THE COMPLEX EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE COACHED E LEARNING MA IN LEADERSHIP STUDIES

'Thus, in so far as we want to teach expertise in particular domains and practical wisdom in life, which we certainly want to do, we finally run up against the most important question a philosopher can ask those who believe in the educational promise of the World Wide Web: can the bodily presence required for acquiring skills in various domains and for acquiring mastery of one's culture be delivered by means of the Internet?'
                                                                        Dreyfus, 2001, p. 173

At the end of Chapter 1, I had reached the point in my story where I'd identified the idea of an 'online coaching pedagogy of presencing', and wanted to continue taking steps both to improve my practice and find ways of sharing and testing my knowing with others in the public domain. In this second chapter I want to lift my eyes from my coaching practice to look more carefully and critically at the educational world around me in which my own small and local study is located, to find out how my inquiry might link and contribute towards one or more areas in this broad and diverse 'field of practices' (Schatzki et al, 2001, p 2), and identify ideas that might further help me in my quest to improve my practice. This will then set the scene for the more in depth review that follows in Chapter 3 of how my chosen methodology for knowing what can be known, has evolved. So in this chapter, I begin with a brief review of the latest thinking about the doing of educational research and how my own work might link with critical issues being identified in this field. After a brief introduction to the MA in Leadership Studies itself, I then follow with a review of relevant research in what I see as the six practice fields that constitute the immediate context for my work. Finally I identify particular themes which I want to employ to condition my approach to the action research process.

APPRECIATING COMPLEX ECOLOGIES

In their opening to the 2010 AERA Annual Meeting 'Understanding Complex Ecologies in a Changing World', Carol Lee and Ronald Rochon (2009) state that 'education research sits inside what Donald Stokes calls "Pasteur's Quadrant", referring to the dual focus of building basic theory while simultaneously improving practice.' This implies not only that attention be devoted to these two generally separate streams of activity but also to the multiple opportunities for learning and education that occur in formal and informal settings, both physical and virtual, in the complex social, economic, and political ecologies that people now live and work in. Often in our attempts to influence learning and its application we 'try to strip away complexity for presumed efficiency' (ibid, p 301) failing to appreciate the impact of larger cultural, political, and technological forces on the *nature and quality of participation* that's possible. According to Lee and Rochon, there exist a wide variety of differences in norms of participation which require that researchers and practitioners 'recruit' what and how they've learned in other settings, as resources with which to make sense and act effectively in new situations. And this requires that we in educational roles pay attention to the effects of how we organise and facilitate learning in educational settings, on how this facilitates and/or constrains the recruitment of diverse repertoires and their creative

exploitation in other settings. In other words we need to acknowledge and respond to the fact that effective learning for students 'entails cultural navigations.'(ibid, p 301)

So what does it mean to make 'cultural navigations' – and what might this imply for educational researchers? Jack Whitehead makes the point that the learner needs to be creatively engaged for learning to be experienced as educational (Whitehead, 2009). Biesta in his writing supports this view preferring to see learning not as acquisition but as a reaction to a disturbance, as a *response* to what is other and different. From this 'autopoietic' angle (Maturana and Varela, 1992), education is concerned not just with the 'transmission' of knowledge (not a metaphor I'd normally use) and skills, but also very centrally, with 'the individuality, subjectivity, or personhood of the student' (Biesta, 2006, p 27). So how might we create and facilitate settings where such learning might take place? There also seems to be a growing recognition in many quarters (e.g. Harre, 1979, Bohm, 1996 Isaacs, 1999) that we need to place *conversation* at the centre of our attention as it is here that we can focus on fostering the collaboration, improvisation, and emergent learning that will help students learn to appreciate and 'navigate' within the cultural contour lines they will come into contact with, that Lee and Rochon refer to.

In this connection, Maggie Farren in her BERA 2009 presentation, supports Snow's claim that 'the knowledge resources of excellent teachers constitute a rich resource but one that is largely untapped because we have no procedures for systematising it' (2001, p 9). And of course this applies to students too, especially those that are experienced practitioners. So the challenge for educational researchers, is how to systematise the study of the everyday activities involved, and make public the findings in ways which reveal the richness, subtlety, and situatedness of such knowing. As mentioned in my Introduction, this is something that AERA feels needs more attention, and will be the focus of their 2011 conference.

Since Boyer's call for a new scholarship of teaching (1990), and Schon's subsequent call for a new epistemology for a new scholarship (1995) to deal with the dilemma of 'rigor or relevance', the field has gradually opened its doors to new methods of data capture which offer hope of progress in this regard. For example, Eisner's pathfinding promotion of the use and legitimation of new forms of representation in the Academy (Eisner, 1988) has paved the way for the introduction of a range of new forms of digital/multi-media and web-based accounts of educational practices. These are now being used for the more disciplined and detailed recording and analysis of a range of new educational research practices like e.g. 'living educational theory' research submissions pioneered by Jack Whitehead (2009). These permit the exploitation of ostensive means of representation to show the expression of embodied values in which multi-media video can and does show much more than the words themselves, allowing different kinds of knowledge to emerge (Farren, 2009). These include the life affirming flows of energy which are associated with the embodied expression of the values which energise much educational interaction, and which can become the new standards of judgement used to assess the originality and critical judgement being exercised in the work (Whitehead, 2009).

So with this very brief introduction to some of the latest thinking and how these developments are impacting the field, let me turn to my own more limited project: coaching on the MA in Leadership Studies. And as I look upon this scene I'm astonished at how complex a landscape I face, positioned awkwardly in the midst of a

number of other fields which appear to have very different perspectives on my topic of interest. I'm reminded of Barnett's metaphor where he sees a university as a 'mosaic on the move' (Barnett, 2000) – is this what I'm facing? And with my own 'mosaic on the move', how might I frame a field of interest for carrying out action research on my own work that might usefully connect and share ideas with these fields, while perhaps operating on different assumptions and values? And will it be possible to find a way of doing this in a comprehensive and comprehensible manner, and in ways which satisfy Habermas' four conditions of social validity (Habermas, 1984)?

