened with some scepticism and alarm. His response was delivered with considerable vehemence:

> 'Chris, are you crazy? This would be the first step in the revolution. The 'b….rs' would be running the school and telling us how to do our job! It's ok for you; you can walk away and won't have to be here to pick up the pieces.'

> > (Personal journal, October 1999)

There were two outcomes from this experience, my first experience of being a living contradiction where my espoused values of justice, democracy and respect for the natality of each student, clashed with dominant modes of discourse, power and control within educative relationships. First, the initial shock alerted me to the fact that my pedagogical, epistemological and ontological stance was neither universally welcomed nor adopted and that I did not, at that stage, have a coherent, cogent or viable understanding or philosophy of leadership underpinning my practice. This point was a real axial point in my research. Second, I was faced with an ethical dilemma in relation to the manner in which I involved myself in situations that exhibited fearful ways of knowing (Palmer, 1998) and relating, where power was exercised through restrictive,

134

authoritarian and unilateral modes of 'command and control'. As a guest rather than a paid employee, experiencing myself as essentially powerless in many of my work contexts, I struggled to find a mode of respectful, yet challenging, collaboration that honoured my own integrity and that of others, while modelling an alternative form of leadership that reflected mutuality, participative democracy and justice.

This search for a coherent and integrated philosophy of leadership received further impetus from two other sources. Having developed and facilitated leadership development programmes for students in several schools, I was approached by teachers expressing the need for a similar programme for *teachers* involved with student leadership, in order to help them work with student leaders in supportive, facilitative and non-authoritarian ways. My evidence file contains the material and processes I developed and implemented with colleagues from the Christian Brothers' Education Office to address this need. The second source was the dismissive response from people in leadership to my proposal to develop communities of shared praxis. I quote:

> One couldn't possibly put a training programme together for such a diverse group as mentioned. So it will need further time. Anyway, maybe a seed has been sown as it was the first time that such a project was mentioned at this level.

(27th June, 2000. Original in evidence file base)

Movement Three then, has its origins in experience of contradiction in my work contexts, and traces my search for a living, ethical and life-affirming theory of leadership. In this manner, I have experienced the emancipatory nature of action research, rooting my practice in a fearless way of knowing and being, and discovering my truth through experiences of resistance, criticism and opposition. Movement Four describes how I have implemented this theory and how it is expressed in my practice.

Third Movement: Process

Three preliminary points have influenced my approach and are worth noting here. The first is Gadamer's (1975: 270) insistence on the need to recognize that all understanding emanating from hermeneutic engagement inevitably involves some prejudice. I use prejudice with its more positive connotation of a judgement made 'for now' and before

all aspects of a situation have been considered. Gadamer, citing Heidegger, reminds me of the 'fore-having, fore-sight and fore-conceptions' I bring to the 'text' of leadership (and, indeed, to the 'texts' of all the literatures that suffuse this thesis) and the need for respect for each text's alterity.

The second point influencing my approach is my extensive experience of living and working as a missionary educator within another culture and people in Central Africa. While I have benefited hugely from this experience, a key learning that impacts on my research is the realization that the world and reality are not necessarily as I perceive them, and that issues of culture and nationality elicit multiple interpretations of reality. As a consequence, I have learned to be wary of the tyranny of my personal unquestioned certitudes, and have allowed the text and experience of living contexts to invite me to a new cognitive and epistemological space.

A final point influencing my approach is awareness that I approach the text, not as a naïve, inexperienced neophyte, but as one who has had experience of a variety of leadership roles in educational, sporting, organizational and community contexts. The latter context is particularly apropos, given that I actually live in a religious community, and this lived experience is of relevance, as I strive to foster shared praxis through *modelling* leadership forms that facilitate such communities. In developing a living theory approach, I consciously and actively integrate both theory and practice.

In light of the foregoing comments, I have drawn on the insights of Ricoeur (1974) and Schussler-Fiorenza (1989) to construct a hermeneutic of 'retrieval' and 'suspicion' to form the building blocks in constructing my own living theory. Given the practice dimension of living theory, and the need for its ethical, congruent application, Groome's (1993: 231) suggestion of the need for 'creative commitment' as the third leg of what he terms the 'dialectical tripod' is very helpful in developing an approach of disciplined conversation (Fear *et al.,* 2006) with the literature.

Retrieval as I use the term, serves not only to seek, discern and bring to consciousness, life-affirming ethical and sustainable models of leadership but to facilitate their expression in living contexts. In congruent modelling of such leadership, I hope that

those I work with will themselves use such knowledge as a tool for their emancipation from repressive ideologies and structures.

A hermeneutic of suspicion - seeing, naming, reconstituting (Schussler-Fiorenza *ibid:* 1) - functions as a two-edged sword throughout my research. On the one hand, it serves to unearth distortion, destructive ideology and false consciousness within accepted interpretation and practice. While it is essentially positive in approach, I have experienced this hermeneutic as subversive in challenging dominant educational discourse and ideology. Groome (1991: 233) in his comments on the Christian Story, refers to 'dangerous memories' that can call our world, in Brueggeman's phrase (1986: 28) 'the royal consciousness', into question and empower people in their quest for social transformation. In particular, my engagement with dominant educational discourse and structure has heightened my awareness of issues of voicelessness and powerlessness on the part of participants, specifically students and young adults.

On the other hand this hermeneutic contains a deeply personal challenge. In claiming that I am using my ontological, epistemological and methodological values as living standards of judgement and explanatory principles, it is humbling to experience their denial in my practice, and to find personal assumptions, unquestioned certitudes and blind prejudices being called into question at various stages of my research in the manner described earlier in this section. While Chapters 5 and 6 discuss in more detail the inner and outer landscape of my educative practice and its expression in practice, this chapter traces the development of my living theory on which these two chapters are based.

I regard the third element of hermeneutic engagement, Groome's (1991: 234) idea of 'creative commitment' as key to developing my living theory account of my practice in that it envisions possibilities, new beginnings and more adequate constructs that provide in Groome's words, 'a more adequate orientation for human life.' In the context of communities of shared praxis, I explore the exciting possibilities and challenges inherent in a collegial dynamic, which engages students and young adults as co-researchers, co-creators and co-constructors of their own reality.

Story of Practice 2

I usually begin my leadership sessions with students sitting in a circle with a flipchart at the periphery of the circle. To ensure I am dealing with their agenda, their hope and anxieties, I begin with the following:

> *'If, when going home this afternoon, you were able to say 'That was a great day's work!' what would you like to happen during the course of our time together?' How would you complete the statement - 'Today was a great day because……'?*

I then write their responses on the flipchart. Samples of their responses include

> *'I would like to grow in confidence.'*

> *'I'd like to be able to speak in public without blushing, being shy etc.'*

> *'That we would learn how to work as a team/ improve communication*

>> *skills/ leadership skills /decision-making skills.'*

> *'Learn more about myself and others.'*

> *'Share ideas and listen to each other.'*

> *'To know what is expected of a prefect/ student council member.'*

> *'To develop a vision and goals.'*

> (March, 2006, included in photographic evidence archive)

To this list, I usually add *'fun'* and *'food'* (I recommend that schools provide for tea-break and lunch, in recognition of students' willingness to contribute time and effort to improving the quality of school-life and place their gifts, talents and energy at the service of their school) to highlight that learning can be fun, and mention of food, paid

for by the Principal, highlights the 'special' nature of the process, which is usually held in a centre away from the school.

> *'Ok, this then is our agenda for the day, and at the end of our work and time together, we will check that we have addressed all of these topics.'*

Part of our concluding ritual, when we (teachers included) all sit in a circle, is to check off the items on the flipchart to ensure we have addressed all of them.

This dynamic reflects my understanding and application of Gadamer's (1989: 374) 'fusion of horizons'. I experience this exploration as an adventure of hope, rooted in a conviction that the potential contribution of young people to educational and social transformation is immense and, regrettably, untapped. I use as an additional standard of judgement my commitment to providing opportunities for their contribution to the improvement of social contexts (Chapter 6).

I have outlined the dynamics of engagement in Chapter 2 and will further discuss engagement as a feature of my practice in Chapters 5 and 6. However, I wish now to address its *emergent* nature in and through reflective practice. In the initial stages of my research, I had no pre-conceived or pre-determined plan of action, nor had I a congruent, coherent living theory of educational leadership. As with my missionary experience in Africa, engaged practice evolved in living contexts. Using a hermeneutic of engagement, I experience myself, in the company of others and in relationships of mutuality, reciprocity, support and challenge, 'living our way into a new way of thinking' (Fear *et al.,* 2006: 43). The following chapter traces part of that journey into a new way of thinking about leadership and the living theory that finds expression in practice.

The dynamics of this movement helped me to engage with the larger Story of leadership and in the following chapter, I engage with the literature and suggest a model of leadership that fosters and sustains communities of learning and shared praxis. I have outlined in Chapter 3, the manner in which I use stories of leadership in my practice and narrated two stories that have profoundly affected my understanding and practice of

educational leadership. In Chapter 4, I describe and explain how, through the interaction of my experience, tacit knowledge and the 'text' of leadership, I have developed a theoretical and philosophical understanding of my living theory of educational leadership.

CHAPTER 4   EXPLORING THE 'TEXT' OF LEADERSHIP

Introduction

In this chapter I focus on the story/narrative or 'text' of leadership, and explain how a process of hermeneutic engagement has contributed to my own living theory and praxis of educational leadership. In Chapter 3, I narrated two stories from my experience as an educator which have profoundly influenced my practice in educative and therapeutic contexts. Drawing on these stories and Aggrey's tale of the eagle (Gregorowski, 2000), and honouring my commitment to dialogue and community discourse, I demonstrate how I used a process of collaborative hermeneutic engagement with students and young adults to develop a shared praxis model of leadership development.

4:1 Approaching the 'Text' of Leadership

A key feature of a living theory approach is the manner in which the literature is engaged. At the initial stages of my research, my practice provided the elements of theory development - what 'worked' for me in past leadership roles, experience of effective leadership in a variety of contexts, and knowledge and theory gleaned from participation in management support groups and organizations, from training courses and from personal study and reading. This store of personal and tacit knowledge (Polyani, 1958) formed the basis of the initial design of my leadership development programmes and guided by the question 'What, in light of my knowledge and experience, would be most helpful to me if I were undertaking this role (of student leader, young adult leader, adult youth worker, sports coach) right now in this particular historical context?' Linking past experience and current needs in a reflective process generated both content and process which, in general, proved to be quite effective. However, three situations prompted a deeper engagement with the literature of leadership.

First, while developing my own living theory in response to Winter's (1989) question, 'Where does the theory come from in action research?', I felt the need to locate my practice against the horizon of existing theory. Given that action research living theory is essentially a form of improvisatory self-realisation (Winter, *ibid.*), my use of the leadership literature evolved during my research, serving as a sounding board that challenged, supported, shaped and informed the emergent epistemological, ontological and values-driven basis of my living theory, and my efforts towards improving my practice.

Second, the initial stages of my research and practice were greeted in some quarters with fear, resistance and opposition. During this liminal period, I had recourse to the literature to clarify my understanding of my own practice, but especially to clarify and develop my understanding of the dominant leadership paradigms and prescriptive discourses of power I was confronting in educational and communitarian contexts.

The third, and perhaps the most painful personal experience influencing my research, relates to my experience as a member of the Catholic Church and of a religious order, two institutions undergoing critical and unprecedented change in recent years. In particular, leadership and authority structures and discourses are facing enormous challenge from within and without. In both institutions I have experienced empowering, life-giving, life-affirming models of leadership; regrettably, I have also experienced destructive, dehumanizing and disempowering leadership and authority structures. An unexpected offshoot of my research in educational contexts was a parallel and overlapping exploration of models of leadership and authority structures more closely aligned with the founding ethos of both institutions, and promoting the development of communities of shared praxis. The dynamic interplay of theory and practice in one context significantly enriched my understanding and practice in other contexts, as I will illustrate in Chapter 7.

4:2　Engagement with the literature

The early stages of my engagement with the literature was marked by confusion at the plethora of definitions, descriptions and portrayals of leadership (Granberg-Michaelson, 2004; Northhouse, 2004). Bennis and Nanus (1997: 2) lay claim to over 850 definitions of leadership, while noting that many of the multiple interpretations contradict each other, offer only a sliver of insight, and frequently reflect fashions, political currents and academic trends. Lowney (2003: 14), reflecting on leadership literature, refers to the 'irrefutable laws', techniques, 'secrets', pointers and prescriptions that rather simplistically promise to turn the reader into an effective leader, while simultaneously citing Kotter's (1999) scathing indictment of the leadership deficit in organizations.

Discussions with a wide range of colleagues in the teaching and therapeutic professions, parents, school principals, students, young adults, and managers of various organizations where I work elicited a broad spectrum of interpretations and conceptualizations of leadership which bear out Bass' (1990) assertion that

> there are almost as many different definitions of leadership as there are people who have attempted to define the concept.

(Bass, 1990: 11)

Van Maurik (2001: 2) helped me focus on *categories* of leadership theory. He speaks of 'generations' of development of leadership thinking, grouping them into four broad categories as follows - trait theory, behavioural theories, contingency theories and transformational leadership theories. While his work helped provide me with an overview of leadership theory, van Maurik suggests, and my research and experience bear out, that none of these theories are mutually exclusive and that each generation shares common elements or features. Nor did I experience any of these categories offering a wholly integrated, unified and effective response to living contexts, though I drew on elements of each to develop my own living theory. What became very clear to me, however, was that leadership was a highly valued, very complex phenomenon (Northouse, 2004) and the debate on leadership was on-going and wide-ranging.

I also experienced difficulty with the oft-repeated leadership-management distinctions frequently cited in the literature (Bass, 1990; Law and Glover, 2000; Bennet *et al.,* 2003). Covey's (1992) claim that management is of things, while leadership is of people was, I felt too simplistic and offered little help in the swampy lowlands of my daily practice. The bulk of management and leadership theory seemed to be generated in business contexts, and while making a valuable contribution to the leadership debate, it does not provide, I feel, satisfactory solutions in educational, therapeutic and community contexts. Personal experience and discussions with many people in leadership positions confirmed for me that management-leadership distinctions are frequently blurred, overlap and are interwoven in the fabric of everyday practice. As I noted in my early journals, all of these busy leaders expressed scant interest in leadership-management distinctions in their daily practice.

Turning to *definitions* of leadership marked another stage in the development of my own living theory, but again I was faced with an astonishing array of definitions. Within the four 'generations' of leadership mentioned earlier, I came face-to-face with a plethora of definitions (Spears and Lawrence, 2002; Kippenberger, 2002; Lowney 2003; Northouse, 2004; Davies, 2005): achievement–oriented leadership, emergent and assigned leadership, heroic leadership; leader-member exchange leadership, team leadership, ethical leadership, transformational leadership, servant leadership, situational leadership and strategic leadership. Yet again, I experienced confusion, frustration, resonance and dissonance, as I struggled with the questions - 'What does this model look like in practice?' and 'How does this model address my concern about developing a life-affirming and collaborative theory and model of leadership suited to my work contexts?' While various models of leadership contributed to my emerging epistemology of practice, at this stage I felt that attempting to define models of leadership had little practical contribution to make other than to agree with Bass' (1990) statement that

> leadership has been conceived as the focus of group process, as a matter of personality, as a matter of inducing compliance, as the exercise of influence, as particular behaviours, as a form of persuasion, as a power relation, as an

instrument to achieve goals, as an effect of interaction, as a differentiated role, as initiation of structure, and as many combinations of these definitions.

<div align="right">(Bass, 1990: 11)</div>

Failing to precisely locate my personal leadership model in the literature (although there were many areas of agreement and resonance), I explored the motifs within my initial leadership programmes for students, young adults and adult youth workers (Glavey, 1997 and 1998) under the headings of content, epistemology of practice and process. While I will develop these ideas at a later stage of my narrative, I became aware that my practice reflected the following qualities: a deep awareness and appreciation of the uniqueness and giftedness of each individual, non-hierarchical and collaborative relationships, an epistemology of accompaniment and alongsidedness, and a methodology of engagement that promoted students' ownership of the learning process. The experience described in the stories of the Nuffield Project and the Old Woman's Hut, introduced me to an unfamiliar and challenging model of leadership using the acronym LBGOTW - 'leadership by getting out of the way' - the ability to step outside of a formal leadership role, treating power as a shared resource and permitting the locus of power to shift, by allowing the group to engage in shared or distributed leadership processes. While my adoption of this form of leadership in the Nuffield experience was unplanned and simply 'happened' outside of my conscious control, in the latter situation my response was conscious, premeditated and ultimately liberating.

4:3   Towards a pedagogy and epistemology that includes absent voices

This stage of my engagement with the 'text' of leadership was marked by reflection on what was absent from the literature and the voices absent from the dominant and frequently unchallenged discourses of leadership and power. One particularly striking absence from the literature on leadership is a body of writings on *'followership'*. Much of the literature gives univocal accounts of the activities of a person, usually male, who achieves greatness and acclaim in some organizational endeavour. Rarely have I encountered an account of organizational success where the leader-follower relationship

is portrayed as a multivocal, social process where the relationship, interaction and contribution of all parties are described in detail. As a practitioner approaching the literature, I find that cause-and-effect accounts predominate and my question 'How does this look/work *in practice*?' usually goes unanswered.

An epistemology of absence addresses issues of powerlessness and voicelessness, specifically in relation to where power resides, whose voice is being heard and whose needs are being met, and whose competencies and contributions are being taken for granted. My experience of living and working as a missionary educator in a third world country, of living and working in disadvantaged and deprived areas of my own country, and my current work with students in educational contexts and young adults in community contexts, have heightened my awareness of structures and practices that disenfranchise and disempower the very people they were intended to help. Overseas aid programmes in third world contexts, government task forces and projects here at home, as well as schools and community youth projects, rarely cede voice or power to those in whose service they are constituted. One of the insights emanating from the 'liminal period' of my research in school and community contexts was the degree to which students and young adults are essentially disenfranchised and disempowered by structures and ideologies of control and dominance.

 The female voice is significantly muted if not markedly absent from general discourses of power and leadership. This fact struck me forcefully in the early stages of my research during a conversation with a mother whose daughter was injured in the Omagh bombing. Her words brought home to me the reality of a voice significantly absent from political discourse and initiatives for peace in Northern Ireland. She said, 'This atrocity would never have happened, and the Peace Process would be very different if it were left to mothers to sort it out'. I have drawn attention in Chapter 2 to how McNiff and Whitehead (2000: 179), drawing on the insights of Said (1994), highlight the power of the 'grand narrative' to block or suppress other narratives. Gilligan (1993) and Eisner (1988) offer an alternative perspective to the dominant discourse in the fields of psychology and archaeology, while in the fields of biblical studies, theology and spirituality, a feminist critique provides generative perspectives and alternatives to

dominant structures and discourses of hierarchical power and control (Schneiders, 2001; Chittister, 1995: 134). McKenna (1994), in her work entitled 'Not Counting Women and Children', reflects on the 'neglected stories' that challenge dominant theory and interpretation, while Gilligan (1993: 173) suggests that the inclusion of women's experience brings an expanded perspective on relationships and constructs of interpretation, leading to deeper relationships of interconnectedness, responsibility and care and an understanding of knowing as a process of human relationship. The qualities of an ethic that balances power and caring include connection, particularity of responsibility, commitment and reciprocity (Sernak, 1998: 10).

Drawing on personal experience and my learning from previous studies and engagement with feminist critique of conventional masculine interpretations and structures within biblical studies, spirituality and with theory and practice within the Catholic Church and religious communities (Wittberg, 1996; Schneiders, 2000; Radcliffe, 2005), and experiencing the enriching and broadened perspective that such inclusion contributes to current discourse, I began to reflect on the contribution to my own living theory and practice that insights from a feminist critique of leadership, especially educational leadership, might make. My aim in including both masculine and feminine perspectives was not simply to 'compare and contrast', but to draw on the wisdom of complementary modes of being to develop a more *human* and inclusive approach as an expression of the 'new sensibility' (McFague, 1987) discussed in Chapter 1.

Crawford *et al.* (1997: 68), citing Shakeshaft (1989), reflect on the distinctive characteristics a 'female culture' brings to educational management and leadership - greater interpersonal sensitivities, a central focus on the quality of teacher-student relationships, a more democratic and participatory process of communication and decision-making. Her approach also reflects a different conception of the use of power, of educational leadership and of relationships with the wider community. Blackmore (1989), also cited in Crawford *et al.* (1997: 67), offers a more radical and fundamental critique, and calls for a paradigm change in theory and discourse that emphasizes sameness over difference. For her, a feminist construction of leadership involves a move away from notions and structures of power and control *over* others, towards a model of

leadership defined as the ability to act *with* others in non-hierarchical, reciprocal and caring relationship. Blackmore's goal seems to be the formation of more human communities that enhance the education of young people, rather than structures or systems which equate efficiency and effectiveness with hierarchy and organizational rationality (Alimo-Metcalfe in Mabey and Iles, 1994: 224).

Belenky *et al.* (1986) offer the metaphor of teacher as midwife, someone who helps the birthing of new life. Women, according to Belenky (*ibid:* 195), did not wish to be told merely that they had the capacity or the potential to *become* (author's italics) knowledgeable or wise. 'They needed to know they already knew something ….that there was something good inside them'. I suggest this drawing out what is already present within each person and helping to develop his/her capacities and emerging consciousness, are key elements of my espoused leadership and educative process. Given the conflicted context of Northern Ireland implicit in the mother's words quoted earlier in this section, I was struck by Belenky's term 'maternal thinking' (*ibid:* 214) as a model which, in sharp contrast to Freire's (1970: 58) portrayal of the mechanistic 'banking model', encourages and fosters active participation and partnership in the learning process. Within this model, education (and leadership) is 'co-intentional' (*ibid:* 56), where leader and follower, teacher and learner are both subjects, both intent on co-facilitating emerging consciousness.

Fischer (1988: 136) suggests that this epistemological stance fosters new discourses of power, where power is viewed as a process of interaction rather than a quality possessed by any single individual; a paradigm of power as domination is replaced by one of power as mutual influence; relational power leads to collaboration rather than competition, and diversity is experienced as enrichment. Fischer (*ibid:* 139) suggests new metaphors of power are needed where dominative power using hierarchical metaphors (ladder, pyramid) is replaced by images of mutuality and reciprocity (webs and networks) and power 'over' becomes power 'with' and power 'among' (Cady *et al.,* 1986: 7). One key outcome of an epistemology and ontology of reciprocal relationship is the elimination of a fearful way of knowing that destroys connectedness. According to Palmer (1998: 50), good teaching (and I would suggest, good leadership) is an act of

hospitality, which endlessly reweaves the social fabric of mutual dependence, in sharp contrast to an objectivist approach which resists the development of communities of shared meaning and significance, in which each person can, in Wheatley's (2005: 159) words, 'co-evolve towards mutual sustainability'. Influenced by the insights of the authors mentioned here, I describe in Chapter 6 my efforts to develop such communities.

Story of Practice 3

> I address my concern for building networks of interconnectedness and interdependence in a variety of ways.
>
> First, I consistently make use of the collective 'we' in my interaction with students and young adults.
>
> Second, when working with student leader groups, we co-construct the school community as a 'web of connectedness' where all the constituent groups are linked by two-way arrows representing two-way communication. (A copy of this diagram is included in my evidence archive).
>
> The third, and perhaps most effective, way in which I develop a sense of community involves movement. When groups of students enter the room, the chairs are usually arranged in rows, theatre-style. When they are all seated, I ask the following question:
>
> > *'What is it like to be looking at, and communicating with, the back of someone's head?'*
>
> The response is predictable – *'unsatisfactory, impersonal and so on.'*
>
> Then I ask them to construct a space that would help us work more effectively as a group. Invariably, they re-arrange themselves in a circle. When asked why, their replies reflect equality, effective communication, where each person's contribution can be seen and heard. By seating myself as part of this circle, I am

emphasizing our essential equality and natality, and my intention to work in a collaborative relationship of mutuality, solidarity and reciprocity.

A variation of this process is the following:

> '*Please gather here in the open space at the centre of the room.*
>
> *Now, in silence, arrange yourselves in order of height.*
>
> *OK, now arrange yourselves, still in silence, in order of birth month.*
>
> *OK, now, finally, I want you to arrange yourselves, in silence, in order of IMPORTANCE!*'

After a few moments of chaos, they usually arrange themselves in a circle. When asked 'why?' they usually respond as above, but also refer to their belief in their essential equality, and the fact that 'we're all in this together.'

(Photographic evidence of my commitment, and indeed, that of the student leaders, to working in circles of equality is clearly demonstrated on DVD 1, Appendix 1)

The writings of Wheatley (1999, 2005) and Markham (2002) contributed significantly to my efforts to develop more inclusive models of leadership, suited to uncertain and turbulent times. Wheatley (1999: 30) describes the Newtonian influence on organizations, with its emphasis on separation, boundaries, and mechanistic procedures that foster a 'thing' view of the world. Scientific objectivity fostered assumptions of control, predictability and scientific management of objective reality. Drawing on insights from the 'new science', she offers an alternative and life-affirming perspective on life and organizations, on a world 'of exquisite interconnectedness' (*ibid:* 158), of systems rather than isolated parts and players. She notes that

> many disciplines, in different voices, now speak about the behaviour of networks, the primacy of relationships, the importance of context, and new ways to honour and work with the wholeness of life. (Wheatley, 1999: 158)

Wheatley's understanding of the world as a 'web of interconnections' raised many questions for me in my work contexts, specifically with regard to the nature of leadership and management, of educational processes and of psychotherapeutic practices. For her, the potent force that shapes behaviour in organizations and natural systems is

> the combination of simply expressed expectations of purpose, intent and values, and the freedom of responsible individuals to make sense of these in their own way.
>
> (Wheatley, *ibid:* 129)

It seemed to me at that stage of my emergent living theory of educational leadership, that creating a vision, embodying values, and generating meaning were central to effective leadership; I was less certain about how autonomy and freedom to self-determine fitted within my framework. Ongoing reflection and attempts to envision these concepts in practice drew me to the realization that the 'new science' was not entirely new, but a re-discovery of what traditionally has been known and practiced among indigenous peoples. My experience in Africa, brief exposure to Native American and Aboriginal culture and my experience of the Irish 'meitheal' mentioned in Chapter 1, coupled with insights from spiritual traditions, highlighted for me the value of community in promoting and fostering these qualities. I realized that in the story of the orchestra which began this thesis, and in the stories of the Nuffield Programme and the Old Woman's Hut, lay the seeds of my emerging living theory of shared praxis.

Drawing on insights from biology and sociology, Wheatley (2005: 46) highlights a paradoxical quality of ecosystems - the ability to create and sustain resilient and adaptive communities that welcome both diversity and membership. My concern was formulating itself in the question: 'How can my emerging practice embrace and sustain the paradox of individualism and connectedness, the natality and uniqueness of each participant within a community of practice?' Wheatley (*ibid:* 51) proposes a new vision of organization where boundaries, traditionally reflective of separateness, can in fact be the locus of new relationships, exchange and growth and where clarity of purpose rather than rules and regulations recognizes diversity and uniqueness as a 'contribution rather than an issue of compliance or deviance'. From my living experience of community in a

variety of contexts, local and international, I resonated with her belief that forming a community involves shared identity, purpose, values and connection at a deeper level, which she terms the organizing centre, the heart of the community.

Markham (2002), in her work on post-modern leadership from a psychological perspective, echoes Wheatley's sentiments. One insight of Markham's was particularly helpful in contributing both to my practice and my emergent understanding of my educative processes. For Markham, 'spiritlinking' is the bedrock and core of community building and a key component of leadership for today's world. She depicts it as

> the deliberate and untiring act of working through all that prevents us from entering into communal conversion and transformation. Spiritlinking happens as we build the circle of friends, foster networks of human compassion, interweave teams of relationship through which new ways of responding ... take form and find expression.
>
> (Markham, 2002: 20)

Markham's use of the term as a component of leadership resonated at two levels. In light of my Christian beliefs and understanding of spirituality, I understand 'Spirit' as the indwelling of God's spirit at one's core, the essence of each person which finds expression in generative, life-enhancing involvement in the transformation of society. Paul (Romans 12: 6; 1Cor: 14) highlights the 'gifts' within each person, but emphasizes the social nature and character of these gifts as destined for the community's benefit and are realized only through expression in community contexts (Brown *et al.,* 1990: 836).

I have always been fascinated at how *team spirit* is developed and fostered, and while it is difficult to define, one knows when team spirit is present or absent. One hears of the *spirit* of a country, of a group, a community, of an organization, frequently accompanied by an affirmative or negative adjective. At this second level, I approached the literature with a view to exploring this concept of Spirit and its contribution to organizational transformation. Owen (1987: 5) defines transformation as 'the organizational search for a better way to be'; however, I suggest that organizational transformation begins with individual transformation which, cumulatively, leads to metamorphosis at communal or organizational level. I agree with Owen (*ibid:* 8) that thinking of an organization primarily as Spirit, and only secondarily as form, posits a leadership process that fosters

the alignment of individual Spirit towards a worthwhile vision or goal. Owen (1999) suggests five functions of leadership in relation to Spirit - evoking Spirit with vision, growing Spirit through collective storytelling, sustaining Spirit with Structure, comforting Spirit when things fall apart and finally, raising Spirit. Markham's (*ibid*: 22) concept of 'Spiritlinking' suggests such a process is achievable through community-building, spirituality, action on behalf of the common good and attitudes characterized by hopefulness, compassion and reconciliation. These characteristics underpin my pedagogy of accompaniment. This pedagogy, however, demands a commitment to an ontological and epistemological stance that is contemplative, flexible and tolerant of paradox, ambiguity and diversity and facilitates questions of meaning and values through 'conversations of the heart' (Markham, *ibid:* 24).

In Movement 4 (comprising Chapters 5 and 6) I describe in detail how I have incorporated these insights into my practice, but for now I will indicate some elements of practice reflecting this theory.