Sandberg and Alvesson's research into how researchers choose interesting questions for their research (2009), offers me a way forward. The most popular is 'gap filling' which is relatively easy to do as it keeps your work close to and in line with mainstream thinking. But they find that it tends to lead to 'boring' findings casting little new light on the subject. The other main approach they call 'problematisation' where the researcher instead questions the basic assumptions/findings of a field. This they say leads to more interesting and innovative research but there is a danger that this can distance and isolate you from the mainstream – so positioning can be a challenge. But I think this framing shows me a way of 'going on': identify the mainstream assumptions of the conjoining fields, review the ideas that have been put forward to contest and/or develop these, and then see to what extent 'problematising' this further might reveal an interesting and perhaps unique area for me to work in. That's what I'm going to do now, 'go on' for a little way, to see if I am able to work towards a more focused area of research, and identify key ideas which I can address more specifically in Chapter 3[9].

THE COACHED E LEARNING MA IN LEADERSHIP STUDIES
I will start with a brief introduction to the MA programme so you can see how these various fields might impinge to a greater or lesser degree on how the programme was created and how it is being studied and supported. The Masters in Leadership Studies is a part-time, modularly presented programme delivered online over two years to participants who are in their late 30s and 40s and have at least five years of leadership experience. The students come from a wide range of organizations both in the public and private sectors, from the very large like the NHS and RAF as well as the very small, and with students from many parts of the world in each cohort. The reasons for engaging with the programme vary but typically students are seeking a deeper and more personal form of education and development than that offered by e.g. an MBA, to help them enhance their longer term career prospects within an organisation, support a mid-career change of direction, and/or help them establish their own business.

The programme is delivered over seven 'study phases' delivered in seven-week blocks over an 18 month period via a customized version of WebCT/Blackboard/ELE. During each week of a phase, participants download and engage with a variety of set course materials including notes and articles, video recordings, cases, inventories, and extended readings. The main communication channel between coach and student is provided by the weekly Learning Logs which invite students to reflect on course materials and make relevant linkages to their own experience and organisation, which the coach then responds to. Because of the pace of the academic programme, such responses and any ensuing discussions tend to be focused mainly on the week to week content of the syllabus, but over time longer term, more developmental questions also begin to emerge

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[9] this is an example of the coaching tool I've called 'presencing developmental possibilities' where I'm presencing an opportunity for myself to see where this approach leads to

and feature in these weekly interactions. At the end of each phase students have to submit an essay based on the ideas and experiences covered during that phase which are then formally graded and contribute towards the final award. These more reflective writings and responses from the coach can also begin to focus on longer term academic and practice issues that the learning logs reveal but seldom have time/space to address. After this 18 month period of guided and supported learning, students have to complete a six month supervised dissertation on a topic of their choice to gain the Masters degree. This kind of schedule together with the flexibility afforded by the coaching process itself seems to provide both the structure and give and take that students find useful studying for a part time degree, while engaged in full time employment,

As the marketing literature claims, 'one of the primary objectives of the programme is to encourage *critical engagement* with the theory and practice of leading and leadership…[in order to] delve beneath the surface claims of texts produced by leadership theorists and practitioners…[so that] assumptions of mainstream leadership theory – ends as well as means – are exposed and alternative possibilities considered. …The purpose of this pedagogical strategy is to enable participants to come to their own reasoned judgements about the contrasting views to which they are introduced…' This critical engagement with texts forms the central part of the curriculum, and it is possible for students to undertake the programme entirely and solely through web-based interactions. In practice, many based outside the UK have successfully completed the degree without ever meeting face-to-face, their student colleagues, coach, or academics in the Centre.

Despite this, most students agree that it is the support of their personal coach who can individually tailor and supplement the standard experience, which delivers the real added value of the programme. Because these are one-to-one personal relationships, the nature, purpose, intensity, and methods used in providing the coaching component vary considerably between coaches and with their individual students. Some students, particularly those that are based overseas, only use the online written facilities and have no face-to-face or even telephone contact with their coach, other students, and the Centre. Others, particularly those that are located nearer to the university, attend the induction, dissertation, and other workshops which are offered regularly during the programme, and are also able to have occasional face to face sessions with their coach and sometimes other students, especially if several are from one organisation. Between these extremes, many coach-student pairings make use of intermediary media such as e mail, and telephone and Skype calls, to create a more 'blended' experience in what is essentially a distance learning programme. However, despite this potential for 'blending' and face-to-face contact, for most students the programme experience is likely to be predominantly one of a written, asynchronous, and web-based nature with other media adding just sufficient two-way contact to positively frame and influence the nature of the online interaction.

A final strand of variation within this mix of methods, comes from the different approaches used by particular coaches as they devise and support more tailored versions of the basic degree to offer a more personalised quality of education for individual students. Through supplementing and extending the standard readings and exercises to suit an individual student's interests and challenges, and varying the nature and pacing of development-oriented interventions, coaches can enable students to treat the MA programme not just as a period of study for a higher degree, but also use the experience to significantly develop their own sense of who they are and want to be, and develop the capabilities to support these transformational changes. When the programme works this

way the impact of the coaching process goes well beyond the epistemological to influence the ontological and axiological dimensions.

The original seven 'study phases' preceding the dissertation period are listed below:
1. *Leadership and You:* understanding own preferences as a leader - *Online*
2. *Leadership Perspectives:* exploring the 'leadership canon' - *Online*
3. *Leadership Exchange:* how leadership is accomplished in practice - *Experiential*
4. *Strategy, Culture, & Change:* strategy, culture and change processes - *Online*
5. *Leadership Interventions*: putting learning into practice – *Experiential and Online*
6. *Contemporary Leadership:* contemporary debates in a global context - *Online*
7. *Research methods:* social science research philosophy and methods – *Online*

THE PLURALITY OF KNOWLEDGE FIELDS AROUND THE MA

You'll see from this very brief introduction that there are a potentially wide range of knowledge/practice fields each with their own traditions and perspectives, that are likely to influence how the programme was and is framed, studied, and led. Sticking just with
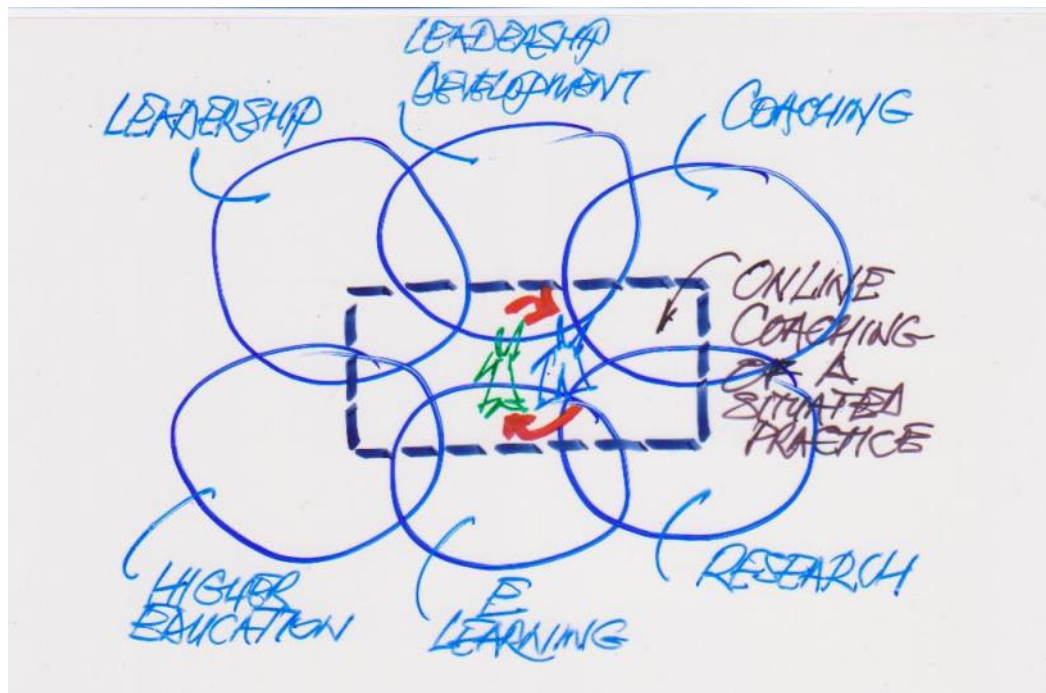
THE COMPLEX EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE
COACHED E LEARNING MA IN LEADERSHIP STUDIES

what we might term the main 'fields', we already have six as follows: the central topic of *leadership*; how *development* of knowledge and capability may be achieved; the institutional setting of *higher education* in which the higher degree is offered and associated ideas of adult development; the particular method of *e learning* used to give the programme coherence and offer/control the processing of educational materials; the long term *coaching* approach used to providing learning support; and the *research methods* used to inquire into, validate, and present the findings of research into the educational process. I will now work my way through each of these in turn, to indicate what I've found to be the mainstream views in each field, what I've felt needed

challenge in seeking to improve my own work practice, and how these challenges have been informed, supported and/or amplified from different parts of that or other field. At the end of each of these sections I will also seek to tease out my own particular angle on the field that I'd like to take forward into my focal inquiry

Leadership

> Cognitive learning no more makes a manager than it does a swimmer. The latter will drown the first time she jumps into the water if her coach never takes her out of the lecture hall, gets her wet, and gives her feedback on her performance…we are taught skill through practice, plus feedback, whether in a real or a simulated situation
> *Mintzberg, 1975, p 26*

In this section I'm looking for a framing of the phenomenon of 'leading' that will most help my students better understand, develop, and offer appropriate influence in their work environment, not the best or most popular model of 'the leader'. A very quick snapshot reveals that the dominant focus has been on the *individual* and his/her traits/skills. This long term view has more recently, in the face of the new challenge of rapid change, grudgingly moved towards some recognition of the importance of followers and the situation; and more recently, newer models have started to suggest that leadership could also have some distributed characteristics and that these are likely to be influenced by conditions of complexity.

In his recent exhaustive and very authoritative review, Northouse reports that as many as 65 different classification systems have been developed to define the dimensions of leadership (Northouse, 2007). In attempting to distil all of this, he comes up with: 'leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal' (p 3). He makes clear that by using the word 'process' he opens the way for leadership to be seen as a transactional event *between* leader and followers, and that is interactive rather than linear, and so available to everyone. However by limiting the 'influence' dimension to the leader, and leadership to groups who have a common purpose and goals, he surely sidesteps several central and intimately related questions that are of the essence in understanding leadership: the *mutuality* of influence, the framing of *context*, the establishing of common *purpose*, and the creating of group *coherence*. As is typical of so much academic theory building, key aspects of the *background* are taken for granted so that the model can use propositional logic to focus on the simpler and more contained space that we are asked to accept *is* the leadership domain. As Bolden and Gosling conclude in their 2006 paper critiquing the competency concept, by treating leadership as a series of capabilities to be acquired and applied, the competency approach reinforces trait, behavioural, and contingency perspectives, and underestimates the relational, ethical, emotional, and contextually dependent nature of leadership practice (Northouse, 2004 in Bolden and Gosling, 2006). They by implication point towards a more *practice* oriented approach to leadership (see later comments on the 'practice' concept in the section on Research).

Collins' work on 'level 5' leaders (2001) and Greenleaf on the 'servant leader' (2003), though still caught up with the idea of the individual leader, with their focus on humility, hard work, and service to others, at least seem to support a more relational and less heroic concept. And then moving on further, Heifetz's ideas start to suggest that due to the demands of adaptation (2002), perhaps the leader is not and can't be the most important person in the organisation, and that a more 'orchestrating' role is required to help organisations address the value conflicts that arise. But it is Grint who introduces

some radical new thinking with his ideas about a 'constitutive' model of leadership where neither leadership or context need be seen as 'essentialist' (Grint, 2000). This highlights the central function of 'framing' [which connects with Schon's (1983) ideas about framing as against problem solving] and emphasises the power of rhetoric and the other 'arts'. He also emphasises the key function that understanding and influencing of 'the context' plays in all of this. Students often struggle with Grint because initially at least, he seems to be throwing out much of the edifice of leadership theory created during the last 100 years. But those that persist often find great insights, and because of this, and my own sense of its relative openness to e.g. Wittgenstein's ideas (see later), I find it is a useful one to use as a default of sorts for my action research work with students. I do use it though, specifically in the 'leadership' form (as against 'leader' form) treating this as an unfolding phenomenon of group behaviour-in-context in which so-called 'leaders' and others make situational and timely contributions.

So we've moved (well *some* of us have!) from the sole 'man on the bridge' in command of all 'he' surveys, through more skills, interaction, and situationally oriented models, to the latest thinking about more dispersed and distributed forms of leadership. These are still mostly propositionally formed theories that seek to explain all in their models, largely ignoring the ever-present need also to find ways of opening the model to the local context and conditions or to the needs of the moment, and how people might develop and use these. Though the later models offer the possibility that leadership could be a more relational phenomenon, there then seems to be little serious attempt to deal with the consequent dilemma for 'the leader' – so what do *he/she* do then? In most of these theories, there is a clear split between academic and practice goals and models with little interchange between the two. There are exceptions from people like Gergen in 'social constructionism' (1999) and Stacey (following GH Mead) in 'complexity theory' (2001) who seek to avoid the 'duality' by framing individual and society as being created *together at the same time*. But this provides only light stitching to the fissure which is consequently easily opened: in everyday behaviour most of us tend to quickly fall back to some version of 'great man' theory and, as Gladwell has reported, our preference for *attributional* rather than *contextual* explanations (Gladwell, 2000) seems stronger than ever.