I tell stories ('Fly, Eagle, Fly' in Chapter 3, for example) that appeal to the listeners' imagination and invite engagement, and through shared listening and shared response, serve to generate living, context-specific theory. Stories from media sources, from scripture, from native traditions, and from Irish mythology are all sources of information, of alternative perspectives, inspiration, or challenge and serve as an invitation to respond creatively, ethically and congruently in current contexts.

Music is central to my practice, not only in providing a tranquil background, but also serves to awaken awareness (to a person, event, situation) that invites or challenges the listener to congruent response. Two examples are Jewel's song '*Hands*', which emphasises the unique contribution each person can make; John Michael Talbot's '*Christ has no Body now but Yours*', emphasises that Jesus' work can only continue and find expression in people's lives. The young leaders themselves have used the songs such as '*Reach for the Stars*', '*Rise and Shine*', and '*The Community Song*' as theme songs for a reflective process for children on camp.

Ritual and 'Sacred Space' are core elements of community-building in my practice. Sacred Space is co-constructed by myself and the young leaders to provide a calm, reflective environment, that contains symbols e.g. pictures, artwork, banners, candles, coloured cloth, icons and mascots. Rituals include journaling, lighting candles, accepting prefect or student council badges, receiving a leader's t-shirt, sharing of stories, hopes, fears and meaning, with celebratory rituals that honour endings e.g. group hugs, songs and dance. 'Sacred Space' and reflective practices foster and promote Markham's 'conversations of the heart'.

Finally, creative, imaginative and collaborative response is encouraged through experiential learning. For this purpose, I make use of a wide variety of puzzles, games, toys and artefacts, based on Gardner's (1993) Theory of Multiple Intelligence, to encourage learning through reflection on practical experiences. Photographs and samples are included in my evidence archive.

I freely acknowledge the young people's contributions to all of the above. Chapter 6 describes how I have made myself largely redundant by handing over all the leadership roles to the young leaders themselves and I assume the accompaniment role of mentor. My evidence archive contains examples of stories, music, games and audio-visual evidence of leaders in action (DVD 1, Appendix 1) and their reflection on their experiences.

'Conversations of the heart' (Markham, 2002) imply a deeper level of leader-follower relationship, and treatment of this concept is remarkably absent from the literature and leadership debate, which is generally prescriptive, hypothesis-driven and quantitative in nature. The development of my living theory approach is rooted in a concern regarding the theoretical and philosophical basis of much of the literature, which promotes the leader, usually someone 'at the top', as the cause or source of transformation. My experience in a religious order and the church, whose founding purpose is transformation, rejects the notion of change/transformation as the work of an omniscient, charismatic figure that designs, plans and executes organizational change (Schein, 1992; Wittberg, 1996). My experience of leadership in cross-cultural contexts

offers an alternative model of leadership as a dispersed and inclusive function (Donovan, 1978; Wong and Evers, 2001). At this stage of my research, my focus shifted towards a 'pedagogy of presence', by creating an open space where all voices, 'absent' voices in particular, could engage in 'conversations of the heart'. I will return to this point later in this chapter. The idea of open space came from my African experience of the open space within the circle of huts, where all matters pertaining to the life of the village community were dealt with. Owen (1977: 4) relates a similar experience which influenced his design of Open Space Technology as 'natural laboratory in which to experience and observe superior levels of human performance'.

Conscious of the constructive nature and character of human activity, including models of leadership, a key concern of my emergent practice was the importance of including both male and female perspectives, styles and concepts in developing a shared praxis approach. At this stage of my research, my concern related not only to a more inclusive, reciprocal and interconnected theory of leadership, but also to actually modelling it in practice. How I actually achieve this forms the content of Chapter 6. My question yet again was 'What would this look like in practice?' as I struggled both with the incrementally-expanding leadership literature and a desire to develop a contextualized perspective (Bush, 2003), a living theory of educational leadership that addressed issues of human agency and social structure. Several factors fuelled and sustained my efforts and process.

First, my experience of living and working among the Bulozi, a tribe in Central Africa, and experiencing first-hand the inclusive, participatory processes of leadership and decision-making exercised within village communities and at gatherings of the paramount chief and his *indunas* (ministers). A direct influence in current practice is my commitment to having participants of my various projects sitting and working in circle formation. Owen (1999: 11), Hamma (1999: 44) and Eliade (1958: 36) also draw attention to the significance of the circle as facilitating 'gestures of approach' (Eliade, *ibid.*), openness to new possibility, encounter and connection. I will explore the significance of this practice as this movement unfolds and provide audio-visual evidence of this concept in practice. Suffice at this stage to state that my emergent understanding

155

of leadership centred on *creating and holding a space* that would facilitate genuine engagement, growth and freedom.

Second, my practice and research in educational contexts parallel my efforts, as a Brother in a religious order, to live meaningful and life-enhancing expressions of Brotherhood in service of humanity. Brotherhood and its structures of leadership are essentially non-hierarchical and collaborative, reflecting reciprocity, mutuality and shared vision and purpose within radical relationships of equality with all of creation (Chittister, 1995; O'Murchu, 2000; Christian Brothers, 2002). The values implicit in Brotherhood are those of Jesus, who rejected structures and systems that inhibited or diminished life, supported relationships of inequality and disadvantage or obstructed the development of true community. A key element of Jesus' response to his historical context was a belief in and commitment to, the value of each person, expressed in his table fellowship from which no one, even the most marginalized of his society, was excluded (Anderson, 1998). His mission, expressed and embodied, was the fullness of life in all its dimensions: 'I have come that they may have life and have it to the full' (Jn 10:10). For me, Brotherhood is an embodied expression of affirming and supporting life in individual and communitarian contexts. A key dimension of my living theory of leadership is an embodied commitment to life-affirming structures and practices that foster communities of reciprocity, mutuality and shared praxis.

Insights from cosmology, quantum physics and chaos theory relating to the web of life and the complex networks by which all life is inextricably linked, have also influenced my research (Berry 1988; O'Murchu 1992; Capra 2002). Berry (*ibid*: 40) suggests three principles on which the universe functions – differentiation, whereby life on earth finds expression in an overwhelming variety of manifestations; subjectivity, the capacity for interiority, that results in increased unity of function through ever more complex organic structures; and finally, the communion of each reality of the universe with every other reality in the universe, an awareness that is embedded in eastern and native cultures. Berry suggests that when we look at nature, we should see a community of subjects rather than objects of control and exploitation. Capra (2002) also explores the patterns and processes of organization of living systems and the hidden connections between

phenomena, while O'Murchu develops the implication of the transition from a mechanistic world-view to a more holistic one. Berry, Capra and O'Murchu are telling a new, emergent story (Owen, 1999) of transformative leadership as a collective and constantly redistributed function, engaged in the realization of human potential. Their insights fuelled my search for more inclusive and collaborative models of leadership.

4:4   Living Theory: creating a structural process

As I experienced the overwhelming flood of ideas, concepts and models emanating from the leadership literature, my research shifted from exploring ideas to initiating a developmental and fluid process with which to develop my emergent living theory of educational leadership, and incorporate these ideas into a coherent synthesis with a view to generating a congruent response. Given the evolving nature of my research and practice, fluid and emergent processes seemed more suited to this endeavour than the construction of a rigid, fixed theoretical structure. While developing an integrative and holistic approach that recognizes the reality of multifaceted, extremely complex, non-linear, and human realities of organizational life in a time of rapid and constant change, I recognize that it is, ultimately, incomplete, provisional and 'for now'.

I began this thesis with an account of a conductor, the orchestra and the interaction between them, an experience which made a lasting impression on me as a model of effective, shared leadership. While struggling to develop my own living theory of engaged leadership in action, and make sense of the voluminous literature, this impression was further reinforced by a comment of Bennis (1997: 3) where he suggested that a leadership model for today's rapidly changing world required a move 'from macho to maestro', from a bureaucratic, centralized control model to a collegial (Flannery, 1988; Bush, 2003), engaged one. In grounding my theory in a conceptual basis that reflects the 'maestro' or conductor mode, I have drawn on the insights of Sergiovanni (1996), Bolman and Deal (1997) and Adair and Nelson (2004).

Before developing a conceptual underpinning of practice, however, I wish to locate my living theory of leadership within the transformational leadership field, which emerged as a leadership approach in the work of Burns (1978) and has undergone several changes since then (Bass, 1990: Bennis and Nanus, 1997; Binney *et al.,* 2005). While being alert to the strengths and weaknesses of a transformational approach (Northouse, 2004: 183), I find myself in close agreement with its general thrust. However, I reiterate my conviction that genuine and sustainable transformation is not the exclusive preserve of the transformational or heroic leader, but emerges in and through a community of shared praxis. Telford (1996) captures this idea succinctly:

> The prophet has already arrived and is amongst us, but not in the shape of the singular form – *in the plural.*
>
> (Telford 1996: 13. Author's italics)

 Bolman and Deal (1997) suggest a re-organization of the key concepts embodied in the cumulative body of leadership theory which I found to be particularly helpful for my emergent practice. Using a concept they call 'reframing', they suggest four frames as 'windows on the world and lenses that bring the world into focus' (*ibid:* 12) and a tool for understanding the complexity and depth of organizational life. The four frames - structural, human resource, political and symbolic - highlight significant possibilities for leadership and 'followership', and, taken together, offers a holistic approach.

The structural frame emphasizes the importance of formal roles and relationships, with the focus on organizational direction and goals, roles, policies, procedures and planning. The human resource frame focuses on the relationship between people and organization, with an emphasis on individuals with their talents, gifts and commitment as the organization's greatest resource. Effective leadership ensures a fit between personal and organizational needs. The political frame addresses the political reality of every organization, with an emphasis on building relationship through effective policies and structures. Finally, the symbolic frame is concerned with organizational culture, beliefs, values and norms. Through ritual, story and symbols it fosters and nurtures shared meaning, values and traditions and recognizes the value of diversity. Bolman and Deal also offer images of leadership appropriate to each frame - analyst, architect; catalyst,

servant; advocate, negotiator; prophet and poet – with accompanying skills and processes.

Sergiovanni's (1992) insights into developing 'leadership density' provided another sounding board for my emergent living theory of leadership practice. He suggests five 'leadership forces' which promote this aim - technical, human, educational, symbolic and cultural. 'Technical' involves the task of the organization - planning, organizing, co-coordinating; 'human' attends to human factors - relationships, morale, empowerment; 'educational' involves ongoing development of curriculum, personal and professional training and development; 'symbolic' involves creating vision and meaning; 'cultural' builds a strong organizational culture and commitment with shared aims, values and beliefs. Sergiovanni (1996: 48) develops these ideas further by drawing on the sociological terms *gesellschaft* and *gemeinschaft* to represent two different types of relationship and vision of life. The former represents contractual connections whereas the latter strives for relationships founded on ties of committed involvement. Drawing on Tonnies (1957), Sergiovanni describes these ties as community by relationships, community of place and community of mind, and adds community of memory (p.51); together they represent webs or networks of meaning, a sense of belonging and a strong, sustaining sense of identity, which promote empowerment, collegiality and the moral voice of the community. In promoting communities of shared praxis, I was drawn to Sergiovanni's (*ibid:* 66) concept of a 'covenantal community' which reflects the prophet Jeremiah's (31: 33) concept of effective laws as written in the heart. This reference to 'heart', coupled with Markham's 'conversations of the heart' mentioned earlier, introduced a new element, the place of 'heart', into my living theory of educational leadership. I address this idea later in this chapter.

Finally, I have adapted the insights of John Adair (1988) on leadership, specifically on his 'Three-Circles Model', as a guiding image of my theory and practice. Adair, drawing on Maslow's (1968) human needs theory, focuses on three needs, one for each circle - task needs, group needs, individual needs (Fig. 4.1 below).
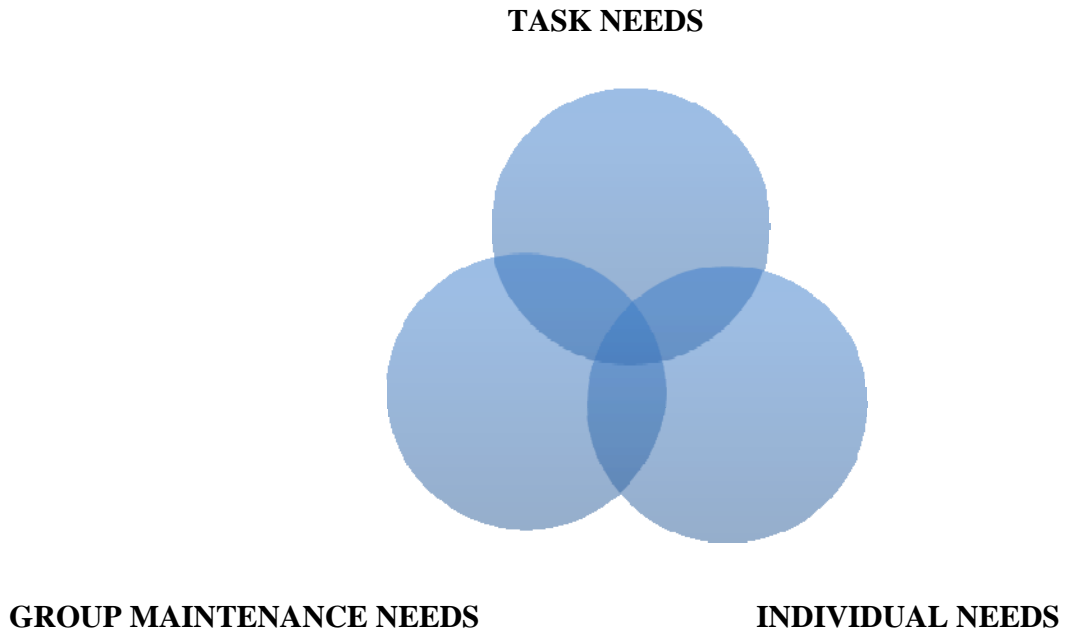
TASK NEEDS

GROUP MAINTENANCE NEEDS   **INDIVIDUAL NEEDS**

Fig. 4.1

In developing my living theory approach, I have adapted Adair's model as illustrated in Figure 4.1 to create a synthesis of lived experience, engagement with the literature and a creative, life-affirming, value-driven response in living contexts. While acknowledging the importance of needs in each of the circles, I particularly emphasise potential, possibility and responsibility. This three-circle model also serves as an evaluative tool, in reviewing or evaluating performance in the personal, the team and the task dimensions of our shared enterprise (Fig. 4.2).
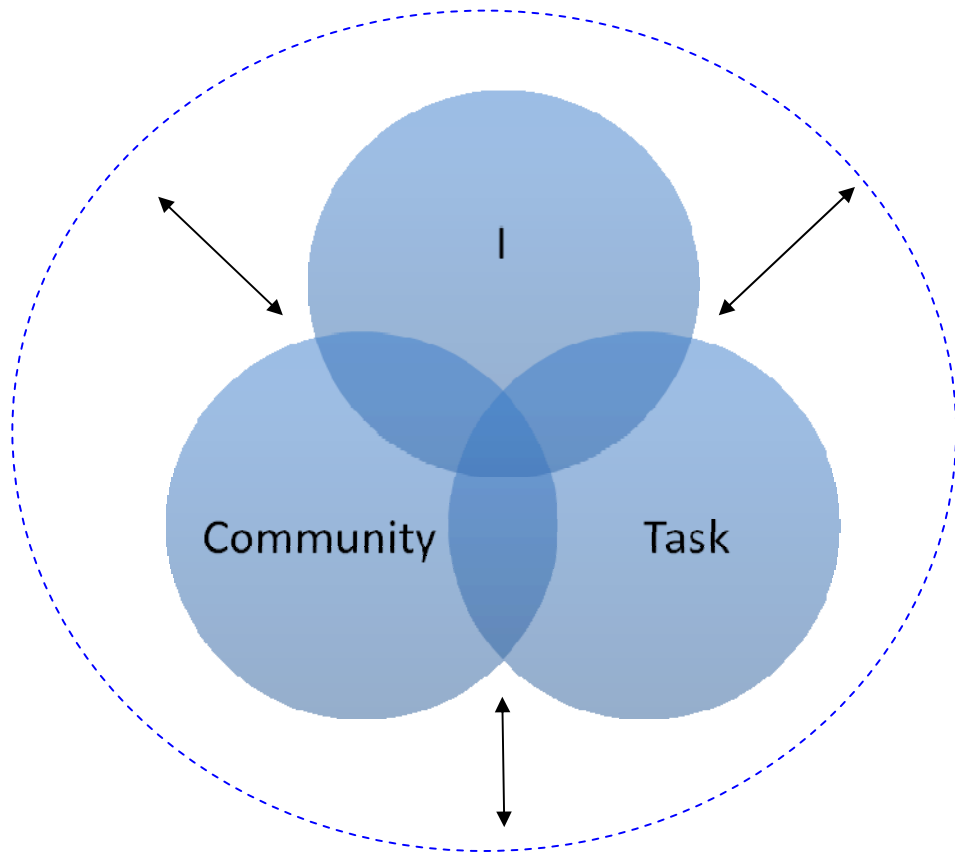
CONTEXT

Fig. 4. 2

'I' – 'I'

I place the 'I' circle at the top of the diagram to emphasize the central place of the person, both leader and follower, in leadership relationships. I emphasize the natality of myself and of every individual, reflected in engaged and dialogical mutuality (Buber, 1958). If I firmly believe in myself as gifted, blessed and a unique part of God's creation, my life-affirming religious beliefs remind me that the 'other I' in *'I' – 'I'* relationships is also uniquely gifted and full of potential, in Gula's (1989: 71) words, 'fundamentally equal but uniquely original'. This relationship of my unique 'I' to the other's unique 'I', while rooted in my religious beliefs and expression of Brotherhood, also underlines my therapeutic practice, reflecting the therapeutic models of Rogers (1961), Maslow (1968) and Adler (1964). It is an expression of Adler's (1964) concept of *social interest* or *Gemeinschaftsgefuhl,* which he equated with awareness of being part of the human community and a sense of identification and empathy with others. Central to my own understanding of leadership is a focus on the constructive side of human nature, the belief that I and every individual is in a process of becoming, of self-actualizing. Maslow (1968) and Rogers (1961) both emphasize the trustworthiness, capability and constructive nature of the human person. Rogers, rejecting the hierarchical relationship of 'superior' and 'expert', proposes three life-affirming attributes that contribute to human flourishing - congruence (genuineness or realness), unconditional positive regard (acceptance and caring), and accurate empathic understanding (an ability to deeply grasp the subject world of another person) (Corey, 1996: 200). Cooperrider's (1990) generative metaphor of Appreciative Inquiry, with its emphasis on positive possibility, on strengths rather than weakness, also contributes to my evolving living theory of leadership. At the core of Appreciative Inquiry is 'inquiring with the heart' (Bushe, 1998: 2), which is concerned with wholeness and affirming life processes that foster and sustain human flourishing.

The 'I - I' circle helped me address the question 'who is the Self that leads?' The most difficult part of developing my living theory of leadership was to actually *live* these values, to 'walk the talk'. It involved a major paradigmatic shift from a pedagogy based on control, order and an authoritative, didactic approach to a more facilitative one that

reflected mutuality, reciprocity and collaborative engagement. Key learning moments for me occurred when I found myself denying or contradicting these values by adopting pedagogic and leadership roles of 'command and control'. However, I became increasingly comfortable with engaging these values in spite of occasional experiences of personal anxiety or vulnerability. The following conversation demonstrates my commitment to helping young leaders develop their leadership qualities and decision-making abilities.

Stories of Practice 4

H. and C., two Camp Leaders, approached me during one of the summer camp activities.

H.   *'Chris, we have a problem!*

Chris: *'O.K.'*

H. and C then described the problem situation and continued,

H. and C: **'What are we going to do?'**

Chris: *'I have no idea!'*

This reply generated considerable annoyance.

H. and C.   **'But you are the Co-ordinator!'**

Chris: *'H. and C., I know what* I *would do in this situation, but I genuinely have no idea what* YOU *are going to do. We have done extensive training, I have complete trust in you to make a good decision and the parents who have placed their children in your care have faith in you, so go ahead and make* YOUR *decision. I'm willing to listen to your suggestions and thoughts but as leaders, you must make the final decision and you will have my full support.'*   (Personal Journal, July 2000 and Appendix 3:1)

Among the camp leaders this process became known as 'Chris doing his thing', where leaders understood that when a problem arose, it was a waste of time coming to me for a solution unless they had first reflected on the situation, explored possible responses and made what they considered to be their most effective response. While I was always available to support and assist, I was allowing them to develop confidence in their own leadership abilities, in the knowledge that I trusted them fully and was committed to relationships of trust, mutuality and reciprocity.

Community

In the second of the overlapping circles, I placed 'community' instead of Adair's 'group maintenance needs'. My efforts to develop communities of practice (Wenger *et al.,* 2002) where *'I'-'I'* becomes 'we' are core elements of my leadership practice. This work both paralleled and was influenced by, my lived experience in community. My practice reflects my efforts to develop communities of shared praxis (Groome, 1991), praxis defined as 'purposeful human activity that holds in dialectical unity theory and practice, critical reflection and historical engagement' *(ibid: 136).* I understand my leadership role in school and community settings as providing a context where democratic and interdependent relationships of participation, genuine dialogue and partnership are practised and where all participants are, in Groome's words (p. 143), 'agents-subjects-in-action' rather than passive recipients of 'expert' learning and knowledge. Drawing on Paul's image of one body with many interdependent parts (Romans 12; 3-13), I understand my work as co-creating community in which the humanity of each person becomes visible and is fostered through relationships of empowerment, mutuality and respectful challenge.

Many native traditions acknowledge the contribution of community to human flourishing. In my own culture, this is encapsulated in the phrase - 'Ar scath a cheile a mhaireann na daoine' ('we grow in each other's shadow'). The essence of community in African contexts can be summed up in Mbiti's statement - 'I am because we are' - and in the Zulu statement 'Umuntu ungumuntu ngabantu' ('A person becomes a person because of people'), both sayings quoted in Radcliffe (2005: 135). In my practice, I

adopt a 'pedagogy of freedom' (Radcliffe, *ibid:* 42) as an expression of leadership to co-create shared meaning and collaborative processes that promote shared and distributed leadership (Owen, 1999; Capra, 2002). My practice of leadership in educative and community contexts is an evolving narrative of mutual engagement and the negotiation of meaningful response, grounded in an emergent repertoire of shared meanings, values and power. In this community, power 'over' others is transformed into power 'with' others.

Task

Within traditional leadership paradigms, one of the primary roles of a leader has been defining the task (Adair, 1988; Bennett *et al.,* 2003; Northouse, 2004). In light of the foregoing paragraphs, and the fact that my research focused on projects for which no clear guidelines or definitions existed, I opted for processes that facilitated 'co-definition' of task by all parties involved. A significant change for me involved a shift from a rules-based strategy to a more complex one that was values-driven and norms-based, from hierarchical authority and power to relationships and processes of collegiality, shared leadership and dialogical decision-making. While it felt, initially at least, like a derogation of power and authority, with consequent feelings of anxiety and vulnerability, in time I came to understand my process as a shift from 'power over' to 'power to' (Sergiovanni, 1996). *Story of practice 4* is an example from practice of how I have tried to facilitate this shift.

Paradoxically, my 'pedagogy of vulnerability' helped foster a community of learning and enquiry, where a leadership 'without easy answers' (Heifetz, 1994) engendered a sense of shared significance, developed connections at a deeper place defined by Wheatley (2005: 54) as 'the organizing centre or heart of the community'. In the context of this thesis, the task unfolded through addressing generative questions such as 'Who are we?' and 'What matters?' (*ibid:* 53).

4th Circle: Context

The fourth circle represents the living contexts of my research and practice. I use a broken line to signify the fluid, dynamic and ever-changing nature of life, the complex and, at times, chaotic interplay of forces operative in social and organizational settings where rapid change is the norm and where boundaries are permeable, flexible and constantly shifting. The two-directional arrows emphasize the reciprocal nature of influence and transformation in living contexts, where each person can both influence and be influenced, can transform and be transformed in daily interaction.

My concern at this stage of my research centred on the question 'What model of leadership should I embody in 'swampy lowlands' contexts, while responding with integrity in a world of uncertainty, chaos and disruption?' I struggled with the application of various theories and models of leadership, specifically transformational (Northouse, 2004) and servant (Spears and Lawrence, 2002) models. While elements of various models were helpful, a 'swampy lowlands' model of leadership, was emerging in my practice, through a method of inquiry reflective of trial and error, intuition and at times, muddling through.

Hock's (2002) concept of 'chaord' was a contributory factor. Hock (*ibid:* 305) describes a chaord as 'any self-organizing and governing, adaptive, non-linear, complex organism, organization, or system exhibiting behaviour characteristics of both order and chaos'. He asked what principles or institutional genetic code would facilitate a self-organizing institution, just like the human body, that would release human spirit and human ingenuity and creativity. I realized that the stories of The Nuffield Programme and the Old Woman's Hut mirrored Hock's concept of chaord. I became conscious of the place of *chaos* in biblical writings (Gen.1), in native traditions, in philosophical anthropology (Eliade, 1957; Arbuckle, 1988), in the literature of spirituality (O'Murchu, 2000) and in the literature of the 'new science' (Wheatley, 1999; Capra, 2002). In all of these, chaos is portrayed as the locus, the material of new life, of new creation. My experience of liminality was a lived experience of new life emerging in the midst of chaos; however, this emergence occurred initially outside of my conscious control and involvement.

Becoming increasingly at ease with experiences of paradox, contradiction and seeming chaos, I began to explore a model of leadership suited to 'swampy lowlands' and to a chaordic organization, and one that would provide an affirmative answer to Hock's question :

> Are our institutions and people capable of their own continuous learning and transformation in order to harmoniously co-evolve with all other institutions, with all people, and with all other living things, to the highest potential of each and all?'
>
> (Hock, in Spears and Lawrence, 2002: 319)

To my understanding of leadership as accompaniment and alongsidedness, I now added Wheatley's (1999: 173) roles of 'explorer and discoverer' in the company of others, and Capra's (2002: 107) 'facilitator of emergence' which reflects an openness to continual questioning, innovation and activity at the margins.

A second contributory factor to the development of a 'swampy lowlands' model of leadership occurred one day while explaining the diagram in Figure 4.2 to a group of youth leaders. I described the diagram as being 'like three African huts, clustered together, and surrounded by an open space of limitless complexity and chaos, possessed of extraordinary potential, possibility and challenge. The central core of all four circles is the heart-shaped piece formed by the overlapping circles'. Two insights occurred.

One, my earlier understanding of 'open space', like Owen (1997), was of space located *within* the boundary of the village huts. My current understanding of 'open space', represented by Figure 4.2, is of the 'huts' ('*I'-'I', community* and *task)* located within boundless 'open space', representing chaos and complexity impervious to technical control, but holding within it extraordinary, unlimited potential and possibility. Without minimizing the fearful nature of chaos, uncertainty and dearth of easy answers, I understand this open space as an invitation and a challenge to explore a wider and greater vision of human personhood, of community, of the cosmos and of God.

With this perspective, I differ from Heifetz's (1994: 15) view of leadership as mobilizing people to tackle hard problems and as 'adaptive work', where problems have a solution and 'adaptive' hints of survival. My view focuses on *challenges to be lived*,

where frequently there is no answer but simply an invitation to take the next 'right' step within a metaphor of journey and a process of human flourishing. This view supports an understanding of leadership as facilitating transitions (Noer, 1997) or 'edge-walking' (Kemper, 2005: 2), at the 'margins, interfaces and intersections between conflicting, divergent cultures, perspectives and worldviews'. Within the polarized and conflicted context of Northern Ireland where my research takes place, such a process has great potential for softening barriers and 'boundary-dissolving' (Slater, in Bennis *et al.,* 2001) in contrast to the predominantly adversarial processes that currently exist. Leadership in my living theory perspective is a quality of being, a quality of Presence that occurs in the process of becoming an integrated human being (Bennis *et al.,* 2001).

The second insight related to the core or 'heart' of the four circles of leadership. Familiarity with the place of the heart in biblical literature and in the literature of spirituality (Au, 1990; May, 1991; Wiederkehr, 1991) as the inner core, the depths of being, focused my attention on the place of the heart in understanding leadership and on processes, practices and relationships that promote and foster Spirit, which I discuss in the next section.

4.5   Leadership of the Heart - towards a spirituality of leadership

In this section, I explore the place of the heart in my understanding of leadership and its contribution to my emerging practice. I do so, conscious of the fact that my comments are located within a particular tradition of belief and spirituality not universally shared; nonetheless, they represent the 'inner dimension' of my work and practice and give meaning and impetus to my emerging living theory of leadership.

The Meaning of 'Heart'

My understanding of 'heart' is rooted in the Biblical sense of 'heart' as the core of one's personhood, the depth of one's desires, feelings, understanding and insight; the 'heart' is the locus of ethical judgement, of one's integrity, and the driving force and inspiration of an ethical and congruent way of being in the world (Brown *et al.,* 1990). Jesus (Lk.6;

Mt. 7) consistently refers to the 'heart' as the fundamental determinant of being and behaviour; he challenged and subverted conventional wisdom and conventionally sanctioned beliefs and behaviour, which functioned at a surface level and left the deeper, inner level, the level of the 'heart' untouched.

Rahner (1974), cited in Shelton (1990: 62), considers the word 'heart' as an *Urwort,* a primordial word rooted in multiple understandings and layers of meaning, with an understanding of 'heart' as the most fundamental level of one's very personhood. As Shelton points out, Rahner's reflections on the 'heart-centre' emphasize its power for relational connectedness and an understanding of human existence as rooted in care and finding expression in empathy.