I see the great divide here as being between 'individual' and 'social context' with most theorists seeming to favour one or the other side, and a strong but subsidiary split between 'theory' and 'practice'. The big issue for me is how to frame understanding of the leadership phenomenon in ways which allow students/practitioners to work with a more *situational, relational, and momentary* interpretation *and* one that looks for that kind of answer in expressive and embodied terms i.e. in *ontological* terms. With this in mind, I prefer to use the very open but in some ways quite narrow version of leadership as 'momentary orienting with others' that I take from Wittgenstein's ideas about 'knowing how to go on' (Wittgenstein, 1958, no 154). This allows for the timely and situational assessment not only of what kind of leadership if any, might be appropriate at any moment in time, but also who might do what with whom, so encouraging a more inclusional approach to the phenomenon as against the varieties of 'splitting' that we currently face.

This take on the phenomenon receives some support from a provocative paper by Simon Kelly entitled 'Leadership: a categorical mistake?' (2008). In this he uses Pondy's 1978 thesis that 'leadership is a language-game' as the starting point for an exploration of the idea of 'leadership as a discursive and locally produced phenomenon' (ibid, p 764). He comments that the twin concern of recent ethnographically inspired studies with

language and action has often led to leadership as 'an empirical object of inquiry…to disappear among the milieu of everyday life' and the everyday mundane work that so-called leaders get involved in (e.g. Mintberg, 1975; Stewart, 1997). The effects of the category mistake involved in choosing what the object of inquiry should be in the complex relationship between language and action, encourages him to propose a move away from the focus on the linguistic construction of leadership as a language-game towards what Wittgenstein called 'a form of life', where everyday action precedes and influences the *use,* and hence the meaning, of language (ibid, p 765). The example of a category mistake that's offered is from Ryle (1949) about a foreign visitor arriving in e.g. Oxford wishing to see 'the university' and who after touring all the colleges, playing fields, libraries, etc asks 'but where is the University?'. The mis-allocation of 'the University' – an abstract description for a collection of related organisations - to the same category as that to which these other institutions belong leads to the same confusions as the original 'Cartesian separation of mind and body'(ibid, p 772). He suggests that 'leadership should…be treated as what Wittgenstein (1953, no 71) calls a "blurred concept" around and through which language-games orient themselves. We should accordingly attend to the production of and relationships between language-games', and the 'relationship between "natural reactions", language-games, and forms of life in the production of an organisational setting' (Kelly, 2008, p 779)

And so this is the perspective on leadership I'm planning to use in looking at how the other 'fields' like *leadership development* might be supported, how *coaching* on *e learning programmes* might be offered, and so on. The assumptions in each of my six fields logically need to weave into and influence my thinking in the others. To progress further along this line of thinking, I believe I need to focus more directly on the idea of 'practice' - where practices precede individuals, both historically, logically, and ontologically and where there is no presumption of the primacy of individual action. Yes, the single individual participates in practices but any qualities are *qualities of a practice* and *not* qualities of the individual (Schatzki, 2001).

Development

> The leader's voyage of development is not an easy one. Some people change little in their lifetimes: some change substantially. Despite the undeniable crucial role of genetics, human nature is not fixed. Those who are willing to work at developing themselves and becoming more self aware can almost certainly evolve over time into truly transformational leaders
> *Rooke & Torbert, 2005, p 11*

Given this thinking about concept of leadership itself, how might we think fruitfully about the development of people who are 'leaders' and/or get involved in the process of 'leadership'? The dominant concerns here for many decades have been a focus on identifying and teaching sets of knowledges and skills thought to be essential 'input' for successful performance – now popularly known as 'competences' - and then dealing with the so-called 'transfer gap' that arises: how do you help students who learn something in the classroom transfer this learning into effective performance in local contexts? Some progress has been made in using Heidegger's ideas about 'building' and 'dwelling' to suggest that a situated practice like leadership would benefit from the latter (Ladkin, 2006), but despite this, the dominant force remains the competency movement relying on ever more sophisticated lists of behaviours and/or qualities thought to be critical for effective performance, developingways of teaching these, and then trying to find ways of reducing the transfer gap (Bolden et al, 2009). Gosling and Mintzberg (2004) have ventured into this terrain and with their concept of 'close

learning', have sought to bring the context and teaching closer together so that the learning that takes place in the classroom has in a sense less far to go, but it is still very much part of the narrative that dominates thinking and action on development.

Another interesting approach has come through the agency of communities and Wenger's work in particular on how specialist groups can come to possess the wide array of knowledges (Wenger, 1988), much of it tacit and shared, that allow the world to work. Much of this is invisible and undervalued and very difficult for the academic community to capture or do anything very effective with it, when they've got it. I see this phenomenon very much as an example of Foucault's (Foucault, 1976) marginalised knowledges – though we are much more aware of these now, we still seem to favour what we've always found much easier to study, write about, and commercialise i.e. *explicit* knowledge.

My own take on this is both macro and micro. At the micro level I identify strongly with Polanyi's views about how knowledge is personal and is created in tacit and largely unconscious ways: 'when originality breeds new values, it breeds them tacitly; by implication, we cannot choose explicitly a set of new values, but must submit to them by the very act of creating or adopting them' (1983, p xi); and the support he receives from Lyotard: 'The artist and the writer, then, are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what will have been done' (Lyotard, 1986, p 81). Further I believe this concept is supported in their different approach to this idea by cognitive scientists like Lakoff and Johnson who hold that most thinking/decision making is unconscious and metaphorical (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999). So to truly develop something new, there is a need for dwelling (Heidegger, 1971) or indwelling (Polanyi, 1983) for a period so that the idea/tool or whatever, can be fully 'fleshed out'. And I use this metaphor deliberately to show the need for it to be experienced bodily/viscerally and emotionally if it is to become an embodied part of a person's 'gestural' language with others (Merleau Ponty, 1962).