In the literature and practice of spirituality, the 'heart' is understood as the locus of the most intimate contact and relationship with God and union with other persons (May, 1991; Merton, 2000). Merton (1973: 62) suggests that effective leadership is a result of listening and responding to 'the demands of inner truth'. It is at this deep level of hidden wholeness that according to Merton (*ibid:* 81), the deep 'I' of spirit, solitude and love can meet the deep 'I' of the 'Other'. In my living theory approach to educational leadership, 'heart-linking' and 'spirit-linking' are core elements of developing shared vision, shared values and shared meaning. In developing a community of shared praxis, I seek to build relationships of significance and resonance of spirit (Daloz *et al.,* 1996; Goleman *et al.*, 2002) as the first stage of a process of transformation. It is only when transformation begins in the 'I' of myself and connects with transformation occurring in the 'I' of the 'Other', that the transformation of social and organizational contexts can begin. In Chapters 5 and 6, I discuss how I generate and foster conversations of 'heart' and 'spirit' through the co-creation of 'sacred space' through ritual, story, reflection and the creative use of symbols, music and silence.

References to the 'heart' and 'spirit' occur frequently in the contemporary literature (Blanchard, 1999; Owen, 1999; Kouzes and Posner, 2002, 2003; Granberg-Michaelson, 2004). Kouzes and Posner (2002) suggest that one of the key tasks of leadership is to 'encourage the heart' as a way of living values, developing a collective identity and

aligning 'spirit' in the service of the organization. Granberg-Michaelson (2004) quotes Mandela's belief that real transformation begins with a 'reconstruction and development programme of the soul' (*ibid:* 174) of each person involved. He also cites Havel's address to the U.S. Congress where he stated that 'the salvation of this world lies nowhere else than in the human heart' (*ibid:* 175). Terry (1993) defines authentic leadership as 'courage in action'. I understand courage as 'what is of the heart'. I find myself in strong agreement with the insights of these and other authors, particularly in the belief that holistic, generative and life-affirming leadership is a matter of the heart. However, espoused values are not enough; they must lead to a congruent and authentic response in living contexts. Living my espoused values has led me from reflection and understanding to decision and action, from the cognitive to the moral sphere. In this next section, I will treat briefly of the moral dimension of my living theory of educational leadership.

Moral Leadership

The moral dimension of leadership is expressed in decisive action. Decisive action goes beyond the cognitive levels of experience, understanding, and judgement and forms the link between the inner life of the person and his/her objective life commitments. I again draw on Lonergan's 'transcendental precepts' (Dunne, 1985: 60) as a framework for a living theory approach to moral leadership. These precepts are: Be attentive; Be intelligent; Be reasonable; Be responsible. The term 'precepts' might suggest written rules or commandments; however, I understand them to be dynamic processes that are 'transcendental' at two levels. One refers to the metaphysical order of reality, which I understand in terms of God, and reflects my Christian beliefs embodied in action. On a second level, these precepts are experienced as questions which take us 'beyond' ourselves. Dunne summarises this concept as follows:

> On the level of attention we notice where, when, and what. On the level of intelligence, we ask how and why. On the level of judgement we ask whether. And on the level of decision we ask should or ought.

> (Dunne, 1985: 61)

These precepts find expression in authentic and congruent responsiveness that is marked by tension and struggle at two levels. One is the existential level, addressing and responding to questions of value, right relationship, responsibility and integrity in each of the 4 areas in Figure 4.2. The second level is of particular importance in sustaining a leadership ethic of justice and care. At this level lie the long-range and cumulative orientation and direction of all the individual moral decisions which define one's moral character and one's existential and ontological stance.

In this context, Sergiovanni (1996: 33) believes that a theory for the schoolhouse and for leadership should emphasize moral connections, grounded in cultural norms, shared values and beliefs. He draws on the biblical concept of *covenant (ibid:* 66) to describe the essence of these connections as a 'virtuous enterprise', where there are shared values, sense of purpose and a commitment to the common good. The Hebrew word for covenant (*berit)* (Boadt, 1984: 175), however, has a deeper sense of connectedness than is implied in the word 'covenant' - it denotes connection that is embodied at 'heart' and 'spirit' level and draws on the integrity of every person involved.

Telford (1996), Crawford *et al.* (1997) and Fullan (2001, 2003) address the moral dimension of educative relationships and discourse, its influence on epistemology and pedagogy and its contribution to school effectiveness. Fullan (2001: 28) states that moral purpose and sustained performance of organizations are mutually dependent. Fullan (2003: 32) also stresses the moral imperative of leadership in bringing about systemic or organizational transformation. Crawford *et al.* (1997: 70) describe educational leadership as 'a moral art', an expression of 'practical idealism', a capacity to interrelate technical competence and moral complexity. Palmer (1993: 33) proposes a model of teaching that comes from the depth of one's own truth which connects with the truth within others.

Addressing the teleology of leadership in the literature challenged me once again to address the question - 'How are these theories or insights reflected and embodied in (my) practice?' Several key insights contributed to an expansion of consciousness.

First, while theoretical formulations of leadership ethics are relatively scarce (Northouse, 2004), there is a growing demand for ethical principles to hold a central place within the leadership domain (Covey, 1992; Sergiovanni, 1996; Bennett *et al.*, 2003). As a corollary of this scarcity of ethical theory, I found it necessary to explore my own values and their place in and contribution to my emergent self-understanding. My understanding of my values resonated with those of several authors, for example, Northouse's (*ibid:* 310) five principles of ethical leadership: respect, service, justice, honesty and community. Using my epistemological, ontological and pedagogical values as living standards of judgement (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006: 85) generated a sustained struggle to ensure my espoused values were lived in practice.

Experiences of being a liminal person and a living contradiction, where my espoused values were negated in practice by myself or by others, have led me to a heightened awareness of the complexity of ethical dilemmas, paradox and tensions in living contexts. Duignan and Collins (in Bennett *et al.,* 2003: 281) suggest three key areas of tension and paradox: individual versus group interests, service versus efficiency, and compassion versus rules. My research strongly resonates with their findings. This awareness, in turn, has led to a shift of consciousness from a stance of moral relativism to one of moral sensitivity, which addresses questions of the kind 'How does a good person respond to this situation or context in a fair, just and congruent manner?'

Finally, engagement with the topic of ethical leadership in the literature and using my values as living standards of judgement, challenged me to consistently 'act expressively' (Palmer 1990: 24), the core of my understanding of moral leadership. Generated by an inner truth, conviction or value, an expressive act is one which, if not taken, is a denial of my own nature. This focus on inner truth, in turn, led me to explore and describe in this next section, a spirituality for leadership and its place in my living theory.

4:6   A spirituality for educational leadership

I have written about spirituality in an earlier chapter, but it might be helpful to draw on Carr's (1988) definition as a starting point for a more detailed discussion. She writes:

> ..spirituality can be described as the whole of one's experience, beliefs, convictions and patterns of thought, one's emotions and behaviour in respect to what is ultimate, or of God.
>
> (Carr, 1988: 201)

A holistic spirituality is essentially relational, informing life-affirming relationships of interconnectedness with self, others, God, and all creation; it is an essential dimension of being human, providing depth, meaning and resonance in daily life. In this section, I outline some characteristics of my emergent spirituality for leadership, which foster and underpin my living theory of practice.

A spirituality for leadership generates a commitment to authenticity

I understand spirituality as a way of being and becoming, a call to recognize and address what is counterfeit and inauthentic in my practice and in my relationships. Authenticity serves as both challenge to and critique of practice (Terry, 1993: 273), and finds expression in embodied engagement where means are integral to the end. A key element of my practice is the introductory process to my leadership sessions where I use reflective passages - e.g. '*Celebrate You*', '*When you were created*' or Nelson Mandela's '*Our Deepest Fear*', all of which are included in my evidence archive - to emphasise the unique contribution each person can make to our shared process. Instead of dependence on my expertise, questions like '***What is it that you, and only you can bring to our process?*'** or '***Look around at this group gathered in a circle - there are over six hundred years of lived experience, tacit knowledge and all kinds of abilities within this group. What would it look like, what might happen, if we shared all of this richness in our time together today?*'** open the way to shared involvement, a sense of ownership of the process and create an open space that fosters collaborative and democratic response. Instead of telling participants what *I* think they need to know, my commitment to honouring the voice of participants is expressed in a shared agenda and a collaborative pedagogy.

Two paradoxes occur within this scenario. One, promoting student voice, far from fomenting dissent, anarchy or resistance has, in fact, contributed to reduction of student indiscipline and disaffection, improved staff-student relationships and facilitated a creative and imaginative contribution on the part of young people to the life of their school and community. Glavey (2002) and feedback from both teachers and students (Appendix 2), bear witness to this fact.

The second paradox, a personal one, is the experience, initially terrifying but now energising and exciting, of foregoing the role of 'expert' and the control and authority accompanying that role, and instead, serving as a companion-in-learning and co-creator of the learning context and relationship. This has contributed to my emergent living theory of leadership that is revealed in more inclusive and reciprocal educative relationships. In the next chapter, I describe my experience of adopting a 'vulnerable stance' in promoting a democratic student voice.

A spirituality for leadership is rooted in hope

I understand leadership as a step towards a better present while also opening up possibilities for a better future. It pre-supposes committed, reflective action coupled with what Radcliffe (2005: 76) calls a 'geological patience' which points to future promise. In the context of my research, I am blessed in having the opportunity to work with so many gifted, enthusiastic and committed young people, who are making a difference for good in their schools or local community (DVD 2, Appendix 1) and re-conceptualising the roles of youth in society (Kurth-Schai, 1988).

A spirituality for leadership fosters and sustains life-affirming practice

Jesus' words (Jn 10:10), 'I have come that they may have life and have it to the full', are the inspiration for my collaborative practice, rooted in relationships of justice, mutuality and reciprocity, and a dialectical attitude that recognizes that bias is part of the very structure of consciousness. This spirituality honours the natality and agency of each person, expressed in freedom, and recognises the diversity of perspectives in living contexts. In short, leadership spirituality fosters the emergence of 'judging actors'

174

(Arendt, 1964), through respect for the natality and plurality of others, instigating new forms of democratic discourse and dialogue and, finally, through moving into 'living logics' (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006: 39), which possess the capacity for self-recreation in infinite innovative ways.

A spirituality for leadership honours community

My living theory of leadership is rooted in the value of community, which offers both challenge and support for leader and follower. This type of community recognizes the value of shared and distributed leadership and functions within a paradigm of abundance, which recognizes the vast reservoir of wisdom, insight and giftedness within the community and draws on it for the benefit of all. Interdependence fosters what Daloz *et al.* (1996: 215) term 'constructive engagement with otherness', which evokes empathic recognition of a shared humanity. This concept is reflected in the story of Jesus' feeding of the five thousand (Mt. 14: 13-21) where Jesus 'invoked the abundance of community' (Palmer, 1990: 136). Recognising, in Palmer's words, that community is a gift to be received rather than a goal to be achieved, I understand that a key role of educational leadership is the co-creation of an open space where Spirit and the abundance of community can come to fruition and find generative expression.

A spirituality for leadership generates a liberating consciousness

Recognising the dignity of each person, a spirituality for leadership challenges practices and structures that silence, disempower, colonise and disenfranchise. The emancipatory nature of self-study action research has alerted me to significant issues of powerlessness and voicelessness in current epistemologies of practice and educational discourse. In Chapters 5 and 6, I give an account of how a liberatory praxis has contributed to a mutually liberating consciousness in school and community contexts, through 'a curriculum of inner significances' (Hart, 2001) and engagement of participants' interiority that, over time, will render me largely redundant.

A spirituality for leadership embodies empathy

My spirituality is authenticated by congruence between my beliefs and my actions, between my espoused way of being and my behaviour, and the next two chapters describe my efforts to congruently express my beliefs in living contexts. Empathy grows out of the habitual recognition of the sacredness of life and work (Woodward, 1987), a valuing of the whole of life and a self-forgetful receptivity before the reality of another. Derived from the Greek word *pathos,* empathy has the sense of 'feeling into'. Empathic spirituality promotes leadership with 'an open heart' (Heifetz and Linky, 2004), characterized by innocence, curiosity and compassion, and 'spiritually intelligent leadership' (Zohar, 2005), which accesses higher meanings, values and abiding purposes and embodies them in leading a more creative life. Leadership fuelled by empathic spirituality, implies a shift from a politics of individualism to a politics of compassion. A politics of compassion is organized around the nourishment of human life, of human flourishing, is inclusive and reflects awareness of the impact of social structures, especially unjust ones, on people and on nature. Borg (1997: 150) regards compassion as a political paradigm, both a lens for seeing and a core value of an alternative vision of society, promoting an ethic of care, inclusion and justice.

Dorr's (1990) 'Three-Circle' Spirituality

My understanding of a spirituality for leadership is summed up in a favourite text of Scripture (Micah 6:8) - 'Act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with your God'. I have used this saying as a framework for life-affirming, generative relationships with self, others, God and creation, and have developed a holistic understanding of spirituality that embraces three aspects - the personal, the interpersonal and the 'public'.

In Figure 4.2, I used Adair's 'Three Circles' as a model for understanding and developing my living theory of leadership. I now draw on Dorr's (1990) 'Three Circles' (Figure 4.3, below) as a framework for, and summary of, my integrative approach to a living theory expression of spirituality and leadership.

While the diagram is self-explanatory, I wish to explain the concept of *shalom,* a Biblical word, which means all-embracing peace in every sphere of life, a peace which is at the centre of a holistic spirituality and which contributes to human flourishing in all its dimensions. It involves peace within my self, peace in all my relationships with others, peace within the 'public' sphere, and peace with nature and the cosmos (Dorr*, ibid:* 193).
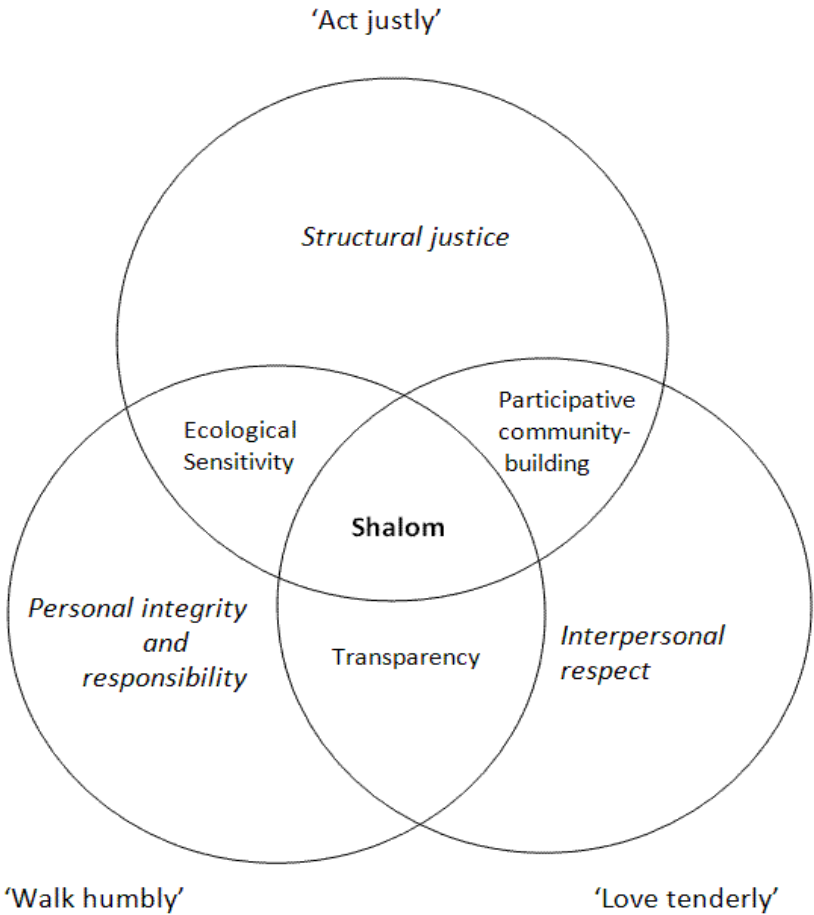

Fig. 4.3

Conclusion

I agree with Duignan and Collins (2003) in (Davies, 2003: 292) suggestion that their formation as 'depthed' human beings should be integral to the training and education of leaders. They suggest that such a programme of formation should develop leaders who possess the following eight characteristics: critically reflective, intellectually challenging, competent, emotionally mature, ethically literate, spiritually courageous, intuitively connected and culturally sensitive.

In this chapter, I have traced my process of hermeneutic engagement with the literature, its contribution to my expanding consciousness and the development of my emerging living theory of educational leadership. In this way, I have become familiar with understandings of leadership in the literature, developed an horizon of consciousness, a sounding board, against which to critique my emerging practice, and finally, have articulated appropriate standards of judgement as a demonstration of ethical, methodological and epistemological validity and rigour. As already stated, the ontological, epistemological and pedagogical values explored in this thesis and illustrated graphically in Figure 4.3 above, serve as explanatory principles and living standards of judgement by which my theory and practice of educational leadership may be tested and judged.

In the next two chapters, I explore a contextualized perspective on my practice by reflecting on my work of student and young adult leadership development in a school context and in a community context. Duignan and Collins (*ibid:* 292) sum up the challenge which faced me as follows:

> …to combine the intellectual and moral into frameworks that help transcend knowledge generation and skills development, to one of reflective critique of contemporary dilemmas, and personal and professional growth and development through an exploration of what it means to be human.

> (Duignan and Collins (2003) in Davies, 2003: 292)

I address my own question 'What does my living theory look like in practice?', and describe how I strive to live my espoused values and living theory in ways that are emancipatory, generative and transformative. I now embark on the Fourth Movement of my thesis.

FOURTH MOVEMENT

Introduction

The Fourth Movement of my narrative reflects two key dynamics, *appropriation* and *expression.* In earlier movements, I have given an account of 'present praxis' in living contexts (First Movement), employed self-study action research as a process of growth in critical consciousness of that praxis (Second Movement), and engaged in dialectical engagement with the literature, accessing both its story and vision as a backdrop, a horizon against which I benchmark my emergent living theory, the 'Score' of my 'Unfinished Symphony' (Third Movement). This Movement originated in experiences of liminality, of resistance and criticism and was fuelled by my need to develop a coherent, challenging and philosophical underpinning of my interventions in school and community contexts, interventions that were mediated through ethical, congruent and collaborative practice.

In the Fourth Movement, I employ a dialectical, reflective hermeneutic to appropriate personal and tacit knowledge (Polyani, 1958), personal and communal experience of living contexts and, finally, theory and insight emanating from dialectical engagement with the varied literatures that fuel my research. Maintaining a critical dialectic throughout, I now address the 'So what?' question, where I take the 'score' of my unfinished symphony and demonstrate its application and embodiment in living contexts. I demonstrate the process and outcomes of the congruent and collaborative engagement of my living, embodied theory within two contexts – one, a school setting, the other a community setting.

In describing my experience of living theory, I also highlight the significance of my intervention and its transformative potential for myself, for those with whom I have engaged throughout my research, and for the living contexts of my work. In particular, I will demonstrate the transformative potential of developing learning communities of shared praxis in the education of social formations (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006). I

include the voices of those I have accompanied and collaborated with during the course of my research to test the rationality and credibility of my claims to new knowledge. In Chapter 6, I describe how I have built on Wenger *et al.,* (2002) to develop my own living theory of communities of shared praxis.

Living theory as embodied theory

Perhaps the most significant feature of my living theory account portrayed in Chapters 5 and 6 is its *embodied* nature - the practice, model of leadership, values and theory described are all lived in daily practice. My narrative traces a major shift from scientifically-driven and oriented epistemologies and methodologies to more democratic, collaborative and participatory ones, and describes the manner in which I have developed and implemented an embodied praxis that integrates theoretical understandings and insights from varied literatures with ongoing reflection and rigorous critique.

My embodied praxis strives to hold in dialectical and dialogical tension three dynamic processes - affirming what is good and of value in current practice (my own and that of others in my research settings), questioning and challenging what is problematic or dissonant, and, finally, through imaginative, courageous response, journeying with others to a new epistemological and ontological space. As Groome (1991: 290) points out, this movement proposes a creative and hope-filled response, embracing concepts discussed in previous chapters - judgement (Lonergan, 1972), assimilation and accommodation (Piaget, 1932), fusion of horizons (Gadamer, 1975) and an epistemology of accompaniment.

Key elements of the Fourth Movement.

At this stage it might be helpful to revisit the key elements of the Fourth Movement that find expression in Chapters 5 and 6. I begin with a definition and clarification of some of the terms I use in my research.

I adopted Groome's (1991: 136) definition of praxis as value-driven and 'purposeful human activity that holds in dialectical unity theory and practice, critical reflection and

historical engagement'. In working to develop communities of shared praxis, I recognised the communal nature and dynamic of our purposeful human activity, the multiple discourses that infuse our interaction and the adoption of 'living logics' (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006) over propositional ones in exploring generative themes and 'untested feasibility' (Freire, 1970: 92). 'Shared' implies a form of engagement that engenders and reflects partnership, shared values and leadership within empowering relationships of mutual accountability.

A corollary to this concept is a view of the community as resource- and asset-rich rather than deficit-driven, and a mode of enquiry that is appreciative (Cooperrider *et al.,* 1990) of the individual and collective tacit knowledge, experience and potential of its members. Using an engaged mode of enquiry, I gradually came to appreciate the value of co-constructing a communitarian learning space and recognising my research participants as co-creators of learning and knowledge.

Each cycle of research involved what Varela (cited in Senge *et al.,* 2005: 29) terms 'suspension, removing ourselves from the habitual stream of thought', or what Bohm (1996: 20) called 'hanging our assumptions in front of us'. Suspension, personal or collective, presupposed a willingness to avoid imposing pre-established frameworks or mental models on what I and research participants see and do. In addressing concerns throughout my research, I facilitated suspension through persistent use of the 'What if....?' question. A key feature of the Fourth Movement is the non-linear *emergent* nature of my epistemology of practice, which I will now describe in Chapter 5 (school context) and Chapter 6 (community context).

CHAPTER 5

'SOUNDING TOGETHER':

GENERATING AN EPISTEMOLOGY OF PRACTICE

Introduction

This chapter explores my role as a facilitator of student leadership development in a second level school in Northern Ireland, and describes the nature of my work with students, teachers and management. It is worth noting, however, that this work influences and is influenced by similar, ongoing work in a network of over fifty schools within the Republic of Ireland. It is also influenced by my work of generating my living theory approach to leadership development with young adults within the local community (described in Chapter 6), and while I describe both contexts in separate chapters, there is mutual interplay between them.

Conscious of my status as 'guest' in educative settings, I address my concerns about the nature of my intervention - my 'gestures of approach' (Eliade, 1958: 36) - under four headings: my engagement with management and staff to reach agreement on content and appropriate processes; developing an induction process for senior students; promoting and implementing a student leadership programme; and finally, concerns about sustainability and transformational practices. While reflecting many of the characteristics of Schon's (1995) 'new scholarship', in time my epistemology of practice evolved through reflective dialogue, evaluation and experimentation. In reconceptualising the role of students as stakeholders within the school community through student leadership development, I have developed my own living theory of educational leadership. I understand 'educational' as helping people to think for themselves, to access and use their voice in contributing to a good social order through the education of social formations.

A key element of my living theory of educational leadership has been the development of an effective and ethical intervention strategy which addresses my concerns. Recognising that effective intervention depends on understanding the 'local' dynamics of change, the need to fully engage intended recipients and stakeholders at all stages and to develop 'local' resources and capacity-building, I adapted Falk's (2003: 16) five-stage design as my intervention framework:

Stage 1: Trigger stage - a situational need is identified.

Stage 2: Initiating stage - collective processes to take concrete steps to address needs.

Stage 3: Developmental stage – development of formal implementation processes.

Stage 4: Management and sustainability stage – reflective response to new challenges.

Stage 5: New Trigger stage begins a new cycle.

I now demonstrate my use of this framework in one of my work settings, as a model of my approach in other educative settings.

5: 1   Trigger and Initiating stages: identifying needs, developing a response

My involvement in this work began as a result of a casual conversation between friends, one (R.), a headmaster in a large grammar school, the other (me) involved in youth leadership development work. Friends for many years, we were sharing the ups and downs of our respective educational roles. As he listened to my account of my work (still at an early stage of development), he reflected on possibilities for his own school and our discussion focussed on implementing a student leadership development programme there. We used the 'What if..?' question, the 'out-of-the-boat' question (Zander and Zander, 2000) to explore possibilities - 'What if we started with Year 8? What would we do? How would we do it?' We applied these questions to each year group in the school, eventually deciding to incorporate a module on student leadership into the Year 13 Induction Process (Year 13 is the first year of A-level courses), which

both senior management and staff felt needed to be re-vamped. He felt that my involvement in A-level induction would be the prelude to setting up a student council and providing a leadership programme for both council and prefects.

A meeting of senior management, Year Heads and Form Teachers was arranged and a lengthy, lively conversation ensued. My role first involved an account of my work with student leadership, which received a mixed reaction, ranging from enthusiastic agreement to extreme caution about its implementation. Second, as an objective but interested outsider, my role involved asking questions to clarify aims and objectives of the induction process. Two questions in particular helped bring about general agreement on aims and objectives:

'If we had an induction process that helped us achieve our aims and objectives,

(a) what would we hold onto in our current process?

(b) what would we need to put in place?'

'What if we had an 'ideal induction process',

(a) what values would underpin it?

(b) what would it look like in practice? What would be happening?'

(Journal: Project 1, April, 2000)

In time, clarity about aims and objectives began to emerge and there was unanimous agreement that the aim of the induction process was to help students

- *become more motivated and focused on their work,*

- *become self-disciplined and take ownership of their own work,*

- *set realistic targets, have clear goals (long-term, short-term),*

- *know how to be committed to their work, operating at maximum potential,*

- *have a good attitude to study and manage their time effectively,*

- *work as part of a group, learning from each other,*

- *develop coping skills.*

<div align="right">(School Induction Programme, June 2000)</div>

It was clear from the above that the focus was entirely on the students, so I asked another question based on Adair's (1988) Three Circles of individual, team, task, to raise the issue of educative relationships.

'What kind of relationships- student/student, student/teacher, teacher/teacher - would facilitate these aims?'

A lively session followed, as *teachers'* contribution to the process became the focus of the group's discussion. The following guidelines emerged:

- *students would bond, get to know each other,*

- *new students from other schools welcomed into year groups,*

- *students and teachers would interact and get to know each other,*

- *the process would unite teachers and students by having a common aim/objective.*

<div align="right">(Journal, Project 1, June 2000)</div>

The meeting ended at that stage, but it was agreed that a project group of four, Vice-Principal, an A-level Form Teacher, A-level Year Head and I, would meet the following day to draw up a plan of action. The smaller group facilitated briefer discussions and decision-making, and a structure for a two-day induction process emerged (Project 1, evidence archive). The first day, mainly involving management and staff, centred on welcoming students, providing a forum for conversations about hopes, goals and objectives for the next two years, and receiving formal input on school structures, processes, syllabi and support systems. I was to be responsible for the second day (a daunting experience, given there were 150 students involved), which was to be focused

on helping students to bond, build effective relationships with staff and fellow-students, and develop learning skills that would benefit their A-level studies.

Further discussions with the project group followed in the latter stages of that academic year, during which we refined the process and I shared with them my emergent practice of student leadership development in other locations. They displayed a remarkable openness to the concept and potential of student leadership processes. I had two further suggestions for the induction process - group work sessions in small circles of 6 - 8 students, facilitated by a teacher, and a tea-break, with tea/coffee and biscuits or scones provided by the school, and where students and staff could mingle and chat.

The induction days were held when school opened in September, and were a resounding success (Appendix 2:1, 2). Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of this event was the interaction of staff and 150 senior students, in small circles, at tea-break, and in large group sessions. My journal reflects my sudden awareness of being part of a community of learning and of practice (Clarke, 1996; Wenger, 1998) as I witnessed Principal, Senior Management, teaching staff, canteen staff, facilities staff, IT staff and students mingling and working together in a relaxed and supportive atmosphere. This episode was significant as it marked the beginning of a school community consciously engaging in inclusive, collaborative relationships, epistemologies and logics (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006; Rayner, 2007). The organisational benefits are attested to in Appendix 2:1.

5:2   My emerging epistemology of practice

Reflecting on the experience outlined above, I realised that our process was rooted in conversations addressing the 'what if?' question, rather than operating out of 'hypothetico-deductive processes accounts of scientific theory' (Wong and Evers, 2001: 119). Reflection on our process after the event, I realised the teachers and I, operating out of shared values of care and concern for students, and openness to effective educative practices and empowering relationships, had experienced collective liminality

and an ethic of risk (Welch, 1990) where the outcomes were uncertain and unpredictable; we were, in fact, co-constructing a space and process that would prove to be of enormous benefit to the students (Appendix 2:1).

The most significant dimension of this early experience of working in a school context was my experience of school as *community,* where all participants contributed to the achievement of a shared vision and purpose. As a member of a religious community of Brothers, I was particularly alert to the potential of building community in educative settings and developing communities of learning and practice. Monitoring this process over a period of years, and recognising the value-driven nature of the work of all participants, I perceived our collaborative work as moving beyond community of practice (Wenger *et al.,* 2002) to developing a community of *praxis* (Schneiders, 2000; Wittberg, 1996). Re-visiting Groome (1991), I re-awoke to the potential of '*shared praxis'* as a framework for understanding our current collaborative interaction but also as a process that gave form to inclusional logics and epistemologies in this and other contexts.

While this experience had its origins in an unplanned conversation among friends, it was to have a profound influence on my practice in other educative contexts, particularly with reference to the development of student leadership processes and structures. Post-event reflection and evaluation, repeated over several years, have led to an emergent process with the following characteristics.