Furthermore this indwelling needs to fill out the parts of the tacit knowing of the 'subsidiaries' (Polanyi, 1983) that may be said to be 'contextually focused', so that people can be ready and practiced at unconsciously fitting their 'tools' to the issue in context in a timely way. And of course it also has to be value-based if their behaviour is to be experienced as authentic by the people who count – those on the receiving end! This is not something that can be built up once and for all at one time but needs to be a constant part of Polanyi's 'subsidiary', developing not only many options but also the ability to create new options.

At the macro level I believe most practical knowing is created dialogically with others in a constant anticipatory and creative manner, so that the knowing is shared and has a 'from' character that relates it to that context and contexts like it. As Garfinkel states: 'For the purposes of conducting their everyday affairs persons refuse to permit each other to understand "what they are really talking about" in this way. The anticipation that people will understand the occasionality of expressions, the specific vagueness of references, the retrospective-prospective sense of a present occurrence, waiting for something later in order to see what was meant before, are sanctioned properties of common discourse. They furnish a background of seen but unnoticed features of common discourse whereby actual utterances are recognised as events of common, reasonable, understandable plain talk.' (1967, p 40). Shotter in his recent more embodied approach to his concept of 'conversational realities' extends Garfinkel's concept to talk about a special *third kind of knowledge* that 'cannot be reduced to

either of the other two (a "knowing that" or a "knowing how"), the kind of knowledge one has *from within* a situation…or society; it is what we might call a "knowing from". Bernstein (1983) has called it a "practical moral knowledge"' (Shotter, 2008, p 16)

So the development challenge is to do with how to assist in the *revelation* to the other, the knowing they have themselves and with others. Development also needs to take account of embodied values, relations and context if it is to work, and the need to keep updating this knowing dynamically over time (how to go on now/here/with these). In relation to my comments on 'leadership' earlier, the great divide here seem to be between development being seen mainly as about increasing 'knowledge' (an epistemological quality) through a 'building' or 'warehousing' model, and then finding out how to 'transfer' this knowledge once it has been learned into practice; and development being seen as about learning how to do things in context on an everyday basis so that the knowing is much more an embodied, relational, and contexted phenomenon, and possibly also a feature of a 'practice' and not just the individual– so more of an ontological quality. So the big issue for me is how to frame and enact the learning and development process so that e.g. my use of Wittgenstein's 'how to go on with others' guide to leadership can be experienced not as a 'knowledge transmitted' phenomenon but as something that can be experienced and made sense of by students in their relations with me and in 'close learning' conditions in interactions in their workplace.

Higher Education

> Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself.
> *John Dewey*

There are three particular aspects of this 'field', the institution of higher education in which the MA programme is based, that I feel deserve comment and critique:

1. Power asymmetries
Not really having worked in a university before – despite my brief time at Kings College London – I became aware of the kind of difficulties 'power relations' can create indirectly. At the induction workshop for the first cohort on the E Learning MA in October 2004, I made some gentle fun in the background during the opening address by the Director (who I was quite friendly with). That evening when chatting to Richard, one of the students allocated to me, he said that my fooling around had made an immediate and positive effect on him: if the coaches behaved like this, he knew that the programme wasn't going to turn out to be the formal, arms length, condescending and

even dismissive experience he was half expecting after his long break from higher education. So there obviously was some kind of relational barrier there between student and university at the outset – which my fooling around had eased. A couple of other little incidents reinforced this impression: the 05-07 student who expressed great surprise that she could use the MA to validate herself; and later, an 08-10 student who'd recently completed an MBA, being surprised when I encouraged him to learn from and develop his own models from his own local experiences.

In an earlier life I had been a senior HR professional, and I'd felt a sense of real shock when first being exposed to Foucault's thinking. Of course I was aware of the dangers of 'managerialism' and the tendency to see working life just through corporate

spectacles. But to realize that rather than seeking truth, we HR professionals were instead using our techniques of assessment and appraisal, to construct a discourse which 'rendered visible the work arena' in order to define what passed for truth in the area of 'human resources', cut much closer to the bone. With the best intentions in mind, I too had been a prime mover in introducing the so-called 'latest thinking' to my organisation e.g. competency frameworks and assessment centres. And as the professional 'expert', I'd used these so-called expert knowledges to create and order reality, and not as I believed at the time, to map what was there. And it had all seemed so natural at the time, as though all I was doing was being a fair and neutral observer, without any axe to grind, without any 'rank' (Mindell, 1995) to blinker my vision and relations with others less expert. I still shudder when I think about how naïve I was at the time, and how I so easily became an active agent of my own subjugation to this view of organisational practice.

So as I felt my way into Exeter university and this programme, I realised that here too, there was a basic and largely unquestioned assumption (on both 'sides') that knowledge flowed one way, and unless challenged could really restrict what students felt able to explore and offer. Students have to write seven formal essays and a dissertation as part of the degree, so there's plenty of scope for knowledge flowing the other way. However the marking and primarily summative grading process which focuses on knowledge of formal theory, makes it clear that it's the university that knows and therefore assesses and decides, thus diminishing what students may offer. And as Foucault (1972) has indicated, there are always a wide range of 'exclusionary practices' that work in the background in order to control and sustain the orderly nature of a discipline – so it's not easy for those on the 'outside' to get their new ideas acknowledged.

And many of these are 'rationally *in*visible' (Garfunkel, 1967)[10] it's very hard for students to realise and then believe they have something original and valuable to offer, unless it fits/adds to what's on already on offer on the academic agenda. And what's on offer is focused on what the university values in it's own closed and competitive circles, where work is focused mainly on 'filling scholarly holes' (Bartunek, 2007) and where the rhetoric of *logos,* rather than *ethos* or *pathos* (Aristotle, 1954) is the preferred medium. Again as Foucault has clarified: 'this power is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the "privilege" of a dominant class, which exercises it actively upon a passive, dominated class.' (in Sheridan, 1980, p 136). Scarce wonder then that practitioners feel rather shut out, and unless strongly and regularly encouraged, fail to find their own voice and the 'I' that will show them their own path of development and contribution. And that I in return, felt and feel strongly that despite the masking and insidious effects of disciplinary power, I want to help them search for an 'aesthetics of existence' (Foucault, 1989 as quoted in McHoul and Grace, p 125) – in essence a practical way of life – in order to become an *agent* in the production of their own lives and those around them.