First, by consciously adopting a shared praxis approach, I deliberately eschewed the role of 'expert', with its connotations of control, scientific, prescriptive epistemology and authority status, for that of 'companion' in the learning process, embracing an epistemology of accompaniment where I regarded teachers as colleagues and experts in their own praxis. Rooted in my experience of cross-cultural engagement in Africa and in insights gleaned from appreciative inquiry as a generative metaphor (Bushe, 1998), I emphasised the transformative potential of conversations and stories about people and social structures *at their best.* In establishing a communal ethic, I strove to foster a

dialectical hermeneutic that both affirms and challenges current practice and regards shared reflective practice as the locus of transformation.

A second characteristic was the ethical nature of my intervention, the challenge to *embody* the educative qualities I espouse and to actually *be* the change and improvement that I am striving for. Rather than living my way into a new way of thinking (Fear *et al.,* 2006), I was, in fact, living my way into a new way of *being*. Our conversations of significance bore all the hallmarks of Schon's (1995) new scholarship, where ongoing reflection in and on practice led to a new understanding of our collaborative educative practice. As Fear *et al.,* (*ibid:* 62) point out, collaborative enquiry is essentially a stance that regards participants as colleagues in a jointly defined and undertaken enterprise. I regard the manner in which I have embodied this stance as a standard of judgement by which my research and praxis can be judged.

A third characteristic of my shared praxis approach concerned the nature of the conversations that occurred with the different stakeholders. Reflection on the outcome of the conversations mentioned above alerted me to the potential of 'conversations of inner significance' (Markham, 2002) for developing a relational, communitarian epistemology around generative themes. Regarding my research and praxis as my 'unfinished symphony' highlighted its polyphonous nature, the 'sounding together' of multiple voices, principals, teachers, parents and students, as we conversed around the questions - 'What is *our* concern?', 'How can *we* improve *our* practice?' and 'What if *we* worked together, what might happen?' Buber's (1958) 'I-Thou' became 'I- We', and the researcher and 'the researched other' (Soto and Swadener, 2001: 51) become co-constructionists and co-creators of the learning space and process. We began telling the 'we story' (Zander and Zander, 2000: 181).

By beginning my intervention in a school context with conversation (from the Latin, *conversus,* 'turning toward']) turning towards others in dialogue (Adair and Nelson, 2004), I am 'visiting' (Arendt, 1968, cited in Coulter and Wiens, 2002), carefully listening to the perspectives of diverse and unique individuals, instead of attempting to consider the perspective of a collective, abstract other. In these conversations, I strive to

co-create an 'ideal speech situation' (Habermas, 1970) reflecting freedom to participate in discourse, to challenge assumptions, claims, values and norms, to foster mutual understanding between equal, autonomous but interdependent partners and achieve agreement through discursive and non-coercive power structures (Palmer, 2000).

Encouraging an ideal speech situation raised for me the issue of *voice* - whose voice is speaking? Whose voice is being heard? What are the voices talking about? What voices are absent from the conversation? Awareness of the essential 'voicelessness' of students in educative contexts, of the dominance of bureaucratic, controlling and propositional logics that inhibit students' involvement in their own learning, led to the emergence from my conversations with staff and management of another concern - 'How do I (we) encourage student voice, students' participation in their own learning through developing living logics as generative transformational spaces?' (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006: 39). I address this issue later in this chapter, and describe how I have developed student leadership programmes which provide students with a voice and forum for addressing their concerns.

Changes in praxis leading to transformation of educational settings are generated in relationships of mutuality, which I understand, in Woodward's (1987) words, as

> the capacity to receive with respect and understanding the reality of another, and to offer to the other or others our own reality without pretence, game-playing, indirectness or manipulation.

> (Woodward, 1987: 56)

Appendices 2.1, 2 and 3 describe the development of an induction process that reflected shared ownership by management and staff, identified learning skills for each subject, identified needs of students and provided a forum for students' voice. We developed an implementation plan and evaluative processes, and laid the foundation for relationships of shared praxis. Significantly, this process, through recognition of students' ability to take responsibility for their learning, paved the way for the introduction of a student council and a re-vamped prefect system, described in the next section. The emancipatory nature of an action research approach became evident through our conversations and the 'Senior Prefects Thoughts' document (Appendix 4.1), as we grappled with the

development of an effective induction process, identified ineffective practices and appropriate interventions, and, in the words of Carr and Kemmis (1986: 192), recognised 'the often unseen constraints of assumptions, habit, precedent, coercion and ideology'.

A key learning point for me, and an essential element of my living theory of educational leadership, was a growing awareness of the paradoxical power of liminality, an awareness that was to stand me in good stead in other educative contexts, especially where I experienced resistance and fear. As a guest, I had no formal standing, authority or power, yet the experience of co-developing a student induction process awoke in me an awareness of the power of another form of collaborative and non-coercive influence.

I strongly resonated with Heifetz's (1994: 188) insights on leadership without authority. He suggests that one has more latitude for '*creative deviance*' from the norms of authoritative decision making, and for raising questions that disturb rather than provide answers that soothe and control. For example, when I ask 'What do your students think of this arrangement/ issue/ situation?' or 'How might we empower students to take ownership of educational policies, norms or decisions?', I am frequently met with blank looks, sometimes a clear indication that students' insights, reactions or ideas were rarely sought or listened to. Being a guest also facilitates '*issue focus*', which can keep an issue - student voice, for example - on an agenda that reflects multiple constituencies, issues and perspectives. I have achieved this through presentations at principals' conferences (Glavey, 2005), and through articles in a variety of educational newsletters, one of which was devoted exclusively to students' voice (EDO, 2006, 2005). All are included in my evidence archive. A third advantage according to Heifetz is '*frontline information*', which brings one closer to the detailed experiences of some of the stakeholders in living contexts - as a guest without formal authority, I was able to maintain empathic relationships with management, teachers and students and influence the development of student leadership processes. Power 'with' rather than power 'over' became a significant element of my living theory of educational leadership and praxis, and an important factor in developing what Bohm (1996: 26) terms a 'participatory consciousness'.

Heifetz's (1994: 22) concept of 'adaptive work' - the learning required to address conflicts in the values people hold, or to diminish the gap, the contradiction, between espoused values and their expression in living contexts - provided an insight into the nature of my intervention and my ongoing praxis in educative contexts. Initially, our conversations occurred almost accidentally and evolved out of shared interest in students' welfare; these conversations surfaced and exposed inherent contradictions within individuals and systems and mobilised us to consider and learn new methodologies and new behaviours (Wheatley, 2002: 29), acknowledging each other as equals, improving listening skills through a reflective process in the 'messiness' of the search for a solution and, most notably, displaying a 'willingness to be disturbed' (*ibid:* 34). Addressing Heifetz's (*ibid:* 22) question - 'which stakeholders have to adjust their ways to make progress on this issue?' - heightened my awareness of the absence of students' voice in all our deliberations. Occurring at the early stages of my research, this event helped me to clarify the aims of my research and focus my attention on developing a process whereby students' contribution to their learning contexts could be facilitated and welcomed. I address this issue in the next section.

5:3 Stage 3: Developmental Stage

In this section, I address my concerns regarding the content and process of my engagement with students, initially as part of the induction process described above and, at later stage, as a process of student-leadership development for student councils and prefects. While my initial approach was mediated by the challenge of engaging 150 students in an A-level induction process, it evolved into a focused process of encouraging student voice and facilitating their emergence as active stakeholders and members of the school community.

Adair's (2003) Three-Circles format of the 'I', Team and Task (described in Movement 3), provided the structure for my living theory approach which addresses the Self, the Community and the Task dimensions of student leadership within a community of shared praxis. While Adair frames his theory in terms of individual, team and task

needs, I emphasise the asset-rich nature of students. The programme content which forms part of my evidence archive is too extensive for inclusion in this thesis; however, I include an outline of the process in Appendix 4:3, and include a sample of activities in the description of my student leadership development process. Having already described aspects of my practice Chapter 3, in this section I highlight some key elements of my epistemology of practice and living theory. In section 5:4, I will explain the outcomes of my intervention and include participants' voices to test the validity of my claims.

Addressing the 'Self' in student leadership development (Adair's Circle 1)

One of my concerns in working with students was addressing what Palmer (1998: 50) terms 'our fearful way of knowing' on the part of students, who, when asked to express their anxieties about the content and process, frequently mentioned fear of failure, making mistakes, appearing foolish or embarrassed in front of peers, not knowing the 'right' answers and so on. While assuring them that they were 'worthy of first-class honours in being human beings' and that *they* were the experts in knowing what it meant to be a Year 13 student in their school, allayed their fears to some extent, incorporating insights from Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider, 1990) and Gardner's (1993) Theory of Multiple Intelligence enhanced students' sense of themselves as active contributors to their own learning and to improving the quality of life in their school. My purpose was not to *analyse* these theories in depth, but to explore their application as generative metaphors in my educative relationships.

Bushe (1998) suggests five theories of change embedded in Appreciative Inquiry – social construction of reality, heliotropic hypothesis, organisational inner dialogue, paradoxical dilemmas and appreciative process. By helping students create new images of themselves as potential-rich rather than deficit-based, incorporating their most positive images of themselves into the learning process and challenging their (frequently negative) inner dialogue, resolving paradoxical dilemmas, and appreciative process, I empowered them to become partners in, rather than recipients of, their own learning.

Let me give an example from my practice, where I ask students to place themselves, in silence and within a given time-frame, in order of height. Invariably, the task is not carried out in total silence, and while mentioning this breach of instructions, I highlight actions which helped the group complete its task - each person's willingness to get involved and cooperate, smaller/larger students moving to one end of the room thus providing a starting point, students measuring each other, signalling to each other, nodding approval/disagreement and making decisions, while experiencing and modelling collaborative teamwork. This approach also helps to emphasise leadership as a distributed function within the group and fosters freedom for individual response. In this way, I model two key aspects of appreciative process - tracking and fanning (Bushe, *ibid:* 5). Tracking involves constantly looking for and acknowledging what one wants more of, while fanning amplifies and encourages the behaviour, process and relationships that contributes to effective functioning within the group. By modelling this approach, I actively encourage students to apply it themselves during our time working together and later in the living context of their school.

My living theory approach also incorporates insights from Gardner's (1983) theory of multiple intelligences. I will not debate the theoretical status of multiple intelligences, given that it has been criticised on a number of fronts (Fitzgibbon and Fleischmann, in McNiff *et al.,* 2000: 151); indeed Gardner (1993) himself suggests the debate is ongoing. At an early stage of my research, I again asked 'What if I incorporated Gardner's theory into my emerging epistemology of practice?'

Seated in our circular, co-constructed space, I display on a screen, a summary outline of Gardner' seven intelligences, under the heading '7 Ways of Knowing', each with an explanatory symbol (included in my evidence archive). By inviting students to stand/ raise a hand when I ask questions such as, 'Who can play a musical instrument, has friends, can think logically, takes part in sport, is good at art, is learning a language, can think for themselves?' and so on, they provide for themselves visual evidence of the wealth and variety of intelligence present in the group. This activity also serves to highlight the significant tacit and personal knowledge and experience in each member and available to the group. I employ Gardner's theory for several reasons:

First as a challenge to resist 'structural conflict' (Senge, 1990: 156) or what Palmer (1990: 114) describes as 'the temptation to be inadequate', the temptation, by students, to see themselves as powerless, passive receivers of knowledge and essentially voiceless, rather than persons who can contribute to their own learning and social contexts.

Two, as a ritual of inclusion, which values the natality and unique contribution of each person to the task in hand;

T*hree*, as a deliberate shift of focus from linking intelligence solely with logical-linguistic academic achievement to a more holistic view of human potential;

Four, as a powerful process of fostering an asset-rich community of learning, where each person can contribute to the learning context as a learning partner and as co-constructor of knowledge;

 Five, for students who are essentially voiceless and marginalised in educative environments, Gardner's theory, rather than *giving* students a voice, facilitates them in bringing into being the voice *they already possess*;

Finally, using multiple intelligence as a framework, I have devised an experiential learning process, a form of multiple intelligence obstacle course (outlined in Appendix 4:3) for Year 13 induction and student leadership development.

Addressing the community dimension of student leadership development (Adair's Circle 2)

Several 'what if..?' questions guided my research, and diverted my focus from 'team' to 'community': What if I really operated out of my deep belief in the uniqueness of each individual student? What if I were to incorporate Gardner's theory into my practice and educative relationships? What learning context would students and I co-create so that they might 'do' leadership rather than learning about it? Mindful of my experience of the symphony orchestra which began this thesis, what if I regarded each participant as a part of a new symphony of interdependent learning and action, each bringing his/her

unique blend of tacit knowledge, giftedness and experience to bear on our shared endeavour. Three elements of my practice foster the development of the community dimension of my leadership process: co-construction of learning space, systems thinking (Senge, 1990) and a pedagogy of vulnerability.

(a) Co-constructing the learning space

Allowing students to choose a more appropriate setting for working effectively by re-arranging formal rows of chairs into a large circle effectively generates a sense of ownership of the process and learning space, serves to break down barriers to communication, and leads to enhanced interaction. The circle, traditionally a symbol of inclusion, equality and hospitality, allows everyone to be seen and heard and where, in Senge's (1990: 3) words,

> new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together.

(Senge, 1990: 3)

Sitting in the circle and inviting teachers to do likewise, I model a collaborative dynamic that reflects inclusion and mutuality. I include photographic evidence in my evidence archive.

(b) Systems thinking

My practice is strongly influenced by Senge's (1990) concept of the 'learning organisation' which is characterised by 'continually expanding its capacity to create its future' (*ibid:* 14). While my living theory account includes insights from Senge's concept of the learning organisation, it moves beyond it to embrace Wenger *et al.,'s* (2002) theory of communities of learning and practice, on which I have based my theory of communities of shared praxis. I have adapted systems thinking, Senge's 'fifth discipline', to model community dynamics in three practical ways – using a hanging mobile, a tablecloth, and a spider's web.

By suspending a mobile (I use one with several colourful tropical fish) and touching one of the fish, I demonstrate the concept of equilibrium, and how any change affects the entire system. Similarly, using a tablecloth stretched between four people, I demonstrate that any increase or reduction in the number of people holding the tablecloth requires several adjustments on the part of the other holders to keep the tablecloth at full stretch. Using a visual image of a spider's web, I demonstrate how an insect's contact with part of the web, agitates the entire web.

Providing these hands-on, tangible examples of systems theory heightens participants' awareness of each person's potential contribution to generative or destructive models of community. To reinforce this understanding I devised an activity entitled the 'Community Partnership Wheel', where students are gathered in small groups along the circumference of a large circle. The groups represent each of the stakeholders in the school community - Board, Principal, staff, students, Parents' Council, catering staff, secretarial staff, cleaning and maintenance staff. Using systems thinking, I ask participants to consider the impact of their decisions on the school as community by asking three questions:

> *Will this decision/ action/ suggestion help build or diminish the school community?*
>
> *What do you feel will be the response of each group of stakeholders?*
>
> *What support could each group provide to make this suggestion a reality?*

<div align="right">(Journal, Project 1, September, 2000)</div>

In this way, I am modelling an approach to student leadership that is committed to a vision of school as a partnership and community of learning.

(c) *Employing a pedagogy of vulnerability*

This third element, one that challenges Palmer's (1998) 'fearful way knowing', emerged in response to a variety of influences - a desire to replicate the dynamics of the orchestra described at the beginning of this thesis and the two stories recounted in Chapter 3, my

experience as a missionary and a desire to 'work with' rather than 'do to or for' students. Having experienced a variety of pedagogies of diminishment, my living theory action research fuelled a desire to reframe the imbalance and hierarchical power-structures of student-teacher relationships and to foster student leaders as 'agents-subjects-in-relationship' (Groome, 1998) - agents rather than dependents, subjects rather than objects or passive receptacles of other people's knowledge. This desire was fuelled by my readings from other disciplines - theology (McFague, 1987; Borg, 1997), spirituality (O'Murchu, 1997), missiology (Donovan, 1978; Senior and Stuhlmueller, 1984), cosmology and ecology (Berry, 1988; Wheatley, 1999; Capra, 2002), religious community life (O'Murchu, 2000; Schneiders, 2001) and the literature of leadership, which I have addressed in Chapter 4. My exploration of life-enhancing epistemologies of practice was paralleled and influenced by my ongoing search for life-affirming ways of living community within my own religious community. My living theory research in educational contexts was (and is) challenged and enriched by lived experience in personal community contexts.

My pedagogy of vulnerability operates at three levels - personal, communal and task level. At a personal level I choose to forego an authoritative, hierarchical, and didactic role of 'expert' and dispenser of knowledge, in favour of one that is invitational, collaborative, empowering and dialogical. My role is educative in the sense of 'leading out', bringing to expression what is within each person. I experience myself as vulnerable too in revealing 'the Self who teaches' (Palmer, 1998: 7) in congruent expression of the 'inner' and 'outer' self that accepts (at times, fearfully, but with growing confidence) the resulting ambiguity and paradox.

Sitting alongside the students is an experience of vulnerability, while at the same time expressing solidarity with them and encouraging them to develop their understanding of leadership through experiential learning and independent thinking. As Kohn (1996: 112) points out, reaching out and developing genuine, congruent and warm relationships with students may compromise one's ability to 'control' both students and educative processes. Embodying such relationships, however, models how students might *be* with each other and opens a space that mirrors Vygotsky's (1978) 'zone of proximal

development', focusing attention on the social means by which competence and learning are shared, understanding is mediated and future possibilities are born. In adopting Palmer's (1998: 78) criteria of space - openness, boundaries and hospitality - I am committed to 'hearing people to speech' (*ibid:* 46) through dialectical engagement and a balanced mix of critical analysis and radical openness to new possibility.

Promoting a dialogue of equals raises issues of power, agency and the factors that inhibit the democratising and dialectical potential of student voice. For example, when a student gives a 'wrong' answer to a question, a key learning from my practice is to reply: 'Tell me what was in your mind when you gave that answer'. Invariably, the response reflects a level of insight, wisdom or knowledge that would be unavailable to the group had I responded, 'Sorry, wrong answer!' Encouraging students to find and speak in their own voice on matters of concern identified by them, allowing them space and opportunity to design a response without editing or re-shaping it is an expression of my living theory of educational leadership. For me, it also raises an ethical dilemma in providing such experiences for students when their school culture may be resistant to change and resorts to 'accommodation' (Fielding and Rudduck, 2002: 5) where challenging ideas are modified so that they conform to and do not disturb the existing orthodoxy.

Addressing the task dimension of student leadership development (Adair's Circle 3)

My main concern in designing a student leadership development process was the provision of a learning space where student leaders could come to an understanding of leadership dynamics by 'doing' rather than hearing about leadership and by grappling with leadership issues and challenges through practical experiences. The evolving nature of my work is influenced by insights from several theorists. Sergiovanni (1996: 132), reflecting on constructivist teaching and learning, highlights the power of generative learning which emphasises the social context of learning, one's prior knowledge and the connections between what is being learned and the real world. He emphasises the importance of 'cognitive apprenticeships', excursions into the real world to promote authentic learning. Chomsky (2000: 28) asserts that the best way for students to learn

about functioning democracy is to practise it; I endorse a similar sentiment with regard to student leadership. Lave and Wenger's (1991: 29) concept of 'legitimate peripheral participation' - the process by which a newcomer becomes part of a community of practice, where the meaning of a person's engaged learning is configured through the process of becoming a full participant in a socio-cultural practice - generated my response to the question: 'What if I incorporated this theory in my practice?'

Particular aspects of these theories resonated with my own practice in that it emphasised comprehensive understanding involving the whole person rather than on receiving a body of factual knowledge about the world or about leadership. Lave and Wenger (*ibid:* 33) also emphasised activity in and with the world in the belief that the agent, the activity he/she is involved in, and the world itself mutually constitute each other. Fostering student voice and providing appropriate forms and processes for its expression have become central elements of my practice (Glavey, 2002, 2005).

From theory to practice

The leadership development day, based on students' hopes and concerns (see Chapter 3), incorporates the following: issues of self-awareness, communication, teamwork, problem-solving and decision-making. In the afternoon session, students work on effective meeting procedures, clarifying a vision identifying short, medium and long-term goals for the year ahead, and practical steps towards their implementation. The morning session is focussed on practical learning and development skills, while the afternoon is devoted to action and practical application of skills learned.

Games – learning in and through practice

I use a variety of games to foster experiential learning and reflective practice to reverse the traditional teacher-student relationship, where students are in control of their own learning and have unlimited scope for their creativity. My repertoire includes activities, brainteasers, crosswords, toys, and a variety of materials, lego, board games and games that I have devised myself. The following game, 'Robot Talk Walk', which I devised

from an amalgam of four individual games, illustrates my methodology and epistemology of practice.

Robot Talk-Walk

I divide the group into teams of 5 students, three of whom have the role of Eye, Voice and Robot. The team is given 10 minutes in which to invent a new language of words, sounds and hand signals to guide the Robot. The Eye can see everything but can only communicate through hand signals, and may not move from its assigned position. The Voice is seated facing the Eye, interprets the Eye's hand signals, and verbally gives directions to the Robot in their new language, but cannot see how the Robot is responding. The Robot is blindfolded, may not speak, and has to negotiate its way through a series of obstacles, guided by instructions from the Voice, using the new language. An alternative version involves scattered objects on the ground being collected and placed in a box.

The Eye, Voice and Robot are placed in a line, each about four metres apart, with the Voice seated facing the Eye, with his/her back to the Robot. The game ends when three members of the team have taken the role of Robot.

The students are then invited to sit in their respective teams on the periphery of the Partnership Circle and, using Adair's 3-Circle framework, reflect on their experience and the learning involved. After an appropriate time, participants' experience is shared with the large circle. At this stage, I raise the question of application of learning to their school context and its relevance in their role of student leaders; however, at this stage, my purpose is to raise their awareness of possibilities - in the afternoon session the process is focused on effective action.

Let me highlight the strands of living theory woven through this activity and others that comprise my leadership development process. *First*, my role is peripheral and consists of providing and maintaining a space where learning can take place, presenting a task and facilitating a reflective process on the completed action. *Second*, the students are central to, and in control of, the active learning process where each person can bring

his/her tacit knowledge and experience, creativity and commitment to the task in hand (Appendix 2.4b). Instead of being dependent, passive recipients or receptacles of *my* knowledge, experience and beliefs, they are invited to take responsibility for the task and become generators and co-creators of their own learning. I draw on Freire's (1970: 66) distinction between 'problem-posing education and 'banking education' to foster joint ownership of the learning process. *Third*, teamwork and competitiveness, collaboration and individual contribution are recognised as essential elements of task completion. I have found that activities of this kind highlight the positive dimensions of difference and diversity, particularly within a multiple intelligence framework and the 'Valuing Difference Model' (Walker, in Mabey and Iles, 1994: 212), which values and empowers students to work interdependently and synergistically.

Helping students develop a shared repertoire of skills, styles and approaches is a *fourth* strand of my living theory. Activities like the one described above provides a safe but challenging context, where effective leadership skills can be recognised, explored and practiced, while facilitating a transition from the micro (training sessions) to the macro (using leadership skills in the context of daily life in school). I have adapted activities like *Robot Walk-Talk* as an example of 'constructed liminality' to challenge students' assumptions, involve them in dealing with a task where many of their customary tools and processes are ineffective, challenge them to think and work in new ways, and alert them to the demands of their role as student leaders. Learning from mistakes also facilitates leadership development, and several of the exercises have an inbuilt 'trap' or pitfall for the unwary. During the introductory session, I inform students of this fact and the offer of a month's free school lunch, at the Principal's expense, for anyone who comes through the programme unscathed! An example may help to illustrate this.

In order to improve listening skills, and alert students to the power of assumptions, and the manner in which they process information and jump to conclusions, I ask a series of questions such as the following:

> *'How many months have 30 days?'*

> *'How many animals of each species did Moses bring with him on board the Ark?*

A similar exercise involves a questionnaire with 30 questions. A careful reading (rarely done) reminds the reader that only questions 1 and 30 need be completed. The feedback and reflection session which follows usually results in great hilarity and groans of chagrin at falling into the traps, but post-event evaluation indicates improved appreciation of the complexities of communication. Play and fun are essential ingredients of our mutual engagement and educative discourse, with several activities involving equipment and processes, originally intended for children, being adapted for student (and adult) use.

From Micro to Macro

The afternoon session is conducted with students working in their school groups, with the focus on developing a plan of action to be implemented in the living historical context of their school. Each group forms its own committee, selects chairperson, secretary and timekeeper, and is given guidelines on effective meeting procedure. I then assign them the task of deciding on short-term (to be completed in Term 1), medium-term (completed by Easter) and long-term goals (completed by June, or it may be a project that successive groups of student leaders may carry on). Drawing on the learning of the morning session, the students must complete the task in 20 minutes, with emphasis on strict timekeeping.

In the next stage, each group chooses a short-term and a medium-term goal, and again within a 20-minute time frame, draws up a proposal for implementation using the following guidelines:

What is our goal? Why is this goal worth pursuing? When will it begin and when will it be finished? Where will it take place? Who will carry it out? How much will it cost (in terms of time, effort, support, personal commitment and financial implications)?

 A final decision is then made as to when and how this proposal will be communicated to all members of the Partnership Circle. The 20-minute time-frame represents the effective working time available to student leaders where frequently meetings are scheduled during lunch-break. In this way, the afternoon session is geared towards

concrete expression of students' learning, bridging the gap between learning and action, and helping them develop a coherent, thoughtful and pro-active expression of student voice within their respective learning communities. The day concludes with re-forming the circle for a reflective ritual (see Chapter 3).

While I will discuss further the reflective process and its significance in my research and practice in Chapter 6, I wish to highlight, for now, some important characteristics. Engaging students in a reflective process facilitates and fosters expressions of what Gardner (1997) himself described as 'the eighth and a half intelligence (McNiff *et al.,* 2000: 150) or spiritual intelligence. The reflective practice that permeates the student leadership process honours students' natality and uniqueness, encourages their unique contribution to a good social order in their school contexts, and provides meaning for their lives through linking their own story with that of others in a community of practice and with the example of Edmund Rice, Jesus and other inspirational figures. Reflection and ritual honour the spirituality, individual and collective, of participants and draws on their value-driven response in creative and imaginative ways.

Underlying the use of reflection and ritual is the challenge to engage with the telic dimension of my research and practice and invite others to address the 'sake for which' (Shelton, 1995: 25) we work together, the value orientation that guides our practice and fosters the responsible use of freedom. In my living theory approach to student leadership development, reflection fosters growth in self-awareness and self-appreciation and a deepening awareness of values and congruent moral response. It also defines a shift from practice to praxis, as defined by Groome (1991:136), where students become 'agents-subjects-in-relationship' (*ibid:* 8), consciously aware, reflective, discerning and responsible (Lonergan, 1972), and 'judging actors', where action as defined by Arendt (1958) is an expression of freedom, the capacity of each person to make a difference in the world and the responsibility that accompanies this possibility (Coulter and Wiens, 2002: 17).

One of the key challenges facing me, however, was a growing awareness of the systemic resistance to change within schools, especially with regard to student voice. However,

mindful of the mobile discussed earlier, I understand that working to transform one element of the system generates a new awareness in others. I am encouraged by the fact that from small beginnings with two schools, I am now working with over fifty schools where student leaders meeting with the schools' Boards of Management is a growing reality. My research, however, continues to address issues of transformation and sustainability (see Section 5:4 below).

An experience of being a living contradiction while developing my living theory of educational leadership relates to the problematic nature (Tight, 1996) of the word 'training' to describe my practice. While it is still widely used by colleagues and students, I experienced a growing personal discomfort with its use. I have come to understand my praxis as educational leadership development. I understand 'educational' in terms of bringing to expression, leading out what is already present in the person, and helping young people think for themselves (Appendix 3:1). My stance, while having epistemic and pedagogic consequences, is rooted in my social and moral beliefs. Nias *et al.* (1989: 73) suggest that collaborative attitudes and practices

> ….arise from and embody a set of social and moral beliefs about desirable relationships between individuals and the community of which they are a part, not from beliefs about epistemology and pedagogy.

> (Nias *et al.,* (1989), cited in Telford, 1996: 134)

In reconceptualising teaching, not as imparting knowledge but as building relationships (Fraser, 1998) through communities of shared praxis, I understand my living theory of educational leadership as a generative, transformative metaphor that collaboratively taps into our individual and collective capacity to imagine and strive for an improved social order (Chen, 2001). My living theory encompasses the principles of the *dojo* (see Chapter 3) where the *sensei,* him/herself a learner, accompanies other learners for a time on their journey, before choosing their personal path of generative learning. I will return to this concept in the next section where I address issues of sustainability and transformation.

5:4 Stage 4: Issues of sustainability and transformation

While the early stages of my research centred on improving my practice in terms of delivery of student and young adult leadership development programmes, in time two issues – sustainability and transformation - began to surface on a regular basis. I draw on Fullan's (2003) concept of sustainability as

> the capacity of a system to engage in the complexities of continuous improvement consistent with deep values of moral purpose.

(Fullan, 2003: 10)

This was due in part to meeting with opposition and resistance from a significant cohort of teachers in several schools, the liminal experiences of liaison teachers among their colleagues, and a growing personal awareness of the need for the systemic commitment of <u>all</u> members of the Partnership Circle for student leadership to flourish. While my aim was to invite and encourage teachers to develop a process of leadership development for their own schools, they frequently expressed a lack of confidence in their ability to do so, often using the phrase 'I could never do what you do!' (Personal journal, September 2000). Frequently, liaison teachers' work with student leaders is an *addition* to their teaching work and in many instances is not a recognised post of responsibility. My journal records both my concern and the dilemma facing me were I to continue promoting student leadership. I address this issue under three headings: expanding the conversation first, with principals and teachers, second, with students and thirdly, describing briefly, the elements of a new 'trigger stage'.