2. Split between theory and practice
I'm regularly astonished by the way theorising is valourised ('she's really bright') and how academics are encouraged to follow their own theoretical interests - both with little attention to practice, except at those few universities which recognise the value of experience. Bartunek (2007) in summarising a range of relevant research on the typical gap that exists between theory and practice, proposed that '…we need to enlarge how

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[10] This is an inversion used by John Shotter of Garfinkel's term 'rationally visible' (Shotter, 2008, p37)

we think about bridging academic-practitioner gaps. I propose that we expand Boyer's (1990) scholarship of integration to include academics' relationships with practitioners in ways that go well beyond research per se. That is, I propose that we develop a *relational* scholarship of integration' (p 1324)

In talking about the way academics work, she goes on to say: 'little of the advice includes rationales for intended actions, even though there are extensive conceptual rationales for the studies whose findings lead to the proposed actions (cf. Schulz & Hatch, 2005; Van de Ven, 2007: Ch. 8); that is, implications are typically suggested in a decontextualized, distant way. Some of the advice would appear to many readers to be contradictory, and some of it is simply hortatory. (pp 1325-26)…The typical way that we as academics are accustomed to having an impact in scholarly writing is through the strength of our logic and our data (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 2006); we find gaps of some kind, convince others of their importance, and then attempt to fill them in our work. [This is very much the view of expressed by Sandberg and Alvesson earlier!] Although this works for academic scholarship, it is not all there is to having an impact, and it is not likely to appeal to practitioners who are not particularly interested in, or aided by, filling scholarly holes. (p 1326)… *Logos* is what academic articles typically emphasize; it refers to the clarity and logic of an argument and its supporting evidence…Heath and Heath (2007) summarized prior scholarly work to suggest that ideas that stick are those that are simple, unexpected, concrete, credible, emotional, and likely to be told as stories. For example, Weick (1999) wrote that in theories that are "moving," that matter to others, emotions play a strong role. So, he noted, do affirmations, statements that convey to an audience that something they thought or did is acceptable.' (p 1326)

A particular problem is associated with academic-practitioner differences. This has to do with differing and strong opinions among academics about the value of "rigorous" versus "relevant" research (Anderson et al., 2001)… 'As Gulati (2007) noted, especially in situations in which there is, at best, ambivalence on the part of academics about the value of mutually beneficial academic-practitioner relationships, attempts to create such relationships will likely require the efforts of boundary spanners, people who do not identify themselves fully with either the academic or practitioner community and who have the courage and the interest to treat both groups as of value and as having something to contribute to the other… helping academic researchers and management practitioners enter into each others' worlds without needing to cast their own worlds aside.' (p 1330)

3. Impact of 'supercomplexity' on knowledge and learning
As I discovered when reading Realising the University (Barnett, 2000), higher education needs to involve students in understanding the *contestability* of knowledge frameworks. Here are several penetrating quotes which point to the need for a new kind of pedagogy that embraces conditions of 'supercomplexity':

'Research … has to be understood as the promotion of "supercomplexity" in our public understandings. … Teaching, on the other hand, has to be construed as the production of "supercomplexity" in the minds of students and as the development of the capacity on the part of students to handle the resulting dislocation.' (ibid, p162)… Ultimately, the supercomplex world presents not challenges of knowing but of being. This is the

fundamental educational problematic of supercomplexity and it is one from which the university shrinks…arming the student with a repertoire of well understood intellectual frameworks was itself (never) sufficient to carry him or her forward into life…The student's propositional knowledge never could carry him or her fully and satisfactorily into experiential situations; the is-ought gap never was susceptible to a technical solution. (ibid, p 157)…higher education in its pedagogies [is] to be understood as a threefold educational process. Firstly, it has to create epistemological and ontological disturbance in the minds and in the being of students: it has to pose cognitively and experientially the radical uncertainty presented by supercomplexity. Students have to come to feel in every sense the utter uncertainty of the post modern world. Secondly, higher education has to enable students to live at ease with this perplexing and unsettling environment. Thirdly, it has to enable them to make their own positive contributions to this supercomplex world, while being sensitive to the unpredictability and uncontrollability of the consequences of what they say and do' (ibid, p 154). Echoes here of Foucault – to 'know what what they do, does'!

 '…a pedagogy for supercomplexity has also to become a pedagogy that is itself characterised by uncertainty, unpredictability, contestability, and challengeability…we have to give up the notion of teaching as such…The formal lecture is a refuge…ensures that the unsettling that such elements (uncertainty, contestability, etc) can provoke is barely skin deep…the students remain as voyeurs…The challenge of a pedagogy for supercomplexity…is to place students in situations in which they are *required* to handle conflicting ideas…and uncertain situations (Collier, 1993)…Challenges that yield alternative legitimate responses must be obligatory. The responses, too, should be personal and interpersonal… Enabling students to handle their own disturbance calls for a pedagogical transaction in which the student has the pedagogical space to develop her own voice' (ibid, pp 159-60)

'Accordingly the university has a responsibility to assist students on the formation of what Scott (1995) [ibid, p 158] calls their 'reflexive biographies'. These 'biographies' are regarded as being made largely in and through action, through a purposive engagement with the world, enabling students to act positively in what Barnes calls a 'milieu of dislocation', using their powers of meta-reflection and action. Such powers are felt to be necessary to making a reflexive biography, as '…distinct from having one's biography made for one by the manifold forces that dominate this supercomplex world' (Barnes, ibid, p 158-9)

So here the great divide is between academic 'theory' seen as the primary (deductive) basis for increasing knowledge – and this is what the university has and the students don't; and 'theory' derived from more (inductive) analysis and reflection of the practical requirements of work practice. The challenge for me is how to influence the way I work with both kinds of experience and knowing, how I influence how my students grapple with, distil and integrate their own learnings from the many opportunities that the programme presents directly and indirectly online and at work (through e.g. the 'recruitment' of their diverse resources as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter), and how we influence the educational social formation we jointly create with each other, and with other members of the MA staff and student grouping.