Expanding the conversation with principals and teachers

My first response was to initiate a series of conversations with stakeholders along the lines of those described earlier in this chapter. Asking principals to explore their vision for student leadership in their schools, asking them to define a clear role for their students and clarify boundaries, levels of support, and clear lines of communication, was a first step. Approaching principals individually or through a presentation to assembled

principals at their annual conference, in which I portrayed students as an untapped resource was a first step in addressing the systemic potential of student leadership processes (Evidence archive, October, 2005). Principals sharing their experience with colleagues formed an extension of this conversation. The effect of these interventions has been a marked increase in the number of schools participating, rising from three in the initial stages of my research to the current level of fifty.

The demand for leadership development for teachers working with student leaders increased. While teachers are always encouraged to participate in my work with students, they frequently express feelings of inadequacy in shifting from the more directive, authoritative teaching role to one of accompaniment, collaboration and dialogue. A further difficulty arose from the fact that the post of liaison teacher is frequently an additional, voluntary task for teachers and, given the relatively new concept of student leadership, is not recognised as a post of responsibility within the school system. Liaison teachers also encountered a significant level of opposition and criticism from colleagues, which undermined their confidence and ability to function in this role. As a result, there was a steady turnover of teachers willing to be involved.

With colleagues from the Education Office, I developed a series of programmes for liaison teachers (Evidence archive, 2001, ongoing), which are held annually in regional centres around the country. Topics covered include the following: the purpose and rationale of student leadership, effective structures and processes, facilitation skills, leadership skills and team development, conflict management, organisational skills, effective meeting procedures, promoting partnership and communities of practice. The circle format, emphasising our essential equality, is used throughout, teachers' agendas guide the process and the open space format fosters 'conversations of significance' (Markham, 2002), and encourages a sharing of experience, good practice, resources and mutual support within a growing network. These conversations of significance are a central element of my emerging living theory, providing insights into the lived reality of the educative contexts of my work, and a 'reality check' by colleagues on the quality of my interventions as a guest in their schools (Appendix 2). Let me give an example from my practice.

An example from my practice

Returning to the school mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, I wish to describe how conversations around the content of an induction process for senior students led to a major review of practice by all teachers involved. My suggestion that induction be seen as an ongoing, developmental process rather than an isolated event at the beginning of senior cycle led to teachers reviewing their practice, sharing their findings with one another and agreeing on an effective induction process that would unfold over the two years of senior cycle. The teachers addressed the 'How do I improve my practice?' question by using the following questions:

> *What skills do students need to develop to cope with the work in your subject?*
>
> *How and when in the programme of work will your department help your students to develop the skills listed above?*
>
> *Apart from the skills identified overleaf, what other areas for student involvement can we identify?*
>
> *What might we address as part of the induction programme for our Year 13 students?*
>
> *Have you/your department any suggestions or strategies that could be shared with other departments to meet some of these needs?*

<div align="right">(Evidence archive, May 2000)</div>

The ensuing feedback paints a remarkable picture of teachers researching their practice and taking appropriate action to work as a community of learners to improve practice, a situation that continues to bear fruit. All responses were shared and planning was conducted in an atmosphere of collaboration and a shared desire to address the learning and social needs of their students. The need for a student leadership role was recognised and a process began which led to the establishment of an effective student council and a revamped prefect system. The Principal drew attention to improved examination results and a marked reduction in student indiscipline which became evident within a year of these processes being introduced (Appendix, 2:1). The induction process continues to

evolve, and in the current year, Form Teachers are conducting a large part of the process within their own classrooms, ensuring a greater teacher-student and student-student bonding on the first day of term.

Expanding the conversation with students

To ensure my work was addressing the needs of student leaders within their living school contexts, I attend their final meeting of the school year, to help them reflect on their experience, describe their learning, identify support needs for the coming year and celebrate the achievements of their year in a leadership role. These visits help to ensure that I am aware at all times of the realities of student leadership and serve several purposes. In an expanding network, regional gatherings of representatives from all student councils are an annual event, where good practice, challenges and resources are shared by all.

One, they help students reflect on their experience of giving a voice to their fellow students, their experience of leadership and the difference it has made to their lives.

Two, it affirms their generosity and commitment in service of their school community, and it has become standard practice for Principals or Boards of Management to acknowledge this service at assemblies and by hosting a celebratory meal in a restaurant.

Three, the meeting gives me an opportunity to honour their contribution to my living theory of student leadership and practice, critiquing my work and making valuable suggestions. It ensures that my praxis is critiqued by participants on an annual basis, addresses the lived reality of students' (and teachers') lives, and honours the collaborative and dialogical nature of the standards of judgement against which my work may be judged.

Four, by engaging participants in evaluating our collaborative praxis, I am honouring Polyani's (1958) concept of 'commitment' to ensuring that my personal knowledge is saved from becoming merely dogmatic and subjective. It serves too as recognition and an acknowledgement of their status as co-researchers and co-creators of living theory and their contribution to my emerging epistemology of practice.

Let me give an example from my practice.

Examples from my practice: Students

One of the standards of judgement by which my living theory may be judged is the manner in which I have facilitated student leaders to become co-researchers of their own practice while contributing to the development and implementation of effective student leadership processes in their school. The following is one example of this.

I was invited to revamp the school's prefect system and enhance its effectiveness within the school community. I began as usual by asking students about their hopes and concerns about their role as prefects. Among the concerns raised - working as a team, organisational skills, credibility and effectiveness, public speaking, communication skills - one in particular centred on being an effective prefect with their assigned year group. I then re-phrased their concern as 'How do I improve my practice as a Year X prefect?', reminding them that, as Year 14 students, they were the school's experts in what it meant to be a student in each year group from Year 8 to 13.

As we addressed the concerns listed above, the most significant outcome came in response to my question - 'What ONE improvement in your practice as prefect would best contribute to your effectiveness?' After intense discussion, the group agreed that a key contribution to improved practice was '*To know and understand the year group assigned to us.*'

To move the process a stage further, I then invited them to address three questions:

> (a) *In light of your experience, what are the issues facing the students in your year group?*
>
> (b) *What advice would you give to these students to help them deal with these issues?*
>
> (c) *What support is required from Senior Prefects to address these issues?*

Their response (Appendix 4: 2) demonstrates clearly their deep insight and commitment to improving students' experience of school. They presented it to Senior Management and to the Year Heads responsible for each year group, and three prefects gave a presentation to the entire staff at the beginning of the new school year. As part of their presentation, the prefects gave practical examples of how teachers could support them in their leadership role. My conversations with teachers after these events reflected a heightened awareness and appreciation of student leaders' contributions to the smooth running of the school, a new awareness of how teachers could support student leadership development and a renewed sense of the potential of teacher-student collaboration. This document, updated annually, continues to provide guidance for new prefects and has been shared with prefects in other schools in the network. Here is an extract:

'What are the issues facing the students in your assigned year group?'

Yr. 8: 'The size of the school, especially for boys coming from the small rural schools.'

Yr. 10: 'Trying to revise for Key Stage 3 exams can be difficult. These are the first external exams since coming to the school.'

Yr.11: 'Taking on new subjects and making the transition from Key Stage 3 into GCSE.'

Yr. 12: 'Should a boy leave school, go to the Training Centre to do a trade or stay on to do AS Levels.'

'What advice would you give to the students in your year group to help them deal with these issues?'

Yr.8: 'Work closely with the form Teacher'.

Yr.9: 'Try to motivate students with a variety of activities

Yr.10: 'Take time to talk boys through what the subject involves – best aspects and things which the students may find difficult.'

Yr. 11: 'Senior prefects to organise an assembly to talk about the issues arising in Year 11, entitled 'What we (senior prefects) would do, if we had a second chance.'

(Extract from Senior Prefects' Reflection Document. 25.2.05)

The core element of the student leadership process is its reflective dimension. While reflection permeates the whole process, I incorporated an end-of-year evaluation that deepened prefects' experience of their role, made their learning explicit and provided a body of knowledge for the incoming team of prefects. Adair's (2003) Three-Circles of Self, Team and Task, already the basis of the leadership process, served as a model of evaluation where the experience and contribution of the prefects was reviewed and critiqued. Based on our experience of the early stages of my research, and with the co-operation of senior management, the evaluative process addressed the following questions:

1. *As you reflect on the experience of being Senior Prefect, describe 2 challenges / issues you dealt with.* [Self and Task]

2. *What were the (a) good (b) difficult experiences you had to deal with as Senior Prefect?* [Task]

3. *What has being Senior Prefect meant to you?* [Self]

4. *Give an example of when you felt you were working as a team.* [Team]

5. *What aspects of the leadership programme helped you in your role as Senior Prefect?* [Leadership development]

6. *What would you recommend for the incoming Senior Prefects in terms of (a) Training (b) Support (c) Role of Senior Prefects.*

(Senior Prefects Evaluation Process, Appendix 4:2)

A member of Senior Management, the Liaison Teacher and I joined the prefects for this process which is conducted in an open, collaborative manner. Seated in a circle, each person shared on his/her experience over the past year. The benefits of this process include a sharing of the learning and experience gained, the recognition and honouring of each person's contribution to the life of the school community, and the Principal and Liaison teacher (who also shared their perceptions and insights) were fully conversant with the lived reality of challenges facing the prefects. The manner in which the

Principal and staff *modelled* collaborative engagement was particularly significant to the development of student leadership processes within the school community. A large body of embodied knowledge was thus placed at the disposal of the school community. This is particularly evident when the outgoing prefects hand over to the new team of prefects where they pass on *their* living theory of student leadership to a new generation of student leaders in a process called *'Do's and Don'ts: Advice for new prefects'*.

In evaluating their own experience, the staff members and student leaders also fulfil the role of 'critical friends' (Appendix 2: 1,2 and 3) providing invaluable critique, reality checks and support as we form communities of shared praxis.

In describing my practice in this way, I understand my living theory of educational leadership as a generative metaphor for triggering the collective capacity of teachers and students for value-driven reflection and action. I agree with Binney *et al.* (2005: 12) that my practice embodies the capacity to release the collective intelligence and insight of individuals, groups and organisations.

5: 5   Ongoing developments

I have described my practice in one particular school, but the process is being repeated in an increasing number of schools. However, my research and practice have moved on as the potential for student leadership development is now widely recognised and new possibilities are being explored. I fully concur with McNiff and Whitehead's (2002: 56) metaphor of 'an iterative spiral of spirals', an exponential developmental process, as a descriptor of the evolutionary nature of my practice. These developments are currently at an early stage but, building on current foundations, they display great hope for the future.

From the humble beginnings of the first such school in Waterford in 1802, Edmund Rice Schools have played an important role in the history of Irish Education for over two hundred years. A new and significant chapter in the history of these schools is beginning with the setting up of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST) to hand on responsibility

for approximately a hundred and twenty schools to a group of lay colleagues. The Charter Document (2006: 7) subscribes to the holistic vision of education of Edmund Rice expressed in the following key elements:

- Nurturing faith, Christian spirituality and Gospel-based values;

- Promoting partnership;

- Excelling in teaching and learning;

- Creating a caring school community;

- Inspiring transformational leadership.

In the roll-out of the Charter to school partners, it was significant that those most affected by this unique event - the students - were not considered. Drawing attention to this glaring omission, I strongly urged that students be involved in drawing up a student-friendly guide to the Charter and in its implementation. With two colleagues from the Charter Implementation Office, I included a Charter session in the regional gatherings of student leaders. The Charter was explained to them, and their contribution to its implementation has proved to be both challenging and invaluable (Evidence archive, ERST 2007-2008). A further gathering took place in which the students offered suggestions, ideas and resources for involving their fellow-students in launching and implementing the Charter in each school. Further meetings have been planned and a Charter Implementation Team comprising parents, teachers and students has been established in each school of the network. This project is in its infancy, but already its impact is being felt as school communities are awakening to the enthusiasm, energy and creativity of students and their commitment to the five elements of the Charter, as they use their voice to further a collaborative, holistic contribution to their own education and the education of their educative social formations.

Three concrete examples indicate the enormous potential of student leadership for an improved social order. One is the growing demand for student leadership development in primary schools in the form of student councils and class prefects. A second positive

development is the increasing acceptance of students involved in peer support and the felt need for student leadership development through mentoring programmes. Finally, due to the huge influx of foreign nationals into Ireland, student leaders are regarded as a valuable resource in the task of inclusion and integration of immigrant students and their families into society. Two projects are already in place and I am currently involved in developing student leadership processes to address these needs.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described the emergence, the process and the implementation of my living theory approach to leadership development for students in second-level schools. I have described the development of an induction process for senior students and a student leadership process that reflects relationships of mutuality, collaboration and shared values. By enabling students to engage in a shared praxis approach and contribute to a good social order within their school community in ways that shape their identity, participation and agency, I foster a 'fusion of horizons' which, as Gadamer (1989) points out, leads to an ever-expanding horizon through the development of the Aristotelian idea of practical wisdom or *phronesis* (Aristotle).

Using Adair's 'Three-Circle' model of Self, Team and Task, I described how I have assisted students, as 'agents-subjects-in-relationship' (Groome 1991), to put this practical wisdom to good use in creating a good social order. In particular, I have described my efforts to involve participants as co-researchers and co-generators of their living theories, expressed in dynamic, value-driven processes within a community of shared praxis. In facilitating the emergence of student voice, I portray young people as asset-rich rather than in terms of needs and deficiencies, as producers and creators of living theory rather than mere consumers of others' knowledge. While my praxis reflects the characteristics of the new scholarship, it contributes nonetheless, to 'a transformative discourse for education' (Shor, 1992: 237). Adopting a systemic perspective (Senge, 1990), I recognise the potential of my embodied educative engagement to challenge and transform repressive ideologies by developing an alternative paradigm within a community of shared praxis. Student leadership is an

increasingly accepted and lived reality in schools but there is some distance to go before it becomes, universally, part of the fabric of the school.

In Chapter 6, I describe my practice in developing a community of shared praxis and its potential for the education of social formations (Whiteheadand McNiff, 2006). In this chapter, I described my work and research in schools; Chapter 6 is an account of my practice in a local community context. While the two contexts are described separately, I understand my practice as a unified whole, constantly enriched and challenged by its expression in different contexts.

CHAPTER 6

CULTIVATING A COMMUNITY OF SHARED PRAXIS.

Introduction

In this chapter, I explore my leadership development practice with young adults and their contribution to a good social order within their local community.

My focus in this chapter (as part of Movement 4) is the manner in which I have fostered and developed a community of shared praxis and collected data to illustrate my living theory and epistemology of practice. In developing young adult leadership processes, I engaged young people in 'doing' leadership through involvement in a summer camp for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, with emphasis on shared and distributed leadership, collegiality and non-hierarchical relationships. As I have done in Chapter 5, I have involved participants as co-researchers and co-creators of my living theory, through relationships of reciprocity, mutuality and dialogue. It is important to note that in this instance, my practice in cultivating a community of shared praxis with young adults informs and is informed by my embodied living of community life within the religious order of which I am a member and a community leader. While this chapter illustrates the 'Score' of my 'Unfinished Symphony', it also gives expression to the voices of young adults and their 'unfinished symphonies' which are interwoven with my own; the data and evidence provided will clearly demonstrate this. In this chapter, I will describe the genesis of my work, its rationale, and the developmental process that underpins my living theory approach to developing a community of shared praxis. I will explore my understanding of such a community and the models of leadership that foster and sustain it.

6:1   Origins and growth of an Edmund Rice Camp

A traditional feature of Christian Brother education has been the contribution of Brothers to extra-curricular activities in the fields of arts, culture and music, crafts, sport, athletics, outdoor pursuits and travel, at home and abroad. While all pupils were encouraged to participate, the Brothers, in the spirit of Blessed Edmund Rice, paid particular attention to pupils from marginalised and disadvantaged backgrounds. Long before summer schemes and projects became a mainstream activity, Brothers in Edmund Rice schools around the world organised many such projects during the long summer holidays. In the 1970s, for example, during the worst days of the Northern Ireland conflict, Brothers who were working there (myself included) brought hundreds of children from troubled areas of Belfast, Derry, Omagh, Newry and Armagh to one of our training colleges in the Republic each summer, to provide some relief from the traumatic events that impacted on their daily lives.

In the 1980s however, with an aging membership and decline in numbers, the number of Brothers involved in summer projects decreased, and in some cases the summer projects themselves ceased. In Australia, however, Brothers enlisted senior students to help run the projects, and thus the Edmund Rice Camps (ERCs) were born. The camps are largely funded by the Christian Brothers, and run by young adult volunteers, inspired by the vision and spirit of Edmund Rice and committed to principles of social justice. A unique feature of an ERC is the 1:1 ratio of leader to child, to ensure that each child, usually from a disadvantaged background, receives the maximum personal attention, encouragement and support during the camp. Leaders serve as positive and affirming role models for the children, some of whom may lack such support in their daily lives. This chapter describes my work with a group of young adults in establishing an Edmund Rice Camp, the manner in which I have addressed my concern with improving my practice of developing young adult leadership processes, and through collaborative, collegial and reciprocal engagement, establishing a community of shared praxis.

The purpose of an ERC is the development of young adult leaders, providing them with an opportunity to be of service to disadvantaged children from their local community by taking responsibility for planning, organising and running a summer camp. A key feature of my work is the emphasis on fostering and sustaining a *community* of young leaders, and this chapter explores my emergent living theory approach to achieving these aims through the various stages of planning, preparing and organising a camp with young leaders, developing sustainable praxis, and providing written, photographic and audiovisual evidence of the development of my epistemology of practice and of new living theory. In the process, I give an account of the ideological, conceptual and practical elements underpinning my research and practice.

Why community?

My interest in building community within each of my practice contexts has several antecedents. The most significant is my lived experience as a member of a religious community and the support, acceptance, shared vision and challenge that community living provides. The potential and benefits of community living are well documented in the literature of community life (Edmondson and Ineson, 2006; Schneiders, 2000, 2001; O'Murchu, 1999), highlighting its contribution to personal and interpersonal growth. Christian Theology emphasises the communitarian dimension of God (Radcliffe, 2005; Macy, 1999), and my belief in, and commitment to, building community are core elements of my research and praxis. This commitment is embodied in my membership of a religious Brotherhood, with its relational emphasis on *being* 'brother' to others, rather than the more hierarchical nature of clerical status. In stressing community as constitutive of my research, I recognise its transformative potential (McNiff and Whitehead, 2000; Wheatley, 2005), and through embracing values of collegiality, mutuality, and collaborative endeavour, I explain how these epistemological and ontological values serve as living standards of judgement in assessing my claims to knowledge.

My commitment to community was further enhanced by experiences such as those recounted in Chapter 3, the accounts of the Nuffield Project and the Old Woman's Hut.

Both events were examples of difference and diversity being subsumed into, indeed enriching, a dynamic community experience where each member's contribution was recognised and appreciated. Reflecting on these two experiences while addressing the research question 'How do I improve my practice?' prompted me to focus more intently on community as a metaphor and alternative paradigm for my emerging practice. Several insights emerged over time as I addressed this question and later in this chapter I will locate them in practice contexts.

I have come to understand community as a privileged setting where the identity and natality of each individual finds support and expression. The contribution of community to individual growth is captured in Mbiti's statement (in Radcliffe, 2005) - 'I am because we are'. One's identity, one's natality is configured within living community settings and, as coming-of-age rituals and ceremonies of native traditions (e.g, the Siyumboka ceremony of the Bulozi of Western Zambia) illustrate, integration into a community is predicated on acceptance of one's place and role within the community. Genuine community recognises growth as a relational process and is, in Radcliffe's (*ibid:* 140) words, a place 'in which we learn to say 'I' with confidence'.

Another dimension of living community reflected in my practice is the fact that it is not simply an aggregate of individuals living or working together, but is, in Lonergan's words (cited in Macy, 1999), 'an achievement of common meaning' arising out of shared experience, values and commitments, embodied in practice. 'Achievement' suggests that community is not a given but is a dynamic, creative and unfolding process rather than a rigid social structure. The use of the word 'cultivating' in the heading of this chapter was deliberately chosen as a result of reflection in and on practice, and reflects a clearer insight into the nature of my educative relationships. Achieving common meaning is work in progress and, as I will demonstrate, greatly helped by the stories, individual and collective, that are woven through, and embodied in, the life of the community.

I have had many life-affirming, vibrant and uplifting community experiences but destructive, rigid and conflictual community life experiences ensure that I do not naively

presume that community, like Popsy, 'just growed'. A concern that fuelled my research related to the nature of relationships within community - 'How, in cultivating community in living contexts, can I ensure that a member is not swallowed up, diminished or silenced by oppressive structures or relationships?' Recognising that meaning is not a fixed, permanent achievement but is in fact an ongoing developmental and emergent process, a second concern of my research involved addressing issues of power, control and leadership. What would 'improving my practice' involve when faced with the challenges, dilemmas and paradoxes of pluralistic communal living, involving diversity and commonality, uniqueness and sameness, separateness and bondedness, conflict and harmony, sensitivity and insensitivity, and differences of meanings, hopes, fear and understandings? (Woodward, 1987: 100). I will describe how I have used reflective practice, sacred space and ritual to address these paradoxes and how a model of shared and distributed leadership fostered a vibrant community of shared praxis, mutual engagement and 'a shared resonance of spirit' (Daloz *et al.,* 1996: 77).

I sensed at an early stage of my research the potential of community to embrace and foster expression of a variety of concepts: Gadamer's (1989) 'fusion of horizons', Senge's (1990) concept of the learning organisation and Wenger's (1998) 'communities of practice', Gardner's (1993) Theory of Multiple Intelligences, Cooperrider's (1990) 'Appreciative Inquiry', insights on the primacy of relationships within 'the new science', the 'new story' (Wheatley, 1999; 2005), Capra's (2002, 1996) metaphor of the 'web of life', and networks of interconnectedness that are the essence of living systems and sustainable communities. Coupled with my understanding and experience of the Irish *meitheal,* the community dimension of life in remote African villages, and my experience of Small Christian Communities (SCC) (O'Halloran, 2002), the conviction that sustainable youth leadership development could best be fostered and nourished within a supportive community began to surface in my research. My experience in youth work and psychotherapy also led me to concur with many social critics of the cultural individualism rampant in society, who feel that a desire for community and spiritual depth (Wittberg, 1996; Loeb, 1999) is one of the most pressing issues facing our post-modern Western society. By cultivating community, I felt I was responding to this desire. Finally, I believed that a community would provide a nurturing and challenging

context where Adair's 'Three Circle Model' of leadership - described in Chapter 4 and incorporating the three elements of individual, team and task - could best be implemented.

What kind of community?

Having made the decision to cultivate community, I was faced with another dilemma - what model of community would give expression to the concepts mentioned in the preceding paragraphs? There existed a significant difference between the context described in Chapter 5 and that described in this chapter. The latter situation was free of any pre-existing structure, culture and historical, normative relationships - in effect it comprised a green-field site for community development, leaving me with considerable freedom and latitude to explore and embody Donovan's (1978) idea of a community of mutual accompaniment.

As I was developing my own living theory of educational leadership, I was considering the nature of a living community that could itself co-create, co-evolve its own living theory. Insights from two diverse fields - biology and theology - influenced my thinking and practice. Wheatley (2005: 24) and Capra (2002: 31), draw attention to the *autopoietic* nature of living systems, the system's ability to undergo continual structural changes while simultaneously preserving its web-like pattern of organisation and relationships. According to the theory of autopoiesis, recurrent interaction with its environment triggers structural changes in a living system, without directing or defining them. From a theological perspective, Lonergan (in Macy, 1999: 156), proposes the concept of 'mutual self-mediation'. Recognising that community life is essentially dynamic and emergent, he proposes that a change in a community's normative meaning, its identity, opens up new possibilities for its future:

> The self-mediation of a community, its revelation of itself to itself, occurs in its living, in the way it revises its common meanings, values and commitments in response to challenges and opportunities for growth.

(Macy, 1999: 156)

Lonergan also proposes that each individual in community engages in a process of self-mediation to him or herself and to others by his/her manner of living within the community. In light of the interactive and dynamic nature of community living, Lonergan claims that *mutual* self-mediation, a process of mutual influence and transformation, takes place. Through this process, the meaning embodied in an individual or community becomes visible and is essentially an expression of praxis reflecting Lonergan's norms of attentiveness, intelligence, reasonableness and responsibility.

As Macy (*ibid:* 156) points out, mediation of meaning through reflective practice and communication, is potentially transformative of a person, a community or a situation. To ensure our communication is transformative, I adopted as guiding principles, Habermas' (1987) criteria for achieving intersubjective agreement - that all communication be comprehensible, truthful, appropriate and respectful. In light of these insights and given that my action research was structured on Groome's (1991) 'five movements' of shared praxis, I decided to explore the concept of a community of shared praxis, where my 'unfinished symphony' engaged with those of all participants. As a community, individually and collectively, we would embody the five movements - naming present praxis, critical reflection on this praxis, making accessible the Christian Story and Vision, dialectical hermeneutic to appropriate this story and vision to that of all community members, and finally, devising and implementing an engaged response in our historical context.

6: 2   Cultivating a community of shared praxis: my living epistemology of practice

It began as a conversation with twenty four A-level students, boys and girls, sitting in a circle having completed a student leadership development programme. I was sharing with them my experience of Edmund Rice Camps, how they were one expression of Edmund Rice's spirit and his concern about issues of societal marginalisation, an expression that young people their age could engage in, take ownership of, and would

benefit children from disadvantaged backgrounds. H., one of the girls asked: 'Could *we* run an Edmund Rice Camp?' I responded in the affirmative, but asked a further question: 'If Edmund Rice were alive in Omagh today, how would his camp be organised and run, what issues would he be concerned about, and what kind of relationships would be a feature of the camp?'

Their responses reflected a real concern for disadvantaged children and a desire for life-giving and life-affirming relationships of equality, acceptance and fairness, the kind of relationships they had experienced during the leadership sessions. Influenced by my research in school contexts, I decided to adopt an action research approach (McNiff and Whitehead, 2002: 72) to setting up an Edmund Rice Camp and asked a further question: 'What are your concerns?' The following are a sample of their replies:

> *Will we be able to plan, organise and run the Camp effectively?*
>
> *What will we say to the children and what will we do with them?*
>
> *Will we be able to 'control' unruly children?*
>
> *What happens if we don't get on well with each other?*
>
> *Who will be in charge when none of us has any experience of a camp?*
>
> *How will we organise ourselves?*

<div align="right">(Personal Journal, October,1999)</div>

My concerns centred on how I might work with this group of young leaders to help them develop their leadership abilities, to provide them with opportunities of 'doing' leadership and to address issues of good practice and sustainability. In light of the content of earlier paragraphs and the new epistemology (Schon, 1995), I decided to engage with them as co-researchers and co-creators of living theory. Using Adair's (2003) three-circle format, we grouped concerns under three headings - concerns about self, team and task.

The next action research question I used was 'What will we do about our concerns?' (McNiff and Whitehead, 2002: 72). While being eager to become involved, all of them expressed feelings of inadequacy in relation to the task and agreed that training would

be a priority; they requested my help in developing the skills necessary for working effectively with children. If they were to provide a good experience for the children, they recognised the need to be united, to have agreed procedures to which everyone was committed, that each person's gifts, talents and energies would be harnessed and made available to the group. They expressed a strong desire and a commitment to counteract the effects of disadvantage experienced by the children, while voicing some apprehension about their ability to do so. Concerns about leadership roles and structures also surfaced, but they were happy for me to assume the leadership role and accepted my guidance in preparing for a camp.

Their feedback was significant in several ways. I was struck by how unaware they were of their great gifts and talents, individual and collective, yet willing to give freely of their time, and energy to make the camp a wonderful experience for the children. I realised too their desire to be part of a group that was supportive, shared a common vision and espoused and lived its values. Their comments echoed an ethic of care, compassion and a willingness to help create a good social order through living out their values.

Their responses also carried implications for my efforts to improve my practice. What would be the nature of a group that embraced the values expressed above? Their desire to express and embody individual and collective values spoke to me of the possibility of a shared praxis approach; the desired quality of interpersonal relationships mirrored not only that of an effective team, but also my experience of life-affirming community. However, the young people's decision about leadership of the process resulted in my first experience of being a living contradiction. While claiming to espouse values of democracy, collaborative process and reciprocal relationships based on respect for the uniqueness and natality of each individual, I was aware of my inclination to adopt a hierarchical, 'command and control' model of leadership 'over' these 'inexperienced' young people. I was acutely aware that, accustomed to this form of leadership in organisations to which they already belonged, they expected no different within the fledgling ERC. This dilemma marked a key axial point in the camp's development.

This dilemma was encapsulated in a series of 'what if?' questions informing my emerging epistemology of practice. What if I were to diverge from common educative discourses that viewed young people as leaders of tomorrow and instead presented an alternative vision of young people as leaders for today? What if I operated out of a model of youth leadership development which viewed young people as asset-rich, rather than many prevention models which are based on pathologies and deficiencies of young people and where the boundaries of youth involvement is determined solely by adults? What if I worked towards developing a community of shared praxis, where a shared resonance of spirit (Daloz *et al.,* 1996: 77) fostered life-affirming and life-enhancing relationships, and where the collective vision, energies and giftedness of these young leaders could be harnessed in the service of social transformation? My epistemology of practice addressed these questions under three headings: developing a community of shared vision, resonance of spirit and life-affirming relationships; reflective practice and ritual; and, finally, embracing a model of shared and distributed leadership. While I described them separately, they are in fact an integrated whole which is embodied in the 'action' of the camp process. In the process, I also address McNiff's and Whitehead's (2002: 72) question - 'How will I gather evidence to show that I am influencing the situation?' - by providing written, photographic and video (including one by an independent television company, which was aired on national television) evidence of the evolution and dynamics of an ERC.