E learning

> You can't teach people everything they need to know.
> The best you can do is position them where they can

As I noted in the earlier section on 'leadership development', a major challenge for such programmes and processes is 'learning transfer' - helping learners translate whatever they learn in such programmes into informed action in local situations. As part of the development of the competency approach to address this, there have been attempts to identify and develop what Linstead amongst others calls 'meta-competencies' (1988) which seek to capture what might be involved in contextualising a 'tool' or approach, like being able to cope with greater ambiguity, reading/reframing situations, responding flexibly to changing conditions, and acting with greater critical reflexivity (Carter et al, 2000, Day, 2001 in Ladkin et al, 2009). E learning and other web-based approaches, though growing in popularity especially through the development of more 'blended' approaches (Salmon, 2002) have not until recently featured in academic thinking and research, being seen to be more appropriate for content oriented courses like e.g. geography, statistics, etc. Instead, mainstream thinking about developing these higher level situated skills has generally focused on full time programmes where *face to face* encounters offer the possibility of noticing and working on the complex, multi-level and subtle stimuli and responses that are believed to be involved (Dreyfus, 2001)

But does this differentiation hold up in practice? There is very little research into the online delivery of leadership education, but as part of earlier work on the MA, Ladkin et al (2009) did carry out a review of the growing body of research into the web-based delivery of educational programmes, and the pedagogical possibilities it might offer. Amongst other things the authors identified the following attributes of this research: it's mainly case study based involving undergraduates studying subjects such as statistics (Frederickson et al, 2005; Oliver and Omari, 2001); it seeks to clarify whether online students retain more and perform better than others not using online methods (Frederickson et al, 2005; Holsapple and Lee-Post, 2006); and it assesses how well ICT supports collaborative discourse (Jones et al, 2006; Salmon, 2000) including the impact of specific online features like 'bulletin boards' (Brower, 2003; Palloff and Pratt, 1999). Regarding management education itself, Hodgson and Watland (2004) in a detailed review of research into the use of 'networked learning' methods conclude that the research 'is not looking at what the new and critical issues are, that are raised for learners and teachers when learning via technology'(ibid, p 111) They recommend looking more deeply at how learning occurs rather than at outcomes in web-based delivery processes. However I note that other researchers in the 'networked learning' field like Ryan et al (2000), and Lentell (2003) describe a wide range of academic and non-academic roles for e tutors emphasizing the role of 'educational facilitator' in seeking individual development as well as increases in subject knowledge. My reading of this literature, while more encouraging than Hodgson and Watland's, is that the 'splitting' that occurs elsewhere still permeates this literature: despite more encouraging noises about e.g. learner centredness, the focus is still very much on knowledge and not practice in the field (Denis et al, 2004). Other evaluation studies into management education like those by Arbaugh, 2005, and Legnick-Hall and Sanders, 1997, are of programmes where online delivery had been incorporated as *part* of the process but was not the primary delivery mechanism. (Ladkin et al, 2009, pp 195-6)

The other issue of relevance identified by Ladkin et al (ibid) in the literature in this context, focuses on the differences between learning seen as the 'transmission' of facts and knowledge, versus the idea that it might be 'constructed' through an active process of sense making involving interpretation, selection and personal understanding (Rumble, 2001). I deal with this question extensively elsewhere and here limit my

comments to the apparent impact of distance learning methods on the 'transmitted vs constructed' issue as debated by writers on online education such as Huang (2002) and Oliver and Omari (2001). These writers who link their thinking to theories of adult learning, propose that the 'constructivist/constructionist' paradigm is likely to better capture what happens than the 'transmission' mode – with the former author going further to say that educators should accordingly act as facilitators of learning rather than transmitters of knowledge. This leads to the paradoxical notion that in the new online technology, the 'distance' between knowledge and the knower, in this case leads to greater 'closeness' of learning, in terms of proximity to the scene of performance. This is the overall line taken by Ladkin et al in their paper who, building on work done by Gosling and Mintzberg on 'close learning', highlight the positive role that this proximity to 'context' is likely to play in helping students integrate theory and practice, and so embed their learning informally in work situations, which formal programmes held 'off site' find problematic (London and Maurer, 2004; Taylor et al, 2002)

I see the great divide here as being between seeing learning *about* leadership as mainly being about the 'transmission' of de-contextualised 'knowledge' on which the student 'builds' (Heidegger, 1971) as in the 'warehouse' model; as against learning *of* leadership being of a more situated and embodied nature gained through 'dwelling' (Heidegger, 1971) within practice with others. As highlighted in the section on 'leadership', the issue here for me is how to frame and engage in the e learning process in ways which enable students to experience leadership as more of a *situational, relational,* and *momentary* phenomenon *and* one that looks for feedback on progress in expressive and embodied ways i.e. in *ontological* terms. Obviously the big challenge is how to develop a quality of relationship and interaction that, despite the virtuality, asynchronousness, and 'distance' involved, allows the student to feel sufficiently 'listened' to (O'Reilly, 1998), understood and supported, to engage actively with the greater levels of epistemological and ontological doubt involved in this kind of learning process. So a major question for my research is what such a relationship might look like and how it could be set up and sustained over the two year period of the programme.

Coaching

> To lead people, walk beside them…When
> the best leader's work is done the people
> say, 'We did it ourselves!'
> *Lao Tzu*

When I first became a coach on the e learning programme I approached the role as someone who was a development practitioner in leadership and change management – so mainly interested in practice - but who had an enormous interest in what theory from any field e.g. academic/consultancy/work-based had to offer. Since starting to research my practice I've discovered, perhaps not surprisingly as coaching is essentially a practical real world activity, that as far as HE research is concerned, this appears to be the least well researched of the six areas that surround the MA. Though interest in the field of coaching itself in areas like executive, life, sports, and so on, has burgeoned enormously in recent years, it appears from the lack of relevant academic research in e.g. management oriented journals like Leadership, Management Learning, and Management Inquiry, that HE regards both undergraduate and higher degrees as being primarily about learning propositional knowledge; and that coaching type activity aimed at associated practical application and skills development is not seen as very relevant and/or interesting. Further, as one might guess, there is virtually nothing in the field

concerning *longer term* coaching on e learning programmes – so a very large 'gap' to be filled! As we shall see in my remarks in the later section on 'research', the split between *academic* versus *practice* based theory development in the leadership field is very wide, and this may be one reason for this dearth of interesting research on what might be seen as a largely practical and practice oriented form of support. So, though I will review what I have been able to find in this area, particularly in some of the new journals devoted specifically to coaching, most of my commentary will be on what has been learned about coaching in general, involving traditional coaching as well ideas and methods from a range of therapeutic approaches, and what implications these might have for my research into my own pedagogic practice as an online coach.