6:3   Co-creating a community of shared praxis

Here is a description of how we organise our sessions together. First, we always sit in a circle (Appendix 3:1). When I asked the young leaders to place themselves in order of importance, after an initial hesitancy, they formed a circle. When asked why, they spoke of equality and inclusion, of a circle of friends, of each person being seen and heard, of each person being able to contribute and have their contribution accepted and welcomed. They spoke of lack of barriers, a lack of hierarchical status and of the circle being complete only when everyone was part of it. All gatherings for preparation,

meetings or reflective evaluations, begin and end with members seated in a circle (Appendix 1, DVD 1). By including myself in the circle, I am reinforcing the concept of a dialogue of equals, relinquishing the role of 'the expert', who is 'in charge', and embodying Donovan's (1978: vii) idea of going with these young adults to new epistemological and ontological spaces.

While that decision led to perhaps the most enriching experience of my educative practice, it was made with a significant degree of apprehension and anxiety, a fear of 'losing control' that echoed Palmer's (1998) fearful way of teaching and Winter's (1989: 60) concept of risk, which seemed like a threat to, and a critical divergence from, my customary, taken-for-granted processes and coping strategies. I describe four areas of learning arising out of this experience.

1. Shared vision, resonance of spirit and life-affirming relationships

In Chapter 3, I demonstrated how I use metaphor and story to foster a shared vision leading to congruent engagement within historical contexts. Using generative metaphors of community, symphony and circle significantly influenced both the theory and practice of our relationships and our action. For example, I used as a metaphor of shared praxis the concept of an African Village where the villagers' huts formed a circle, enclosing an open space where villagers interacted socially, shared concerns, hopes and personal and material resources. All decisions relating to village life were made within this circle, and no decisions were made until all the villagers contributed to the final decision, following a consultation process where all were involved. The giftedness, talents and potential of each individual were acknowledged and availed of. Leadership was a shared and distributed function and not the prerogative of any single individual.

Applying the village community metaphor to our circle helped create a shift from 'I-Thou' (Buber, 1958) to 'I-We' attitude, where the open space (Owen, 1997) of the circle is the locus of communal concerns and decision-making. This space always contains a symbolic centre-piece (described in the next section) - an icon, camp banner, candle or photograph - which serves as a visible reminder of why we come together. We negotiate a small number of 'ground rules' of which everyone takes ownership and which guide

our ways of being together. These 'rules' operate on a covenantal basis (Brown, 1996) rather than on a contractual one, as a series of commitments to a shared vision and shared values rather than enforced or bureaucratic conformity. In telling the story of Edmund Rice, I propose a model of response to social marginalisation and disadvantage that has relevance for today; as he embodied and gave expression to values of justice, care, social responsibility and spirituality in his historical context, camp leaders have an opportunity to espouse, embody and express these values in *their* way, in *their* historical setting. During the work of the camp (described below), in the interaction of the leaders with each other and with the children, this embodied resonance of spirit finds expression (Appendix 1, DVD 1) as is illustrated in the written reflections of the leaders. (Evidence archive, 22nd July, 2006. To preserve anonymity, only leaders' initials are included, but the original reflections form part of my evidence archive).

> *'One thing I loved about this week was coming home sweating, smelly, dirty and covered in glitter/glue/paint and the feeling of being unbelievably tired ..but then realising that you'd made a difference to the kids' lives and just feeling happy that I'd done that.'* [D.2006]

> *'I felt that all the leaders worked well together, not because they had to but because they wanted to.'*[A. 2006]

> *'Felt like I made a difference to a child's life and gave them an enjoyable week in the summer that they wouldn't usually have. (I got)... a sense of self-belief and confidence and a sense of responsibility on how to deal with various situations.'* [2006 leader's reflection]

> *'Commitment – I am happy to say I thought I was 100% committed to the week – but next year I am for 101%!! Got an enhanced love of kids - they're great. It has made me wanna (sic) do more schemes/stuff with them - definitely coming back next year - (got) appreciation and insight into others' talents.'* [B.2006]

> *'Laughs galore!! A real sense of comradery* [leader's spelling] *existed. Having taken the time to do this for no other purpose than to give the kids a good time, I*

feel I have really made a difference for these kids' lives - I dedicated myself 200% because I wanted to e.g. not even returning home after holidays- heading straight to camp.' [S. 2006]

(Originals in my evidence archive)

A key contributory factor to resonance of spirit is honouring and celebrating diversity and the uniqueness and natality of each member. Following the process described in Chapter 5, I use Gardner's (1993) Theory of Multiple Intelligence, Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (1990) to emphasise difference as a value, the locus of infinite possibility and as a gift to the emerging community. By telling stories from the Gospels (e.g. The Parable of the Talents, the Feeding of the Five Thousand), stories of Edmund Rice, *'Fly, Eagle, Fly'* and *' The Rainbow Story',* and encouraging the leader's to share their own stories of camp, I emphasise how each person contributes to, and animates, good practice and community capability.

2. *Reflective practice and Ritual*

I understand this element of practice as central to my living theory approach to cultivating a community of shared praxis, an element that embraces Groome's (1991) Movements Three, Four and Five. While reflective practice permeates all ERC activity, there are fixed times set aside for reflection. Leadership sessions begin and end with reflection, morning and afternoon periods of reflection (for leaders and children) occur during the week of the camp, and there are two extended reflection sessions at the beginning and end of the camp. This process helps to foster and maintains a reflective rhythm which motivates and energises while keeping the focus, ethos and values of ERC as a horizon (Gadamer, 1978) or backdrop to practice. This reflective rhythm enables new learning, insight and good practice to become immediately available to the entire group and contribute to the emergent and evolving camp culture.

Reflection for Leaders

In Fig. 6.1 Camp Leaders seated in a circle around a centre-piece of an ERC banner, icon and leader's T-shirt engaged in reflection on the day's experience 20th July, 2006.

To illustrate what happens in practice, I give two examples of reflective process that supports the work of the camp and provide video and photographic evidence to accompany my description, mindful of its limitation in capturing adequately the atmosphere, the presence and the spirit permeating these sessions.

In Fig. 6.1, the leaders are gathered in a circle, with a camp banner as a centrepiece, forming continuity with last year while looking forward to the banner which will emerge from this year's camp. The banner includes a symbol from the ERC Logo, and handprints of every child and leader. Lying on the banner is the Edmund Rice Icon. The spiral is a key symbol of the camps. In the icon, it is behind Edmund, and flows through

him as he reaches out to those in need. An ancient Celtic symbol, it represents God and creation constantly evolving and emerging into infinity. In the icon, it represents God's Spirit as a driving force and influence on Edmund. The spiral, embroidered on each leader and child's shirt, is a reminder that the same Spirit which inspired Edmund Rice is the inspiration for each leader's involvement in the camp, and emphasises caring, life-affirming relationships among all participants. Lying on the banner are two leader's shirts, one brand new, still in its wrapper, the other worn and battered after a hectic week on camp.

Setting the scene by recalling our training days and the hours of preparation, I remind the leaders of why we have come together, usually by relating an incident from Edmund's life. I then say:

> *'I want each of you to reflect for a moment on two things: one, what gifts, talents are you bringing to this camp that you can share with your fellow leaders and the children; and two, what are your hopes for the week ahead, for yourself, for the leaders and for the children.'*
>
> (Pause for reflection)
>
> *'Now, to the degree that you feel comfortable, share with the person beside you your thoughts and hopes.'* (Sharing for 3-4 minutes)

Here is a sample of their responses:

> *'Eagerness to work with others.'*
>
> *'Commitment to the Camp.'*
>
> *'Sense of humour.'*
>
> *A willingness to take part in every activity and bring energy to them all.'*
>
> *'I am easily approachable, a good listener, good ideas for games and activities.'*

I then say: *'I now invite you to come forward and receive your ERC shirt.'*

Each leader receives his/her shirt. I then play a reflective song eg *'Hands'* or *'St. Theresa's Prayer'* – both songs refer to using oneself in congruent service of others, and are included on a CD which forms part of my evidence archive.

I then read from Nelson Mandela's Inauguration Speech - 'Our greatest fear..'.

> I repeat the lines - *'As we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give others permission to do the same'* and then say,
>
> *'When you are ready, light one of the little nightlights, and place it on the banner as a symbol of the light <u>you</u> bring to Camp.'*

With quiet music playing in the background, with lights out, we sit for some time in silence, gazing on the collection of candles. Then a large, multicoloured candle is placed in the centre to represent both leaders and children and the beginning of a new camp. During the week, the large candle is lit during all reflection periods for leaders and children. A particularly powerful and moving reflection occurs midweek when the leaders, sitting in a circle in the darkened Quiet Space (a space set aside for reflection and Quiet Time for leaders and children), pass the icon and a lighted candle around the circle. Each leader shares, usually at a deeply personal level, what the experience of working with the children means to him/ her and how he/she feels they are living out Edmund Rice's spirit today.

Quiet Space

As an aid to reflective practice, during the camp a section of the hall is set aside as the 'Quiet Space', where children and leaders gather at the beginning and end of each day. At the beginning of the week in the T-shirt Ceremony, the leaders present the children with white ERC T-shirts as a symbol of their becoming members of the ERC Community and the Camp Code of Conduct is agreed to. The photo below is one example of how our Quiet Space is set up (Fig.6.2).

Fig.6.2 Leaders' and Children's Quiet Space

In the photo, the centrepiece includes the Edmund Rice Icon, set on a multicoloured cloth (representing all the different types of people on camp), with the Book of the Icon (an illustrated explanation of the Icon) beside it. The Camp Mascot -'Eddie' - wearing a leader's shirt and adopted by the children, accompanies them wherever they go. The children are told the Edmund Rice Story, and each day at the closing reflection they agree on an act of thoughtfulness, a kind action or a personal challenge (e.g. help do the washing-up at home, tidy their room, share sweets etc.) they will perform. The wall hanging of their hands emphasise the uniqueness and natality of each person, and their commitment to use their hands to do good, during and after the camp. Beside the wall hanging is the code of conduct, the 'Rules of Camp', which are the children's own, and

beside it are the signatures of children and leaders, signifying agreement with, and commitment to living out all of these rules in order to make the camp a wonderful experience for all concerned. Each day, samples of children's work - painting, beads, and daily news - are placed on the wall and around the centre-piece. In DVD 1 (Appendix 1), the children and leaders can be seen placing their handprints on the banner which is then placed beside the Icon. The reflection session ends with everybody singing 'The Community Song' or 'Rise and Shine!' and performing the accompanying actions.

The Quiet Space is also the setting where, on the last day of camp, each child receives the 'Eddie Award' - a certificate (Appendix 4.4) that marks his/her special presence on, and contribution to, the Camp. It has the Camp Spiral, child's name and the item at which s/he is 'best' - Best Smiler, Best Joke-teller, Best Actress, Best Helper and so on. Each leader presents an award as a recognition and affirmation of each child's natality.

When the children are gone home, the leaders and I gather in the quiet space to reflect on the day, share concerns and stories, evaluate activities and review the schedule for the next day. The picture below (Fig. 6.2) captures this session in action, and the DVD 1 (Appendix 1) shows a reflective moment as the leaders and I write our response to the question: '*What have you done today to make yourself proud?*' as the song with the same title is playing in the background (DVD 1). Another type of reflective process using video clips of the day's activities has proved very successful. As part of our process of co-creating our living theories, it is customary for a group of leaders to take responsibility in turn for each day's reflection sessions as an expression of shared leadership.

The reflection process helps leaders articulate what the camp and their involvement means to them. In response to the question 'What does the Camp mean to me?' they wrote:

> '*Quote: 'Is it my imagination or have I found something worth living for?'(Oasis). I live for this camp. Third most important thing to me after my family and my music.*'

'See things from a different perspective, not just my own life – the chance to have a brilliant week that involved meeting so many people and making a difference in the kids' lives.'

Fig. 6.3 Leaders, seated in a circle in the Quiet Space, engaged in reflection on the day's events.

'Unique experience – wouldn't get the same experience to work so personally with children anywhere else.'

'For me, Camp has opened me into a more confident and comfortable person. It has allowed me to create new friendships and do something for sheer enjoyment.'

'Camp meant a lot to me. It gave me a chance to appreciate everything I have in life as well as give back something to those less well off.'

The complete file of leaders' responses, including graphs depicting their emotional involvement, energy levels and quality of the experience of camp, is included in my evidence archive. Before moving on to describe how I developed my living theory and understanding of shared and distributed leadership, I wish to 'unpack' the theory in which my understanding of reflective practice is grounded.

Reflection as central to my living theory of shared praxis

Modern culture is becoming increasingly visual and the use of images to influence thinking is becoming increasingly pervasive. In the context of my praxis, I concur with Collins' (2002) view that in post-modern thought the concept of 'text' has expanded beyond the written word and that whatever presents itself for our consideration is a form of 'text'. He draws attention to a 'text's' network or web of relationships within a context of inter-textual, social and linguistic settings and interactions. Among the many 'texts' I use for our group reflective process - story, music, songs, readings from a variety of sources, guided meditation, photographic or audio-visual presentations - I will focus on my use of the Edmund Rice Icon as illustrative of my practice.

An icon, as I understand and use it, is a form of living theory, a world of relationships, of inter-textuality within a variety of contexts. I have adapted Collins' (*ibid:* 10) insights on icons for the young people I work with. The most basic context of the icon is the historical-cultural settings of Edmund's times, the nineteenth century, a time of oppression, persecution and extreme poverty for the majority of Ireland's population. The second context relates to Edmund's own response to the injustice and

marginalisation he saw around him, illustrated by the images of Edmund's care for the poor, the hungry and those in prison. The third context, according to Collins (*ibid:* 10) mediates a personal communion with the divine, an invitation to transcendence, an expression of one's spirituality in the midst of the swampy lowlands of daily practice.

In placing the icon at the centre of our circle, I am using it as both mirror and invitation to living into a new way of being, seeing in Edmund's life an invitation to do likewise in our own historical context, to embody Edmund's spirit, his values of justice, care and love in congruent response. Again, to preserve anonymity, I include only the leader's initial in the responses; the originals are located in my evidence archive, Project 2. In response to my question (22nd July, 2006): *'Name one way in which you demonstrated Edmund's spirit today',* C., A., J. and N., four young leaders, wrote:

> *During the week, one of the girls did not want to join in some of the sports as she believed she would not fit in. I helped encourage her to see that she was the same as each of the other children and that she was allowed to play the game just as much as the other children. When the game was finished, she thanked me for encouraging her to play which made me realise I had helped her to develop a confidence in herself which she was previously lacking.* [C. 2006]

> *Always tried to have a smile for the children and listen to what they had to say without dismissing them.* [A. 2006]

> *I believe that I showed ER's spirit in the fact that I gave up a week of holidays for the camp and I would gladly do it again as it is more than worth it.*

> *I tried my hardest to make sure that some of the more quiet kids felt they had someone there for them and that they wouldn't be left behind or left out.* [J. 2006]

> *Passed on the word of ER through the reflections and talking to the kids one-on-one.* [N. 2006]

In using the ER Icon (or other reflective material), I believe I am inviting young people to a broader consciousness, a greater awareness of connectedness to their own values, and how they experience themselves as living contradictions, when their life-affirming values of love, justice and right relationships are denied in their own lives and within their historical setting of Northern Ireland. Our reflective process is a form of re-educating one's perception of reality and fostering receptivity to a deeper reality. A contemplative stance before the icon entails, as Collins (2002) points out,

> ...a purification from superficial seeing, a move away from a mode of perception that stops short of the hidden depths of things or which remains captivated by their surface glitter. The icon reveals the spiritual through the material.

(Collins, 2002: 21)

The shift from superficial seeing to seeing the 'excess of meaning' (Collins, *ibid:* 12) can lead to an epiphany, an axial or nodal moment (see Chapter 3), in one's life and practice. However, contemplation without action and response is worthless; by donning an ERC leader's shirt, the young person is opting to share in Edmund's values and embodied response to the social needs of his/her own time. The young person becomes his/her own living theory for his/her time and place. Let me give three examples from the leaders' experience and practice to illustrate this point.

Example 1 (July, 2004, personal journal)

We were discussing Edmund's ability to survive, have a flourishing business and accumulate great wealth, property and possessions in a climate and political setting that was inimical to Catholics and where legal sanctions were imposed on any attempt by Catholics to improve their social status. One of the leaders remarked on the similarity between the recent history of Northern Ireland, the discrimination and political action designed to deprive Catholics of basic civil rights, and Edmund Rice's time. The discussion revolved around Edmund's ability to work within the system, to establish friendly relationship with Protestants while working against unjust political structures through the education of poor children and their families. In response to my question -'*If Edmund were alive in Northern Ireland today, how might he get involved?'*- they replied

that he would try to break down barriers between the Catholic and Protestant communities, and establish life-affirming relationships instead of the destructive, discriminatory and hate-driven ones that were a feature of Northern Ireland for so many years.

One of the leaders remarked *'You know, Edmund Rice would have Protestant leaders and kids on camp!'* This generated a heated discussion, which was quite challenging to all, particularly to those from a Nationalist background, but eventually there was general agreement, that in light of the values of Edmund which they were espousing, an approach should be made to a local Protestant school to recruit camp leaders. While the school's response was discouraging, at least the idea has been proposed, and is still on the agenda. The plan to offer places on the camp to children from the Protestant community is also on hold, but with progress being made with the Peace Process, there is hope for the future and the leaders are more aware of the divide still existing between the two communities.

Example 2 (April, 2003, personal journal)

A school principal requested that we accept a child with autism on the camp. There was considerable anxiety among the leaders about the child's suitability for camp and their own ability to cope effectively. The matter was raised during a reflection session, where the group was requested to reflect on the issue in silence before reaching a decision. Anxieties were expressed and a variety of solutions offered but the leaders were divided on the issue. One leader asked the question *'Would Edmund accept this child on camp if he were here today?'* A second leader pointed to the icon and remarked: *'Edmund has his arm around his daughter Mary, who also had a disability. I can't imagine him turning any child away because of his/her disability.'* The whole tone of the discussion shifted, ending with a unanimous decision to have the child on camp.

The outcome was rewarding for all concerned. The child, because of the one-to-one leader-child ratio, had a very happy time and fitted in very well. The leaders themselves discovered their ability to relate to, and work effectively with, children with special abilities, and grew to appreciate the demands made on parents of children with special

needs. As a result, giving parents of special needs children an opportunity for a break from their demanding role became one of the criteria for a child's placement on camp. Since then, several children with disability or health conditions - e.g. Asperger's Syndrome, epilepsy, asthma, diabetes - have participated fully on camp.

Example 3 (July, 2004, personal journal)

A third example of reflection influencing practice followed on from Example 1 and the issue of marginalisation. Reflecting on the composition of the group, a leader noted that leaders were all grammar school students and there were no students from the local secondary school. While this situation was not planned, leaders felt that the 11+ examination effectively discriminated against students who were denied a place at grammar school level. The leaders' feedback mentions on several occasion their sense of being 'privileged', of getting an opportunity denied to other students who had been their classmates in primary school. Apart from a heightened awareness and appreciation of educational privilege, one outcome from the reflective process and engagement with the ER Icon led to an invitation being extended to secondary students to become leaders on camp, an invitation that was accepted by several of them.

Collins (2002: 23) suggests three characteristics of icons: they are dynamic reminders of the underlying goodness of human nature, and its potential for expression in life-affirming ways; an icon serves as a meeting-point and an epiphany, opening up to new, life-affirming possibilities; and finally, contemplative engagement with an icon can lead to transfiguration and a transformed personal and communal vision. Within my own living theory of reflective practice, and in light of the examples given in preceding paragraphs, I hold that other 'texts' - songs, poetry, symbols and stories - possess similar transformative potential by generating what Atlee (2003) describes as 'co-intelligence', the ability to engage the diverse gifts and initiative of participants in creative and congruent response. Atlee asserts that,

> given a supportive structure and resources, diverse ordinary people can work together to reach common ground, creating wise and deliberate policy that reflects the highest public interest.   (Atlee, 2003: xv)

In this section, I have demonstrated my attempts to foster a reflective dimension to practice (my own and that of the young leaders) in a community setting, conscious that the research literature on reflective practice generally suggests that it is difficult to accomplish (Bolton, 2001; Zeichner and Liston, 1996; Sellner, 1990). Gustafson and Bennett (1999), reflecting on the difficulties they experienced in promoting and developing reflective practice among military cadets, identified eleven variables, grouped into three main characteristics - learner, environmental and reflection task characteristics - that affected cadets' lack of response. I have demonstrated how I have addressed several of these variables in my own practice, particularly the physical and the interpersonal environments, and in the next section, I address the third key element that I believe promotes a community of shared praxis.

3. *Shared and Distributed Leadership*

In developing my living epistemology of practice, one of my key concerns in cultivating a community of shared praxis was, and is, the issue of sustainability - how, in Wheatley's (2005: 159) words, might we co-evolve towards mutual sustainability. I suggest, and my practice supports this theory, that shared and distributed leadership is a key factor in sustaining communities of shared praxis. I understand shared and distributed leadership as an emergent process within community, emerging in the actions, relationships and reflective practice of *all* members of the community rather than in and through the actions of an individual. In this section, I describe my efforts to establish shared leadership processes that promote sustainability and modes of belonging.

My concerns in the main centred on issues of ownership, sustainability and power. My desire was to co-develop an ERC that was not solely dependent on my leadership, but empowered young adults to develop their own leadership qualities and give expression to those qualities in life-affirming relationships and practices. I wished to harness the learning and energy I gained in experiences similar to the two experience recounted in Chapter 3 - the Nuffield Programme and the Old Woman's Hut. From my missionary experience I had learned that a considerable portion of development aid to Third World

countries did little to foster independence, self-sufficiency and sustainability among the host peoples, and I wished to avoid any colonialist tendencies in my work with young leaders. Finally, I wished to ensure that life-diminishing, hierarchical and controlling models of leadership, rife within Church and religious life, two organisations of which I am a member, would not be replicated in my own approach to leadership development with young adults. I was being challenged (and continue to be challenged) to adopt a model of leadership and forms of influence that are rooted in my belief in, and commitment to, the natality and uniqueness of each young leader, by providing them with opportunities to explore and exercise their capacity for freedom and creativity. Encouraging young people to 'do' leadership rather than learning about it, necessitated a shift from propositional forms of logic to employing living logics as generative transformational spaces (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006: 39), adopting a pedagogy of vulnerability where the locus of power and control constantly shifts among participants.

My first step involved fostering alternative discourses of power and practice to the adult-determined power-structures, to which young people are accustomed in school and college settings. Frequently they have experienced these settings as structures of domination, compliance and control, reflecting a pessimistic view of human nature (Kohn, 1996). Sitting and working in a circle, we are modelling alternative discourses and relationships of power. By asking the question, '*How are we going to work together?*' (Personal Journal, February 2000), I indicated that I was not presenting them with a pre-packaged plan of action, that I was not assuming control of the process and that all decisions and outcomes were to be negotiated in and by the group. By introducing what became known as the 'Hit-by-a-Bus Scenario' - '*What if I were hit by a bus, and could no longer function on Camp, would the Camp continue?*'- I raised the issues of ownership and sustainability, while minimising reliance on my presence and leadership. I took this course of action with a view to encouraging the young leaders to take full responsibility for the functioning and future direction of the Camp. While I agreed to co-ordinate the camp, I did so with the proviso that after two years one of them would assume the role of co-ordinator. The title is significant – it does not assume a hierarchical mode of relationship or authority but one that recognises and facilitates each person's contribution to the life and work of the camp.

There were several outcomes to these questions. First, the young people decided on having three leaders responsible for each day of camp, with particular responsibility for timetabling, children's and leaders' reflection and evaluation, and the smooth running of camp. It has become normal practice to include new, inexperienced leaders among the daily trio - a reflection of the absence of hierarchical structures and the belief that leadership is learned by 'doing'. Second, all decisions related to the working of the camp are discussed and planned within the open space of the circle, where all participants have equal status and voting power. Those who have expertise in drama, music, arts and crafts and sports take responsibility for these activities with the children - planning, accessing equipment and resources - with other leaders assisting. Third, the role of co-ordinator has evolved; on the leaders' own suggestion, two leaders, a boy and a girl, now share the role for one year; they then hand over to a new co-ordinating team, and rejoin the group as 'ordinary' leaders again. My other role of Camp Mentor has now been taken over by two experienced leaders, a boy and girl, while I adopt a supervisory and supportive role. The Mentor's role is to ensure that the ethos and spirit of the camp is maintained, that leaders look after themselves and avoid over-extending themselves, and that any conflict among leaders is addressed responsibly and pastorally. In DVD 2 (Appendix 1), two mentors and two co-ordinators share what the camp means to them, their understanding of their roles and how they have grown through the experience. It is clear from their conversation that shared, non-hierarchical leadership is a key energising factor in their roles as Camp leaders.

My own role now (six years on) is essentially one of accompaniment - as DVD 1 illustrates, all leadership functions of the camp reside in and among the young leaders themselves. Herein lies my claim to knowledge and new living theory, my claim to have contributed to the education of a social formation (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006). In the next section, I trace the evolution of the model of shared leadership that contributed to this development.

6: 4   An evolving model of shared leadership

In Chapter 4, I described the emergent, evolving nature of my understanding and practice of leadership. In DVD 2 (Appendix 1), the four leaders refer to three elements that nurture shared, distributed leadership - freedom to make one's own decisions (*'What do you think yourself?)*, being trusted to implement those decisions (*'We are not a hierarchy.')*, and a commitment to evaluation and reflective practice. The first and second elements are embodied in my practice by my refusal to give easy answers to leaders' problems, while expressing a willingness to listen to and support leaders as they grapple with dilemmas of leadership, in the belief that they have the necessary gifts, insight and training to make effective and life-affirming decisions themselves (see H.'s comments, Appendix 3:1). Only once in seven years of camp have I intervened on a decision proposed by the young leaders.

There are two further elements of my living theory of shared, distributed leadership, however, which both contribute to and are supported by a community of shared praxis. The first of these I term 'induced liminality', the second is what Bennis and Thomas (2007) refer to as the 'crucible' of leadership. Both concepts are interlinked in my practice.

Induced liminality

In Chapter 2, I described my experience and understanding of liminality, both in the context of missionary work and as an action researcher. I described liminality as a threshold situation for creatively, imaginatively seeking, and navigating one's way towards a new vision, a new epistemology or ontology and a new metaphorical construct. I described it as a time when social hierarchy, difference, distinction and privilege are abrogated and other people and reality are encountered in new, authentic and unmediated ways. I drew on Turner's (1978) and Gittens' (2002) understanding of *communitas,* characterised by collaboration, dialogue, zeal, energy and enthusiasm and built around a common vision, sustained by hope, idealism and a willingness to risk. In DVD 2 (Appendix 1), B. refers to leaders encouraged to 'jump in at the deep end', to engage in 'Little White Pony' (a children's game) which they initially baulk at in front

of their peers, and who, because of their consequent growth in self-confidence and decreased self-consciousness in a *communitas* setting, have no hesitation in performing the game on the dance floor of a local night-club. In giving young leaders an experience of 'induced liminality' by encouraging them to 'do' leadership through leading, organising activities on camp and responsible decision-making, they are faced with an experience of 'startling discontinuity' (Goleman *et al.,* 2002) from contexts or settings where leadership roles are denied them and they are excluded from all decision-making processes.

Leadership as crucible

The concept of 'crucible' (Bennis and Thomas, 2007) closely resembles the concept of induced liminality, and serves as a metaphor for the process that leads to personal transformation. An essential element of my living theory of leadership development involves inviting participants to engage with a personal crucible by providing opportunities to 'do' leadership and to take ownership of, and responsibility for, decisions that further the aim and purpose of the camp. A crucible serves both as opportunity and test (*ibid:* 16), a defining moment that unleashes abilities (often previously unrecognised), and presents the participant with crucial choices and sharper focus that initiate transformative processes.

On DVD 2 (Appendix 1), the four mentors and co-ordinators describe an incident that reflects this phenomenon. They are discussing what happened on Friday when all four of them were absent for an extended period of time. On their return, they realised that there had been no incidents and that the other leaders, unaware of their absence, had functioned effectively without their guidance or support.

As Bennis and Thomas (*ibid:* 99) point out, a crucible is typically a place where one transcends narrow self-regard and reflects on the self in relation to others. Addressing the question*, 'How have I been challenged?'* during the closing reflection, leaders wrote the following: (Note: to preserve anonymity, I have omitted leaders' names - the originals are in my evidence archive).

'I've been challenged to take responsibility to deal with the care of children I don't know, to do things I wouldn't usually do, having fun at all times and making sure every kid was.' [Leaders' reflections, 22 July 2007]

'Leading reflection on Monday - usually scared of speaking out in front of a group - leading reflection made me face my fears and stand up just so I could speak.' [ibid. 2007]

'I made myself take more initiative and had to learn to trust my previous experience at camp and trust myself as someone who has the ability to use that intuition and deal with kids' problems/ awkward or difficult situations / conflicts etc, with confidence.' [ibid. 2007]

'Children with different types of problems, either personal or at home, different to children I would usually be around. Help out other leaders who may have found tasks difficult. Bond together with everyone in the group, no matter about personalities clashing.' [ibid. 2007].

'To be selfless again when especially this last 18 months has been a lot about me.' [ibid, 2007].

It should be noted, however, that employing the concepts of induced liminality and crucible as elements of practice and as the loci for new learning on the part of participants, is not a haphazard or arbitrary action on my part but is, in fact, a carefully considered and structured process. My epistemology of practice that fosters the development of a community of shared praxis embraces the three elements already discussed - co-creating a community of shared vision, resonance of spirit and life-affirming relationships, reflective practice and ritual and shared and distributed leadership. For the purpose of 'unpacking' my epistemology of practice, I have described them separately but all three are, in fact, inextricably linked. I regard arbitrary use of induced liminality and crucible experiences in isolation as morally unjustified and disrespectful of participants' integrity and freedom. A central tenet of my practice

influenced by my experience and understanding of African tribal rites of passage, is that induced liminality or crucible experiences are effective in shaping committed lives only within a community of mutual support, comfort and challenge that embraces reflective practice and ritual. This belief is reinforced by young leaders' reflections and comments on the whole experience of ERC:

> *'I worked hard, helped with graft etc, so I think I lightened everyone's load so to speak. (I) found that if I was having difficulties, there was always someone on hand to aid me and share the burden.' [Leaders' reflections, 22nd July, 2007]*

> *'We go that bit further to ensure the kids can have the most memorable week possibly of their summer. When things got tough or people were struggling with certain tasks, everyone chipped in to give a hand and make sure everything ran smoothly. Always supported each other – you could go to anyone for help, everyone just worked so well.' [ibid. 2007]*

6:5   Emergent identity within a community of shared praxis

A key element of my practice is enabling young leaders to take responsibility for themselves, the children, other leaders and the overall smooth running of the camp. Following Jesus' example - ' I have come that they may have life and have it to the full' (John 10:10) - I understand my role as holding a space where each individual can grow in awareness and appreciation of his/her natality and find life-affirming ways of expressing it through congruent leadership. In essence, my role in providing leadership development processes, support and accompaniment is to invite the young leaders to lead out of who they are (Walker, 2007).   While an ERC community reflects the characteristics of a community of practice (Wenger *et al.,* 2002) - mutual engagement, a joint enterprise, a shared repertoire - it also facilitates the co-construction of learning and theory, negotiation of meaning and emergent social and individual identity. As Wenger (*ibid:* 145) points out, identity consists of negotiating the meanings of our

247

experience of membership of social communities, and serves as a pivot between the individual and the social.

In holding a space as described above, I am consciously avoiding any colonising tendencies to impose or construct either individual or communal identity. By allowing young leaders to be responsible for their own decisions, by avoiding the temptation to offer premature solutions and judgements, by helping young leaders to experience their full humanity in the daily interactions with fellow-leaders and children, I am helping them address and find answers not only to the question *'Who are we?'* but also the question *'Who am I?'* B.'s comment in DVD 2 about me (Chris) not wanting 'carbon copies of myself' bears this out. Adopting a shared praxis approach as a renewing and creative process involving discernment, choice and decision, generating a holistic, ethical and embodied response to disadvantaged or marginalised children, serves as a respectful challenge to young leaders to realise their being, in Groome's words (1991: 138) as 'agent-subjects-in-right-relationship'. Not only am I inviting them to *make* a difference, but I am inviting them to *become* and *be* the difference that makes a difference, to become 'depthed' human beings who are critically reflective, intellectually challenging, competent, emotionally mature, ethically literate, spiritually courageous, intuitively connected and culturally sensitive (Duignan and Collins, in Bennett 2003: 292). This process of becoming is an emergent and life-long one but, I suggest and strongly believe, that an ERC, understood as a community of shared praxis, is a privileged place for this 'depthing' to take place.

However, finding an integrated theory of leadership that could foster this emergence in a holistic manner took time to evolve, and this process is described in Chapter 4. The most significant shift involved a movement from Adair's (2003) 'three circle model' to Dorr's (1990) model of integrated spirituality, as a framework for my educative practice of student and young adult leadership development. Dorr quotes from Micah 6:8.

> This is what Yahweh asks of you, only this: That you act justly, that you love
> tenderly, that you walk humbly with your God.   (See below Fig. 6.3)

'Act justly'

Structural justice

Ecological
Sensitivity

Participative
community-
building

Shalom

Personal integrity
and
responsibility

Transparency

Interpersonal
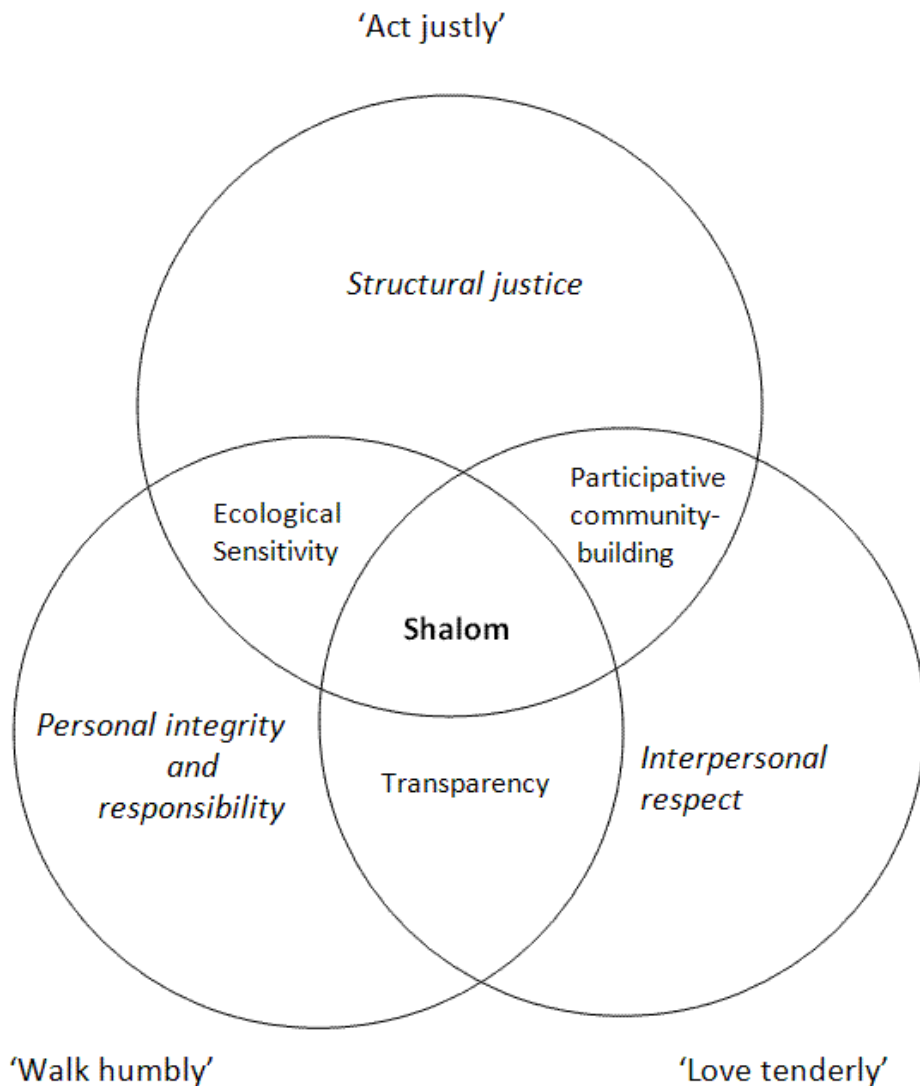respect

'Walk humbly'

'Love tenderly'

Fig. 6.4 Dorr's (1990) Three Circles of Integrated Spirituality

'Acting justly' refers to the public, political dimension and expression of integrated leadership and spirituality that seeks social and structural justice; 'loving tenderly' is an expression of interpersonal respect for the worth and natality of each human being; while 'walking humbly' embodies a commitment to personal integrity and responsibility, expressed in congruent response and radical openness to the Other (Buber, 1958) in life-affirming 'I-Thou' relationships. In adopting and embodying these

three living values of love, justice and humility (understood as personal integrity and responsibility), I am acting out of my deepest identity, creating and fostering, in Palmer's (1998) words, 'a space in which the community of truth is practiced'. Within the community of ERC and in school settings where I work, I understand my ontological, epistemological and methodological values of love, justice and humility as living standards of judgement by which my work and educative relationships can be critiqued and judged. In living and acting 'expressively' (Palmer, 1990) within an emergent community of shared praxis, I support young adults as they perform their own expressive acts and contribute to the education and transformation of social formations. This transformation contributes to the realisation of *'Shalom',* a biblical word which means all-embracing peace in every sphere of life, which Dorr defines as

> the peace of being in harmony with nature and the cosmos; peace based on justice and reconciliation in society and the world; peace in our relationships with family, friends and community; a deep personal peace arising from being at home with oneself.

> (Dorr, 1990: 5)

A community of shared praxis, I believe, is where Buchan's words (1930), cited in Adair, 2003) are best fulfilled. He says,

> The task of leadership is not to put greatness into humanity, but to elicit it, for the greatness is already there.

> (Buchan, 1930, quoted in Adair, 2003: 184)

Through emergent processes, I concur with the statement that 'leadership is a process ordinary people use when they are bringing forth the best from themselves and from others' (Kouzes and Posner, 2004: 2). Such a process, particularly in the conflicted setting of Northern Ireland, is an adventure in hope.

Conclusion

This chapter continues the narrative of my practice of young adult leadership development outside of the school setting (Chapter 5) and within a local community setting. A common feature of both chapters is a narrative description of leadership as a

personal journey that invites the engagement of others, particularly students and young adults, to co-create new narratives, new discourses of leadership that emerge from their living contexts.

In this chapter, I have outlined the genesis and rationale of my practice, and the developmental processes I have used as part of my living theory approach to developing a community of shared praxis, drawing on, and adapting, Groome's (1991) methodology to provide a structure for this development. I trace the method I have used to go beyond Wenger's (1998) concept of community of learning and practice, to develop communal and life-affirming processes where the natality of all participants is recognised and supported, and their leadership development is fostered and sustained within a community of challenge and support. In particular, I have highlighted what I regard as key elements of practice that facilitate the development of a shared praxis community - shared vision, resonance of spirit and life-affirming relationships, reflective practice and ritual, and finally, shared and distributed leadership - and have explored the manner in which I have implemented them, drawing on participants' own reflections and insights, coupled with audio-visual data to test my claims to new knowledge.

Chapters 5 and 6 form the content of the Fourth Movement of my unfinished symphony - the appropriation of the Story / Vision of Movements 1, 2 and 3 to my own story, vision and historical setting while including those of all participants - and maintaining a dialogical and dialectical hermeneutic environment which can, in Groome's words,

> invite people's own reflections; encourage participants to share and test their perceptions and hermeneutics in group dialogue; provide opportunity but never force anyone to speak; model the intent … if that seems appropriate … and be willing to invest one's self in the dialectical dynamic …

> (Groome, 1991: 291)

This movement marks a paradigmatic shift in consciousness and practice; on my part, from a hierarchical position of epistemic privilege / status and knowledge control to one of mutuality, accompaniment and dialogue; on the young leaders' part, from a passive,

251

subordinate and receiving role to one of mutual, interdependent engagement, personal appropriation of learning, and a shared praxis response to issues of marginalisation and disadvantage. An ERC as I portray it is an expression of a generative transformational space driven by living logics (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006: 39).

Having addressed my concerns and outlined my response in the first four Movements, I now turn to the Fifth Movement - Decision, Commitment, Response for future praxis - where I address in Chapter 7 the 'So what?' question of my research. Recognising the contested nature of leadership theory (Bennett *et al.,* 2003; Bennis and Thomas, 2007) and the theory and practice of community (Wenger *et al.,* 2002; Edmondson and Ineson, 2006), I explore the content and significance of my praxis, my learning and experience on three levels - for myself, for participants and settings of my research, and for the wider social and political environment in which I live and work.

FIFTH MOVEMENT

Introduction

This movement, the final stage of a shared praxis approach to my action research, my unfinished symphony, addresses the 'so what?' question, where I reflect on my learning and its significance for myself, for colleagues and for an improved social order through the education of social formations. Beginning with my iterative research questions, 'What are my concerns?' and 'How do I improve my practice?' (*ibid.*7), experiencing the cumulative process of the previous four movements and generating my own living theory through reflective praxis, I have come to the final stage of my narrative - decision and response in relation to its generative theme. In this movement, I reflect on the manner in which I have exercised my educational influence in my own and others' learning and its significance in the education of social formations. I then suggest decisions and response, personal and collective, around future praxis. While I have described each movement separately, it is important to remember that all movements are part of an iterative dynamic process of action, reflection and value-driven response, rather than a series of self-contained, independent units.

Dynamics of Movement 5

The stakeholders of a living theory approach to human inquiry have been identified as 'me, us and them' (Reason and Marshall, 2001), where 'us' refers to participants and immediate settings of my research, while 'them' refers to broader educational and civic contexts. Conscious of my status as 'guest' in my research settings, and mindful of the progress and contribution I have made to the education of social formations, I realise there is still much to be done - my unfinished symphony enters a new phase, but implementation of my learning is dependent on several external sources over which I have little control. Therefore, I draw on Groome's (1991: 267) approach as being best suited to an ongoing shared praxis approach to self-study action research, to an ontology of becoming (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006) and to embodied expression of living logics

and 'transcendental precepts' (Lonergan, 1972). Groome (*ibid.*) suggests two forms of response: 'what to do' decisions and 'who to become' decisions: the former emphasises cognitive, affective or behavioural decisions, at personal, interpersonal or social political level; the latter type of decision and response reflects a dimension of interiority, of congruence and authenticity that reflects a value-driven commitment to an improved social order. It responds to the question - 'Who am I / we / they to become?'

In Chapter 7, I describe my learning and growth in understanding of my practice. I then describe its significance and implications for future praxis.

CHAPTER 7

'PLANTING ACORNS' – DISCOURSES OF HOPE

Introduction

The title 'Planting Acorns' serves as a metaphor of practice and originated in a comment from a colleague, after a day working with students and against the backdrop of significant resistance or lack of interest in certain quarters to my work of student leadership development. He said, 'Chris, other people are involved in high-profile tasks but you are quietly planting acorns!' He then quoted Emerson: 'The creation of a thousand forests is in one acorn' (O'Briain, personal journal, October, 2007, Evidence archive). I was struck by the power of the metaphor and its hope-filled potential in contributing to the education and transformation of social formations.

In this chapter, I discuss the nature of the acorns I am planting under the following headings: my personal growth in understanding my practice; educating social formations; instigating new educational discourses; and finally, new practices and discourses of power and leadership.

7:1   Reclaiming my 'I' and finding my voice

In this section, I trace the personal learning and growth in understanding of my practice as a reflective practitioner engaged in self-study action research under the following headings: the living 'I' (Whitehead and McNiff, 2002: 22); my values as embodied standards of judgement; Brotherhood as educative and generative relationship; and community as the locus of transformation.

The living 'I' – generating my own living theory of supporting student and young adult leadership development

In Chapter 2, I described crossing the threshold of the unfamiliar by adopting an action research approach and placing the 'living I' at the centre of my inquiry. In trying to improve my practice and address the variety of concerns that arose, I experienced the paradigmatic inadequacy of the positivist, propositional forms of logic and theory which are traditionally seen as a body of knowledge applied to practice. Instead, drawing on insights from Boyer (1990) and Schon (1995), I located my research within the new scholarship, in the swampy lowlands of practice, characterised by messiness, fuzziness (Mellor, 1998) and confusion. Experiences of impasse, critical instability and liminality (Chapter 2) led me to investigate and interrogate my practice and its philosophical underpinnings, unquestioned assumptions and uncritical perspectives and to 'see my seeing' (Senge, *et al.,* 2005). Experiences of opposition, contradiction and fear deepened my experiences of liminality, and I experienced my self as a living contradiction, where my espoused values were contradicted in practice by my self and by others. These periods of 'not knowing' I came to understand as a 'crucible experience' (Bennis and Thomas, 2007), an intense, meaningful and transformative experience.

This transformation revealed itself in several ways. In seeking for epistemological, methodological and ontological congruence, I came to understand the place of values in my educative relationships and how to use their embodiment as standards of judgement of my praxis. My confidence in my ability to become my own theorist grew, as I came to realise that my reflection in and on action, was generating my living theory and epistemology of practice that addressed the real needs and concerns of my practice settings. From being a dispenser of knowledge (my own and others') into the 'passive receptacles' of young people's minds, I developed a process (Chapters 5 and 6) whereby my research was conducted *with* rather than *on* participants, who themselves became co-creators and co-generators of their own living theories. 'My' inquiry became 'our' inquiry. I came to appreciate my practice as creating and holding a space where the natality of each person would be supported and challenged, and where young people would be helped to become 'judging actors' (Arendt, 1968) in 'I-Thou' (Buber, 1958)

relationships of mutuality and reciprocity. I discovered the power of metaphor and story to initiate alternative epistemological discourses, elicit untapped tacit knowledge (Sallis and Jones, 2002) and generate transformational potential and processes. In particular the metaphor of conductor (the specific conductor of Chapter 1) has become an integral metaphor of my practice, as I *consciously* embody both theory and practice in research inquiry.

My values as living standards of judgement

The aim of my action research was to improve my practice. Given the contested nature of how action research reports should be judged (McNiff and Whitehead, 2002: 107), I chose Habermas' (1979) criteria of truthfulness, comprehensibility, authenticity and appropriateness, and Lonergan's (1972) transcendental precepts (be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable and be responsible) as guidelines and living, embodied standards of good practice. Using my ontological, methodological and epistemological values as standards of judgement, however, brought my practice to a deeper level. I hold values of justice, respect, democratic practices, freedom, and autonomy; therefore my work is to be judged on whether or not these values are embodied and evident in my educative relationships – are they just, respectful, supporting freedom, autonomy and natality?

However, using my values as living standards of judgement brought my research to the deepest, most challenging dimensions of self, my identity and integrity. Experiences of being a living contradiction - not living my espoused values, or experiencing others not living them - was a constant and frequently painful reminder of the gap between espousing and embodying values. Experiences of contradiction, paradox and impasse, however, were also the locus of new insight and learning; I discovered the power of metaphor and story to highlight the 'is' and 'is not' of my practice where metaphors of eagle, conductor, symphony, community all served simultaneously as ideals to be lived and harsh critics when neglected or ignored.

The key insight into my action research process was coming to understand my practice as *praxis*, defined by Groome (1991: 138) as 'purposeful human activity that holds in

dialectical unity theory and practice, critical reflection and historical engagement'. A second insight evolved from this one when I realised that the practice of participants in my research (principals, teachers and students) could *also* be conceptualised as *praxis.* On further reflection, I then came to realise that our common endeavour, though expressed in different ways, could be understood as *shared praxis,* and I began to develop a response to my concerns by developing a 'community of shared praxis' both as a concept and a reality in my practice settings. Chapters 5 and 6 address this idea. While there is still some way to go, the early signs of this process are promising.

Brotherhood as educative and generative transformative process

Using the metaphor of Brotherhood as part of my action research, brought to conscious awareness a wealth of tacit knowledge (Polyani, 1958) that significantly influenced both the form and content of my research. As a member of a religious order of Brothers, I drew on this experience to develop my emergent living theory of educational leadership. Schneiders (2001: 295) highlights the key features of religious Brotherhood as follows: it is a relationship that is mutual and relational, requiring a levelling of inequalities. Resources (including one's gifts and talents) are shared and people choose to relate to each other, not as an anonymous 'them', but as a community of friends where the uniqueness and natality of each member is accepted and honoured. Brotherhood is incompatible with a social structure of hierarchy and ontological inequality, of domination/subordination. As Schneiders (*ibid:* 299) points out, religious life is a lifeform that can explore and promote the reality of equality in its concrete daily life where class distinction has been abolished and where

> patterns of government have moved towards collegiality, wide participation in corporate decision-making, and mutual discernment about decisions affecting individual members.

(Schneiders, 2001: 299)

Brotherhood is essentially relational and inclusive and, lacking clerical status, is characterised by a preferential option for the marginalised and disenfranchised of society. It is

> … a matter of entering deeply into the dynamics of our culture, in which people are victimised in a staggering variety of ways, from material destitution to political oppression, from religious persecution to discrimination because of race, gender, age or sexual orientation, from devastation by foreign and domestic war to ruin by 'natural' disasters precipitated by ecologically ruinous policies.

(Schneiders, 2000: 324)

Being part of a culture, one of the tasks of Brotherhood is to mediate between the genuine values of the culture and its own blindness, by viewing the socio-cultural system from the perspective of those who are not primary beneficiaries (*ibid*.: 301) of the system and may even be its victims. This stance is grounded in the contemplative dimension of one's spirituality, defined as 'a quest for life-integration through self-transcendence towards the ultimate value one perceives'. For me, this is the God of the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

In Chapter 4, I have drawn on Micah 6:8 to encapsulate this critical stance and I have used Dorr's (1990: 2) Three Circles of integral spirituality as my ontic stance and as a model of embodied leadership appropriate to my educative settings. The story, 'Fly, Eagle, Fly', in Chapter 3 serves for me as a model of the generative intervention of Brotherhood in my practice.

Community as the locus of transformation

I have come to understand the power of community, both as metaphor and embodied reality, to offer an alternative form of generative relationship that challenges the 'commodity form' (Kavanaugh, 2002: 65) of relationships prevalent in society today. He contrasts the commodity form, which subordinates the person to the forces of consumerism and capitalism, with the personal form, a mode of perceiving and valuing people as irreplaceable persons whose fundamental identities are fulfilled in generative relationships. Moving beyond Wenger's (1998) concept of communities of practice and developing my living theory of communities of shared praxis (described in Chapter 6), I posit a model of educative relationships that foster and support natality, counters disaffection and alienation (Glavey, 2002), and is characterised by mutual sharing of resources, non-exploitive relationships, collaborative endeavour around shared values

259

and meaning, and empathy, defined as 'self-forgetful receptivity before the reality of another' (Woodward, 1987: 101). I address this issue in section 7:2

Conclusion

In this section, I have explained the personal significance of my action research. In making 'I' the focus of my research, I have come to a deeper awareness of my potential to develop and sustain my own living theory of practice, to initiate generative, transformative processes (Appendix 2). I have brought to conscious awareness a reservoir of tacit knowledge existing outside my consciousness, embraced the values I embody in practice and recognised the contribution of Brotherhood and my spirituality, defined as a holistic, 'symbiotic relationship of vision and action' (Woodward, 1987: 99) to my praxis. Reflecting an ontology of becoming (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006), my self-study action research has become a generative process of 'self-appropriation' (Lonergan, 1974). In helping young people find their voice, I have found mine.

7:2   Contributing to the education of social formations

When I began my research, my main concern centred on developing a dynamic, engaging and participative student and young adult leadership development programme, where I did the training, with participants undergoing a series of exercises after which I explained to them what they had learned (my first experience of being a living contradiction!). Thankfully, I have progressed to where I have developed (with their help) a reflective process where they engage in a variety of experiences, reflect on those experiences and then share their learning with each other. I serve as a facilitator of their learning. Initially, I knew nothing about contributing to educating social formations so in this section, I will explain how I understand the significance of my research in this regard. But first…

Let me tell you a story… **(Personal journal, March 2008)**

A few weeks ago, while writing this thesis, I was invited by a school principal to talk to his staff about setting up a student leadership system for prefects, a new venture which was already being met by considerable resistance. I arrived for coffee-break, where I was introduced to the staff as the 'guru' (!) of student leadership (first experience of my espoused values being contradicted!). I then went to look at the room where I was to work. The room had been set up for an earlier session with four rows of chairs facing a cloth covered table with jug of water, one glass and two chairs facing the 'audience' (second experience of being a living contradiction).

I rearranged all the chairs in a circle, moving the table, jug of water, flipchart and overhead projector outside the circle, then sat down to wait for the teachers to arrive. There was a variety of reactions when teachers walked into the room – mild shock, consternation, confusion, nervousness and self-consciousness about walking across the open space of the circle. Some people were disgruntled about not being able to sit with their friends; two late comers were quite dismayed at having to sit on either side of 'the Guru' where they were in full view of everyone! (My third experience of being a living contradiction).

After a word of welcome, I asked the teachers to introduce themselves and their subject. I said: 'You will have noticed I have no computer or data projector and we are sitting in a circle. Why? Because I would like us all to have a *conversation* about student leadership in this school [Raised eyebrows, muttering, restlessness]. As one author (Wheatley, 2002) said, 'Conversation is the practice of freedom and can only take place between equals'. I wish to clarify something - I do not regard myself as a guru, much of what I know has been taught me by the young people I work with - in fact, I asked the advice of students I work with before coming here today. I asked them *'What, in light of your experience as student leaders, should I say to a staff embarking on a student leadership development process?'* However, each of us here today is a professional, an expert in his/her own practice; there are approximately 1500 years of life experience in this room, so what might happen if all this knowledge, experience and learning were

placed in this open space for the benefit and enrichment of all of us? Let's break into groups of four or five, and having shared our wisdom in small groups, let's then garner the accumulated wisdom of the whole group. Let's focus our initial conversation (as a staff, you can continue your conversation about student leadership over the next few months) on three questions - 'What are our concerns?' 'What are our hopes?' and 'What might be the characteristics of an effective prefects' team in *this* school?'

 The teachers set to with great gusto and contributed a large amount of useful insight, wisdom and experience; in fact, they produced excellent criteria and suggestions for the development of an effective prefects' group for their school. However, there were significant fears and concerns among them. I responded as follows:

> 'In response to your concerns, let me share two stories with you (I narrated the stories of the *Nuffield Science Programme* and *The Old Woman's Hut*) which have convinced me of the value of student leadership development'. I then shared details of the extraordinary work being done by student leaders in schools where I work. 'Yes, there are risks involved but the benefits to the school community far outweigh them and, if you would find it helpful, I can arrange for a group of prefects to come and share their experience with you.'

Our conversation continued well over the scheduled time, but nobody displayed any concern about leaving. There was a palpable feeling, and feedback from the principal later confirmed this, (private correspondence, 8th February, 2008, original in evidence archive) of a major hurdle being crossed, and while a great deal of work still remains to be done, there was unanimous agreement that an excellent start had been made. As I drove out the gate of the school, the thought struck me 'Yes, I have contributed to the education of a social formation, Habermas would be proud of me!' I mention Habermas in this context because, as Whitehead and McNiff (2006: 102) point out, Habermas (1987) claimed that the main method of transforming entrenched normative social orders was to interrupt and transform public discourses and establish intersubjective agreement. I felt our conversation had done just that as it had been comprehensible, truthful and sincere and context appropriate (*ibid:* 2-3).

I now explain the significance of my educative influence in the education of social formations under the following headings: (a) developing a community of shared praxis, (b) challenging the 'voicelessness' of young people, and (c) creating a good social order in educational and community settings.

(a) Developing a community of shared practice

In Chapter 1, I outlined the structure of a shared praxis approach, and demonstrated the nature and application of the five movements in the structure of this thesis and the development of my living theory. In Chapter 4, I explained how I have developed a model of shared, distributed leadership appropriate to a community of this nature. One of the key dimensions of a shared praxis community is its reflective dimension - the iterative cycle of reflecting in and on praxis, of congruence between espoused values and their expression in daily life. A shared praxis approach challenges the analytic, mechanistic and reductionist approach of technical rationality, and instead reflects the characteristics of the new scholarship (Schon, 1995), which regards practice as the setting for both application and generation of knowledge, and recognises the wealth of individual and collective tacit knowledge in the community. This form of community challenges institutional norms and epistemologies which are characterised by rigorously controlled experimentation, separation between research and practice and between espoused educational policy and policy-in-use (Schon, *ibid:* 33)

The unity of the community rests on holistic relationships of equality and differentiated connectedness, resists the erosion of social capital, and reflects the 'new sensibility' (McFague, 1987) that honours the interconnectedness and interdependence of all creation (Capra, 1996; Wheatley, 1999) and possesses the characteristics of a complex, self-organising and adaptive system. Radcliffe (1999) understands this form of community as an ecosystem for flourishing, holding interdependence and diversity, co-operation and multiplicity, individuality and collectivity in dynamic tension. I have come to understand a community of shared praxis as a *chaord,* defined as a 'self-organising and governing, adaptive, nonlinear, complex organism, organisation or

system exhibiting behaviour characteristics of both order and chaos' (Hock, 2002, 2000). I agree with Hock's two points (2002: 305) that

> First: The most abundant, least expensive, most underutilised and constantly abused resources in the world are the human spirit and human ingenuity', and

> Second: Given the right chaordic circumstances, from nothing but dreams, determination and the liberty to try, quite ordinary people consistently do extraordinary things.

<div align="right">(Hock (2002), in Spears and Lawrence, 2002: 315)</div>

I strongly suggest that the Edmund Rice Camp, constituted as a community of shared praxis, contributes to the education of social formations in the following ways: it facilitates recognition and expression of each member's natality and values each person's contribution to the purpose of the group. Governance and leadership are shared, dispersed and distributed functions, and control of decisions rests with the group. Gronn (2002) describes this form of leadership as 'concertive action'. Alternative discourses and re-conceptualisations of power and authority, represented by the circle formation, create conditions where autonomy, creativity and initiative have freedom of expression. Competition is balanced with cooperation, mistakes are accepted as occasions for new learning, and paradox, contradiction and difference serve as dynamic catalysts for change and growth. This is reflected in an ethic of risk (Welch, 1990) that focuses on clear commitment to regarding the community as asset and capacity - rich and fosters mutual empowerment in an environment of 'fluid expertise' (Fletcher, 1999) where power and expertise circulate among the members. Urged on by embodied values expressed in reflective practice, members are ideally positioned, individually and collectively, to address issues of injustice, alienation and social, economic or political marginalisation. Let me demonstrate how this happens in practice.

(b) Addressing issues of injustice and marginalisation in social formations

Conscious of the originality, the significance and the need for rigour in my research and practice, I include as evidence two DVDs with this thesis (Appendix 1). DVD 1 is the

unedited film of a day in the life of an Edmund Rice Camp, filmed by an independent film company, with the aim of showing Edmund Rice's spirit, vision and values in action today. The crew filmed unobtrusively, and the film is an unrehearsed, authentic account of the day's programme, from morning until the leaders' closing reflection at the end of the day. I have included leaders' reactions to their experience in Chapter 6. What is clear from the DVD is the young leaders' unstinting care, attention and affection for the children in their care, all of whom are socially, economically, or educationally disadvantaged; many are deprived of nurturing adults in their lives or have difficulty relating with their peers. Embodying the values of Edmund Rice, the leaders are modelling a response to disadvantage and marginalisation in their historical setting, as he did in his. Their evaluations and reflections describe their reactions to being able to do something for the vulnerable and less privileged children in their care and how, in turn, the children have touched their lives.

DVD 2 is a recording of four leaders discussing what Edmund Rice Camp mean to them. Two of them are Camp Co-ordinators, two are Camp Mentors who are responsible for the care and support of the leaders during and after the camp. They discuss what the camp means to them, their spirituality, their growth in confidence, their experience of leadership and how leadership is a distributed function on camp; they describe the inclusive nature of camp and absence of hierarchy, the impact the camp experience has on the leaders and so on. Again none of it was rehearsed, nor was I present in the room as they shared at a deeply personal level. Their enthusiasm and dedication is very obvious and they clearly feel they are engaged in a life-affirming enterprise. They also explain clearly how the camp experience has affected their lives and how they are contributing to an improved social order.

In Chapter 6, I describe two other instances where they are contributing to an improved social order. In one, they raised the issue of disability as a reason for excluding a child from the camp. After much debate, they agreed that, honouring Edmund Rice's commitment to persons with disability (his own daughter was one) and to the marginalised of society, no one should be excluded from participation on camp. They honoured this commitment by including children with autism, Asperger's Syndrome,

emotionally disturbed, severe asthmatics, children with epilepsy, ADD and some who had suffered abuse. The young leaders were modelling an inclusive social formation where every child was welcome.

(c) Crossing the sectarian divide: envisioning a reconciled community

The troubled history of Northern Ireland and the political and religious divide that separates Protestant and Catholic, Nationalist and Unionist communities is well documented (Bew and Gillespie, 1993; Darby, 1997; Liechty and Clegg, 2001). While the Good Friday Agreement occurred during the period of my research, there is still a long way to go before peace is fully a social, psychological and political reality - initiating peaceful relations is still a risky business:

> Stepping out of familiar territory across boundaries that carry the status of communal or quasi-communal taboos is a risky business at any time, but it is more so in a situation of inter-communal conflict. It is also true that in such a situation this risk-taking is crucial.

> (Liechty and Clegg, 2001: 345)

Collusion with Loyalist paramilitaries and discrimination against the Nationalist community in Northern Ireland by police and security forces is an accepted and proven fact. Consequently when the issue of police clearance for camp leaders (as part of Child Protection legislation) first arose, there was serious resistance to the idea, on the grounds of huge mistrust and even hatred of the police. There was heated debate and disagreement. In time, however, leaders, inspired by the values and spirit of Edmund Rice and with considerable misgivings, agreed to conform as an expression of their willingness to contribute to an improved social order in Northern Ireland.

A second attempt at cross-community reconciliation occurred as the result of a chance remark by one of the leaders - 'You know, Protestants could relate to the values of Edmund Rice as much as we do. He'd have Protestant leaders and Protestant kids in his camp if he was here today.' There was a stunned silence, followed by thoughtful nods of agreement. After an animated discussion, they agreed to approach a local Protestant school to invite senior students to become leaders. Their invitation received a sharp

rebuff. An approach was not made to a Protestant primary school in case it was viewed as an attempt at 'proselytising'. The process is on hold for now, but there is an openness and hope that in the near future, circumstances will change. (Personal Journal, March, 2006).

Drawing on a considerable body of leaders' data, and personal and group reflections, let me explain what is happening in this community of shared praxis that is the Edmund Rice Camp. On a deeply personal level, they are engaged in a process of self-awareness, self-appropriation (Lonergan, 1972) and self-appreciation (see their comments in Chapter 6). Through their willingness to risk cross-community engagement, they are making an individual and collective shift from 'hostility to hospitality' (Nouwen, 1975) by challenging socially and politically constituted relationships of fragmentation, alienation and division. They are engaging in 'counter-hegemonic moments' (Brookfield, 1995) by rejecting propositional logics of binary divide, which emerge as imperialist logics, frequently manifested as practices of imperialism and domination (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006: 36); instead, they adopt living logics as generative transformative responses to the potential and hidden interconnectedness of their historical settings. Theirs is an alternative and counter-cultural discourse of empowerment, interdependence and life-affirming interconnectedness. Given the contested nature of and myriad meanings of the term 'community' (Vanier, 1979; Palmer, 1998; Reynolds, 2000), in co-founding a community of shared praxis they are continuously working out the implications of community defined

> as a way of relating to other persons as brothers and sisters who share a common origin, a common dignity and a common destiny. Community involves learning to live in terms of an interconnected 'we' rather than an isolated 'I'.

> (Betz and Fisher (1992), quoted in Edmondson and Ineson (2006: 2)

The ERC leaders are developing a model of emergent community that is inclusive, reflective, compassionate, creative and, most of all, sustainable. They demonstrate a clear and definite commitment to discovering and engaging an understanding of community as asset–rich (Kretzman and McKnight, 1993), and engaging their community's capacity for life-affirming relationships in improving the social order of

their locality. Their feedback (evidence archive) frequently refers to understanding their actions as 'making a difference'; I go further by affirming that, not only are they *making* a difference, but they are the *embodied difference* that makes the difference. Jean Vanier offers an insight into the nature and dynamic of an Edmund rice Camp and, I suggest, of a community of shared praxis:

> Through a caring, committed presence, people will discover
>
> > that they are allowed to be themselves;
> >
> > that they are loved and so are lovable;
> >
> > that they have gifts
> >
> > and their lives have meaning;
> >
> > that they can grow and do beautiful things
> >
> > and in turn be peace-makers in a world of conflict.
>
> (Vanier, 1988: 83)

I now address two further topics relating to my practice - my work in educational contexts and the issue of power and leadership. In the final section of this chapter, I will discuss the significance of my work in fostering student and young adult leadership development.

7: 3   Exploring my educative influence in school settings

My involvement in schools was in response to two documents - one, *Government of Ireland Education Act, 1998* and two, *Edmund Rice Education Conference 1997 (EREC 1997)*. The former document advocated the development of student leadership structures, specifically through the establishment of student councils, in all second-level schools in the State. The latter document (EREC 1997: 64-66) highlighted the need in all ER schools for student leadership development within a partnership model of

'openness, mutuality, respect and accountability'. Few schools, if any, in the Edmund Rice Network, had student councils at that time. At the time of writing, I have helped develop student councils / prefect groups in approximately sixty schools, organised development programmes for liaison teachers, and conducted follow-up and evaluation meetings in many of these schools. Many are now self-sufficient, with sustainable student leadership processes and structures in place. In Chapter 5, I explained the process I developed in one school, a process (with appropriate additions, adjustments and new learning) used in many other locations, nationally and internationally. I now address the significance of this work. It should be noted that while I was committed to developing schools as communities of shared praxis, my status as guest, the limited time available to visit the schools, and given the fact that I only worked with the principal, the liaison teacher and a small representative group of students, I decided instead to focus on the school as a *community of partnership*, while maintaining Groome's (1991) 'five movements' as a conceptual structure and process. Throughout my research, I have carefully monitored my practice, inviting students and teachers to co-create new knowledge and provide data to test my claims. Appendix 2 (Teachers' and Colleagues' feedback) and 4 (Students' feedback) provide samples of evidence from key participants. I also draw on Lather's (1991) concept of catalytic validity to show how I have acted as a catalyst for generative transformation and contributed to new practices and educational discourses. I have described in Chapters 5 (school setting) and 6 (local community setting) how, through my living theory of educational leadership, I have developed life-affirming educational relationships, and in Appendices 1- 4, provide evidence from research participants to corroborate and test my claims to new knowledge.

My growing understanding of the significance of my intervention

My concerns in response to the two documents (Education Act 1998 and EREC 1997) centred on developing a programme for student leadership development. After several development events and one ongoing 6-weekly session in a local school, I realised that my work would be largely ineffective without the involvement of principals and teachers. When one school refused permission for its council to function, despite the

students having completed their programme, and given the significant resistance and opposition I experienced from some principals and staff, I began to reconceptualise my work in schools as a *systemic* intervention. I realised I needed to involve principals (and through them, Boards of Management) and staffs in taking ownership of student leadership processes in their schools.

That was a significant time for my emerging epistemology of practice. Conscious of the power of language and metaphor to construct reality (McFague, 1987; Ricoeur, 1976), I discovered that replacing the consumerist and organisational language and metaphors so prevalent in educational discourse (Kavanaugh, 2000; Sweeney and Dunne, 2003; Chomsky, 2003) engendered a new relational paradigm that focussed on education as relational endeavour. I began to explore a variety of perspectives and literatures to develop a conceptual and philosophical framework for my practice and to address a wide range of concerns: moving beyond the technical concern of developing a programme, my concerns over the period of my research included the marginalisation, disempowerment and 'voicelessness' of students, issues of exclusion and justice, the commodity form of education, the nature and use of power and control, models of leadership, values of personhood and spirituality.

 The first stage of reconceptualising my work and developing my own living theory of educational leadership involved the use of language, story and metaphor that employed generative, living logics (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006) and images of growth, collaborative engagement and life-affirming practices. I spoke of community, orchestra, symphony, conductor, web of life, networks and finding one's voice. Given the value-based nature of my practice, and using my values as living standards of judgement, I gradually came to understand my practice as *praxis* and given the participatory and collaborative nature of action research, and participants' involvement, I drew on Groome's (1991) idea of *shared praxis* as a theoretical framework for my research and a model of collaborative, reflective engagement. Given my experience with the Edmund Rice Camp, I began to apply the concept of a *community of shared praxis* to school settings. In light of this significant insight, I demonstrated in Chapter 5 how I have developed and implemented new practices congruent with this awareness. Let me now

'unpack' my understanding of this concept, drawing on examples from practice and discuss its potential for educational settings and a good social order.

School as a web of connectedness

The 'we' of community fosters an awareness of a life-affirming space reflecting relationships of recognition, acceptance, mutuality and dialectical relationships. As a living system of interdependence, the concept of community bears a marked resemblance to Senge's (1990) learning organisation where

> people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together.

(Senge, 1990: 3)

An emphasis on responsibilities and relationships rather than rights and rules define the interaction of the school community, reducing the need for an emphasis on discipline and control. School as a community of shared praxis challenges the rhetoric of partnership where values are not realised in practice, and fosters instead a culture of belonging and contribution. When working with student leaders, I use the 'Partnership Wheel' (see Chapter 3) as a metaphor of systemic relationships. Along the rim of the wheel are placed the school stakeholders - Board of Management, Parents Council, Principal, teachers, students, maintenance staff, secretarial staff, catering staff - with student leaders at the hub, as I explore with them their role in relationship to the other stakeholders and their contribution to the good social order of the school community. By placing each of the partners on the hub, they get a sense of what partnership can achieve. When I refer to the 'flat-tyre community', they understand the significance of a partner not fulfilling its role. Collectively honouring the metaphor of community can be both a challenge and a blessing.

Re-defining student identity

I regard a student leadership development day as forming a 'mini community of shared praxis', where Groome's (1991) five movements form the structure for the day. I

271

construct the day's process as a rite of passage (Turner, 1969) and 'induced' liminality, and invite them to 'cross the threshold of the familiar' into a different reality of an alternative paradigm (Kuhn, 1962). By inviting them to arrange the chairs in a way that would help us work most effectively together, they choose a circle. This simple action gives them a sense of control and responsibility for our working space. When I sit in the circle and forego the usual role, status and authority of teacher or authority figure, I am aligning myself with them, emphasising our common origin, dignity and destiny (Betz and Fisher, 1992). When I introduce myself by my first name and invite them to do likewise, I am honouring our unique identity and natality; and by speaking, each voice is being heard by all. I disagree with May (2006: 134) when he suggests naming as a form of power or subjugation. In this instance, I understand naming as claiming one's identity with relational intent.

A key element of a liminal experience or rite of passage is a strengthened identity (Drumm, 1998; O'Murchu, 1999) which in turn will contribute to an enhanced *social* structure. Using reflective readings, stories, sayings are intended to strengthen participants' sense of themselves as worthwhile and accepted - for example, when I read a reflection that contains phrases like 'Celebrate you - you are you and that's all you need to be!' - I am helping them reinforce their self-image and sense of self. By inviting them to co-construct the agenda for the day and decide on 'guiding principles' (rather than ground rules), I am encouraging ownership of the content and learning process, which in turn is an antidote to disaffection and alienation (Glavey, 2002). In setting problems and challenges, my aim is to develop critical consciousness (discussed in the next section) and the ability to make decisions and commitments that benefit all stakeholders on the Partnership Wheel. In this context, I make use of 'competitive co-operation'- contrary to popular belief (Gilligan, 1993), I have found boys and girls equally competitive. However, when the exercise is complete, I emphasise not 'Who won?' but 'How were we with each other during this exercise?' In building a community of shared praxis, the process is frequently more important than the outcome. The closing part of the day's process is aimed at contributing to a good social order in their school by defining their goals and practical steps towards their implementation. I include a sample of their work in Appendix 4.

In re-defining student identity using a community of shared praxis model, I emphasise throughout an ontology of individual and collective becoming (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006), aided by an epistemology and pedagogy of accompaniment and alongsidedness. Returning to the circle for final reflection, a 'seiza' moment (see Chapter 3), I again take my place among the students as a symbol of radical and embodied solidarity with them.

Addressing 'our fearful way of knowing' (Palmer, 1998: 50)

I have frequently drawn attention throughout this thesis to the widespread fear, anxiety and resistance of management and staffs to the issue of student leadership and student voice. While student leadership is now a widely-accepted phenomenon, significant levels of alienation and disaffection still exist (Boldt, 1997, 2000; O'Shea and Williams, 2001). Conboy (2000) portrays a feature of our educational system as follows:

> The early school-leaving population in Ireland numbers 14,500 per annum. There is general agreement about the factors that give rise to early school-leaving. These include school failure, lower self-esteem, alienation, lack of parental involvement, truancy and low interest in extra-curricular activities. It is also recognised that efforts to redress the problem have seldom been powerful enough to offset these influences completely.

> (Conboy, 2000: 7)

My own research into my work with 'school dropouts' and early school leavers (Glavey, 1999) indicates that, family reasons aside, there are three main reasons for dropping out of school: 'They' (Principal and staff) don't *see* me, don't *listen* to me, and *I don't belong* there.' I receive a similar response when I use the story 'Fly! Eagle, Fly!' with groups and I ask the question 'What is happening in your school that convinces the eagle that he/she is a chicken and prevents him/her from flying?' Many students experience themselves as *not seen, listened to* or *belonging.* They feel invisible partly because they have no voice (O'Leary, 2001). When I surveyed teachers during the course of my work with them, their fears included losing control of the class, physical violence and intimidation, loss of respect, being seen as 'soft', 'an easy touch', poor results, feeling inadequate and so on (personal journal, March 1999).

In developing my understanding of a living theory approach to communities of shared praxis, I address the dynamics of seeing, listening and belonging. In Chapters 3, 5 and 6, I have described a shared praxis approach but now explain some significant features. My understanding of the person as unique, valued, possessing great gifts, talents and potential while living our incompleteness in face of a future promise (Rolheiser, 1999) reflects my belief in a personal, life-affirming God. Merton (2000) captures this idea and Arendt's idea of 'natality' when he writes:

> There is in us an instinct for newness, for renewal, for a liberation of creative power. We seek to awaken in ourselves a force which really changes our lives from within. And yet the same instinct tells us that this change is a recovery of that which is deepest, most original, and most personal in ourselves. To be born again is not to become somebody else, *but to become ourselves.*

> (Merton, 2000: 64. Emphasis in original).

By 'helping eagles fly!' I am extending both invitation and challenge to each person to become who they were born to be.

I have demonstrated how the circle is a formative symbol of belonging where each voice is heard. Mindful of Bourdieu's (1990) concept of *habitus* and its influence on behaviours and practices of people, and Owen's (1997) idea of *Open Space,* I use the circle to foster and maintain a life-affirming space of autonomy and interdependence, acceptance and challenge, reflection and action, contradiction and affirmation, solitude and togetherness. I understand this space as akin to the *dojo,* described in Chapter 3, a place of ongoing liminality, of constantly crossing the threshold of the unfamiliar to new insight, experience and learning. In helping students find, and giving them space to use, their voice confidently, I hear them to speech. Through various newsletters (EDO 2005, 2006; Nuachtiris 2006, 2007, 2008, all in evidence archive), their voice has been joined with those of other school partners and become an accepted part of educational discourses.

The circle in native traditions is a symbol of wholeness, of the sacred and of integration. The Lakota 'circle of courage' (Carlson and Lewis, 1998: 424) portrays the child's self-esteem and mental health as being based on significance (belonging), competence

(mastery), power (independence) and virtue (generosity), located on the circle at the four compass points. In Chapter 6, I have portrayed how through a community of shared praxis, young leaders reflect all of these qualities. DVD 1 and 2 (Appendix 1) demonstrate these qualities in action as they are participate constructively in a community of common concern (Chomsky, 2000: 21).

It is important, however, when using the metaphor of 'community', as with all metaphors, to ask '*how* does it mean?' Community is a dynamic form of engagement, a challenge to give concrete expression to the metaphor (or story) in daily living, to 'do' community as opposed to 'be' community. For example, I can recognise myself in each of the characters in the Eagle story – the eagle itself, the man who caused it to think of itself as a chicken, the children who made fun of its attempts to fly, and the man who saw the eagle for what it was and led it to freedom; in doing so, I experience the challenge to respond congruently in each case in life-affirming ways. Similarly, the characters in the story represent the dynamics of enhancement and diminishment present in institutional settings. Using story and metaphor in this way, and inviting students and teachers to do likewise, fosters an 'ontology of becoming' (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006), and alternative educative discourses which open up new horizons of life-enhancing possibilities.

Student leadership – new discourses of power in educative relationships

The responses from teachers in the early stages of my research ranged from enthusiastic to dismissive and unco-operative. Looking back from my current perspective, I can understand there was an instinctive awareness on the part of management and staff that we were entering a new and uncharted phase in educational discourses. In helping students develop their leadership capabilities, I make two claims - one, that I believe they *can* be leaders and two, excluding them from practising appropriate leadership is a form of social injustice. By reconceptualising student leadership, I have marked a shift from regarding it as a theoretical concept, to seeing leadership as a living form of practice, where the students themselves are both theorists and activists, generating their own living form of theory and practice.

The new emerging awareness (Capra, 1996; Lovelock, 2006) of the connections and interconnectedness existing in living systems posits a model of leadership that reflects a concept of *power with* rather than *power over.* Within a pedagogy of accompaniment, power *among* is an appropriate form of power in a community of shared praxis (Appendix 3:1). However, student empowerment (Levin, 1999; Shor, 1992) still engenders resistance; my personal experience confirms that this continues to be a factor in a significant number of schools. I am also aware of the immense epistemological, methodological and ontological shift required to place students at the centre of educational reform. Giroux (1999), Levin (1999), Fullan (2001), Fielding and Rudduck, (2002), all draw attention to how democratic and emancipatory practice can be circumscribed and controlled. Fielding, in particular, highlights the challenge ahead:

> Are we witnessing the emergence of something genuinely new, exciting and emancipatory that builds on rich traditions of democratic renewal and transformation…Or are we presiding over the further entrenchment of existing assumptions and inventions, using student or pupil voice as an additional mechanism of control?

(Fielding, 2001: 100)

Lodge and Lynch (2000) point out that power relationships, as defined and experienced by young people, have not been a major research subject in education, and young people's concerns have been interpreted within models and disciplines where young people have no voice. Taken from the perspective of a developmentalist, controlling and protectionist model of education, certain assumptions seem to be widespread: young people, because of age and perceived lack of experience, have nothing to contribute to educational discourse and debate; young people are not capable of self-determination and school is a necessary process for maturation into a fully autonomous, self-determining adult; young people are 'our future' or 'leaders of the future'; power can only be exercised 'over' students, never 'with' them while the power dichotomy between teachers and students goes unquestioned and unchallenged. Meanwhile, young people suffer 'the misery of unimportance' (Carlson and Lewis, 1993: 434).

The most significant learning for me during my research has been that in developing leadership programmes for students and young adults, in giving them a voice, I am

engaged in a discourse against forms of power that diminish life. When young people speak for themselves, they challenge the manner in which power and privilege have influenced scientific epistemologies and colonised their identities (Soto and Swadener, 2002). They are, as Peters (2001) drawing on Foucault (1977) points out, engaged in a counter discourse and acts of freedom against their 'administered life' (Marcuse, 1964). The commodity and consumerist approach to education, currently a growing reality, reflects many of the characteristics of Marcuse's 'administered life' in which the human person becomes

> an object of administration, geared to produce and reproduce not only the goals but also the values and the promises of the system.

> (Marcuse, 1977: 14)

I suggest that reconceptualising school as a community of shared praxis, where all members have a voice and embody life-affirming values, serves as an antidote and a counter to the administered life approach in educative and communal settings, and challenges culturally determined and psychologically internalised marginalisation by 'releasing the human spirit and human ingenuity' (Hock, 2002).

7:4   Mending broken circles, helping eagles fly, planting acorns:

Changing the myths we live by

The real challenge of liminality is to find one's way after the liminal experience. While one's identity is clearer and stronger and beliefs and values strengthened, liminality is not a road map - its main function is to help one walk 'differently' on a road that is made by walking. A key myth I lived by as a teacher, was that of *control* - control of my environment, work, time and so on. Developing student and young adult leadership processes revealed a contradictory reality - I was not in control, and within practice settings, as a guest, I had no official standing. It was out of this reality that my pedagogy of accompaniment and vulnerability emerged. I realised that re-defining student and young adult leadership development would necessitate, within a systems framework (McCaughan and Palmer, 1994: 10), re-conceptualising the roles of other members in

the system - another key learning from my research. My understanding of *interculturation* - respectful encounter between diverse cultural worldviews (Grenham, 2004) - helped me develop my living theory of a community of shared praxis. Rather than a confrontational, aggressive approach, I drew on Brookfield, citing Horton's maxim:

> If you want to change people's ideas, you shouldn't try to convince them intellectually. What you need to do is to get them into a situation where they'll have to act on ideas, not argue about them.

<div align="right">(Horton (1990), cited in Brookfield, 1995: 250).</div>

People act differently when structures are changed and old patterns of behaviour become untenable. Two of Arendt's insights, in particular, helped me to begin the process of addressing Brookfield's question (2005: 344): 'How can people be taught to recognise and challenge how dominant ideology works to persuade them to accept as unremarkable an inherently unequal state of affairs?'

In the first instance, I drew on Arendt's (1968) concept of 'judging actor' to help young people become judging actors themselves. According to Coulter and Wiens (2002), she distinguishes between three forms of practice: *labour,* routine behaviour to meet basic human needs; *work* as activity by artisans and craftsmen; and *action,* which requires collective public dialogue to define identity and purpose. She defines two characteristics of action: plurality and the importance of others in forming one's identity. Good judgement, for Arendt is not objective knowledge, but is a result of intersubjectivity, the ability to consider other perspectives and viewpoints on the same experience. Equally important is respect for the uniqueness and agency of others, their natality, which points to a key element of Arendt's (1968) concept of action, namely freedom, which is the capacity of humans to make a difference in the world and the responsibility that accompanies this possibility. Humans have both agency and the responsibility to judge.

The second insight relating to my practice centres on Arendt's idea of 'visiting', which involves carefully listening to the perspectives of others to improve judgement. Visiting requires the development and use of one's imagination, travelling to all relevant viewpoints and engaging with concrete others. To be a good judging actor according to

Arendt, is not simply acquiring knowledge or experience, but also recognises plurality and natality, listening to particular others in a diverse world, and learning from them.

Involving young people as judging actors, I began sharing my ideas on leadership with them and helped them imagine creative and effective responses for their school (or community) setting. As they began to function effectively, it became a challenge to their teachers, especially the liaison, or 'champion' teacher (Goldman and Newman, 1998), to adjust to working differently with young people outside the normal teacher-student relationship, where they were making decisions for themselves. These teachers, from different parts of the country, requested leadership development programmes for themselves, to be able to cope more effectively with their judging actor students. When working with teachers, they came to realise how dependent on the principal they were to help student leadership flourish. I used the principals' conference to share with them the benefits of student councils or prefects to the smooth running of the councils. One outcome of this presentation was that a regular meeting with the principal is now normal for student leaders, and many Boards of Management regularly allocate a section of their meetings to students. As judging actors, the students serve as 'positive deviants' (Pascale, 2005) one of whose task is to 'evangelise' their educative settings by organically introducing incremental change in a way that promotes acceptance by all partners of the school community. Students' roles are now being reversed - from being passive *recipients* of others' knowledge, they are now *contributors* to the smooth functioning of their school.

The metaphors above serve as a summary of my epistemology of practice, my unfinished symphony. They are hope-filled, life-giving and hold the possibility of a larger future. I have a renewed sense of the power of metaphor and story to hold in tension the reality of the high ground and the swampy lowlands; they excite the imagination, the greatest ally of freedom and foster dialogue and intersubjectivity while respecting Arendt's concepts of natality and plurality; metaphor and story can disorient one's quest for certainty to one of openness to mystery through a 'curriculum of inner significances' (Hart, 2001: 153), which, in turn, can lead to congruent and committed

action. In other words, metaphor and story foster judging actors and communities of shared praxis.

While much remains to be done, many positive outcomes already exist. Student leadership structures and processes exist in over sixty schools of the Edmund Rice Network, and are contributing enormously to their schools, addressing local and Third World marginalisation and alienation, contributing to school policies – anti-bullying, health and safety, discipline and homework. All the schools will soon become part of a new Edmund Rice Schools Trust, with its own Charter. It is an indication of progress that students have been consulted in the drafting of the Charter, and are now involved in developing a Students' Guide to the Charter and are members of Charter Implementation Teams (comprising teachers, parents and students) in each school. Working to bring about this transformation has been an adventure in hope. It has been amply rewarded.

Conclusion

This thesis is the narrative of my unfinished symphony, my emerging epistemology of practice, as it passes through the five movements of Groome's (1991) shared praxis. I adopted this approach as a conceptual and methodological framework to facilitate my self-study action research approach to addressing the iterative questions – '*What is my concern?*' and '*How can I improve my practice?*' (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006). My concerns centred mainly on the voicelessness and marginalisation of young people, and I have developed a tried and tested living theory approach, supported by a large volume of multi-media evidence, to address these issues. While I describe my practice in two specific locations, experience has demonstrated its applicability and effectiveness in other locations.

I have learned many things in the course of my research but two, in particular, stand out. One is the realisations that in helping young people reclaim their voice, I have reclaimed mine. It has been a counter-hegemonic process, a transformative experience of embodying my values in the face of opposition, resistance and contradiction. As

Brookfield (1995: 46) puts it, the moment of finding our own voice leads us to withdraw our consent to our own servitude. He quotes Richert (1992) as follows:

> As teachers talk about their work and 'name' their experiences, they learn about what they know and what they believe. They also learn what they do not know. Such knowledge empowers the individual by providing a source for action that is generated from within rather than imposed from without…Teachers who know in this way can act with intent; they are empowered to draw from the centre of their own knowing and act as critics and creators of their world rather than solely respondents to it, or worse, victims of it. Agency, as it is described in this model, casts voice as the connection between reflection and action. Power is thus linked with agency or intentionality. People who are empowered - teachers in this case - are those who are able to act in accordance with what they know and believe.
>
> (Richert, 1992: 197)

I recognise that what I have written is 'for now' - with my ongoing research, who knows where I will be in the future - but there is a sense of 'rightness' in being here. Again drawing on Brookfield (*ibid.*), I can congruently state that

> What I'm doing right now is creative and spontaneous, yet grounded in my examined experiences. I know it's good for me and for my students. What's more, I know it's good and if need be I can tell you why.
>
> (Brookfield, *ibid:* 47)

I might add that placing this thesis in the public forum reflects my openness to critique and ongoing learning.

My second key learning from my action research is the place of spirituality that imbues my practice. What was tacit has been drawn into full consciousness. I regard self-study action research as a contemplative process, reflected in life-affirming, value-driven 'I-Thou' (Buber, 1958) relationships. Buber echoes the dynamics of this connectedness, which I have tried to express in practice:

> In order to help the best realisation of the best potentialities in the student's life, the teacher must really *mean* him as the definite person he is in his potentiality and his actuality; more precisely he must not know him as a mere sum of qualities, strivings and inhibitions, he must be aware of him as a whole being and affirm him in this wholeness.
>
> (Buber, 1958: 132, emphasis in the original)

Such an approach, according to Chomsky (2003: 164) is governed by a spirit of reverence and humility: reverence for the precious, varied, individual, indeterminate growing principle of life, and humility with regard to the aims and degree of insight and understanding of the practitioner. Schneiders (2000: 112) details three key features of postmodernity which impact on young people: a loss of a unified way of seeing things, resulting in a sense of radical contingency, existential rootlessness, and abandonment in a rootless cosmos; the belief that there are no real foundational principles for one's life, we live in a world of universal relativism; and finally, a subversion of meta-narratives. I propose that a community of shared praxis (as described in this thesis) provides a space where issues of meaning, identity and spirituality can be addressed, skills of interiority developed and, with the support and challenge of the community, action taken to address issues of injustice and marginalization.

It is difficult to describe the experience of self-study action research and the thesis that has emerged, but the words of Oscar Romero, captures some of what it means to me:

> This is what we are about:
>
> We plant seeds that one day will grow.
>
> We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.
>
> We lay foundations that will need further development.
>
> We provide yeast that produces effects beyond our capabilities.
>
> We cannot do everything and there is a sense of liberation in realising that.
>
> This enables us to do something and do it very well.
>
> It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way,
>
> > an opportunity for God's grace to enter and do the rest.
>
> We may never see the end results,
>
> But that is the difference between artisans and the worker.
>
> We are workers, not artisans, ministers, not messiahs.

We are prophets of a future not our own.

Oscar Romero.

It is my hope and belief that these words of Gregorowski will bear fruit through my research and shared praxis.

'*And then, without really moving, feeling the updraft*

of a wind more powerful than any man or bird, the

great eagle leaned forward and was swept upward,

higher and higher, lost to sight in the brightness of

the rising sun, never again to live among the chickens.

(Gregorowski, 2000: 26)