Though the word 'coaching' doesn't come up in his work, I regard Donald Schon's work on reflection and professional practice (and his collaborations with Chris Argyris) as providing concepts and tools which are central to the coaching process (Argyris and Schon, 1996). His early interest in the ways in which categories are used to examine things but are not themselves examined as ways of thinking, in time led him to develop an overall epistemology of professional practice, based on the concept of knowledge-in-action. Through studying the reflection-in-action that professionals bring to their everyday practices while operating under conditions of complexity, uncertainty, uniqueness, and value conflict, he showed how professionals' theories-in-use are *tacit* theories of action. Later he also demonstrated how participating in a reflective practice with others on their knowing and reflecting in action, would allow them to reconstruct their theories of action, making it possible for their action strategies to be explicitly formulated and open to criticism. He brought together his ideas on the development of this new epistemology of professional practice in The Reflective Turn: Case Studies In And On Educational Practice (1991). Together with Argyris he developed a range of practical reflection tools like 'the left hand column', 'the ladder of inference', 'advocacy and inquiry', and 'single and double loop learning' which help practitioners (and their coaches) inquire into the assumptions and values that underpin their thinking.

For me the most insightful ideas have come from my exploration of the therapy field e.g. 'systemic questioning' - the work done by Karl Tomm (1988) to categorise the questioning methods of the Milan School of Family Therapy; Farrelly's 'provocative therapy' (Farrelly and Brandsma, 1974); Cechin's stances of 'curiosity' and 'irreverence' in his work (Cechin, 1987); de Shazer's solution focused Brief Therapy (de Shazer, 1991); the 'dreambody' process work approach developed by Arnie Mindell (Mindell, 1982); Michael White's use of Foucault's ideas to develop his version of narrative therapy devising questioning methods for investigating 'landscapes of action and consciousness', and the 'decentredness' of the therapist (White and Epston, 1990); and finally the development of the NLP approach into a less intrusive mode of 'clean language' questioning of the metaphoric dimension of experience (Lawley and Tompkins, 2000). These have provided a wealth of philosophic, methodological, as well as pragmatic ideas and tools for trialling and refinement in organisational contexts, which I've found more engaging and energising than the more practical routines and tools usually of a psychological turn like e.g. the GROW method, that are used in mainstream coaching areas like executive coaching and the newer field of life coaching.

In an article in Management Learning David Gray (2006) identifies this as an issue and provides a thoughtful review of executive coaching, including some interesting detail on Schon's approach to reflection like e.g. his 'Follow Me' and 'Hall of Mirrors' techniques which I'd not come across before. Though the focus of the article is mainly on 'executive coaching' and typically about shorter term relations, I was interested in

his main argument concerning the differences between coaching approaches influenced by 'adult learning theory' as against what he sees as the dominant 'psychotherapeutic' approach. He talks about the former, particularly transformational learning theory as presented by Mezirow (1994), who holds that 'the most personally significant transformations occur when we are able to critique the premises (perspectives) we hold about ourselves' (p 487). Another commentator Cranton believes that this thinking moves coaching 'beyond adragogy' towards being a kind of 'empathetic provocateur' (Cranton, 1992, p 17 as quoted in Gray, p 487). The quote from Newman (1994) regarding 'we see ourselves seeing the world' (as quoted in Gray, p 487) - which he argues is a level of reflection above that advocated by Schon – seems to be another way of talking about 'critical reflexivity' as described by Cunliffe (2002) and others (though Gray doesn't actually use the term). There are also interesting ideas on the role of 'critical reflection' and what Goodman (2002) describes as 'developmental coaching dialogue' which feels close to what I'm trying to do in my work, and does I believe provide support for the general approach I've been taking. There also appear to be some strong similarities with 'ontological' coaching developed by Sieler (2003) and reported on in The Complete Handbook of Coaching edited by Cox et al (2010). In this approach influenced by the integrative work of Winograd and Flores (1986), the coach focuses on the three 'domains' of language, the body, and emotions, to enable coachees to experience shifts in their 'way of being'. This allows them 'to become a different and more powerful observer of themselves, others, and how they can constructively engage in the world' (Cox et al, 2010, p 118).

Coaching of this nature is often seen as an aid to the learning transfer problem mentioned earlier. In a recent paper on coaching effectiveness Hooiberg and Lane (2009) report that the effectiveness of learning transfer from an executive education programme (using multi-source feedback) was considerably improved by having coaching sessions after the programme but *before* executives returned to work. Interestingly the key finding, which seems to contradict much of the existing coaching literature based on longer term relationships, is that participants in coaching sessions in shorter executive education programs, expect and want their coach to take an active role in interpreting their results and in making action recommendations. They do not talk about 'chemistry' with the coach but rather about the coach creating an open, trusting, and supportive environment - so more about coaching 'skills'. But I feel that a greater limitation is that their framework model for effective coaching is wholly linear in nature with no attention being devoted to contextual or relational aspects – so not one that will cast any helpful light on my coaching situation.

Though not focused on coaching as such, nor web-based, I've been attracted to a couple of interesting classroom-based contributions which deal with what a coaching approach could offer to students of leadership. The first is Caroline Ramsay's work on developing a 'scholarship of practice centred inquiry' (Ramsay, 2011) which suggests amongst other things that the role of the educator should be 'provoking' in the sense of 'interrupting' current understandings, inviting inquiry, and the questioning of assumptions and ideas. In this she introduces the ideas/tools of Frank Farrelly (mentioned in an earlier paragraph); an American therapist who called his approach 'provocative therapy', using humour and devil's advocacy as the basic tools for encouraging new thinking (Farrelly and Brandsma, 1974) . Her basic idea which she has used in the classroom with her work-based learning masters degree students, is to move from explanation or testing of theoretical constructs to the creation and evaluation of local social relations in the light of new practices. In this she is following the pioneering work on 'social poetics' developed by Shotter and Katz (1996). She has also used ideas

associated with narrative therapy, in particular the Foucauldian influenced approach developed by Michael White, the pioneering Australian narrative therapist, to help her stimulate her management students' inquiries through the use of poetry (Ramsay, 2005).

I would point out though, that this kind of second position intervention activity is just *one* kind of provocation. Others I would highlight and want to consider as part of the mix, include the potential provocatory value of ones own personal experience, the views of others both close and distant, and serendipity. However, the transformation of theory, personal experience, the views of others, and serendipity into provocative form doesn't just happen, and so there is a need for some support in the learning situation to reframe and reposition these inputs from 'knowledge' into 'provocations to knowing'. And clearly this is where the online coach on the MA can be so useful, sitting in a position somewhere in the neutral middle and/or 'alongside' the student, looking together at issues, and so able to stimulate new thinking through framing each of these forms of knowing, as provocations.

John Shotter is also a major influence in the second piece of work I want to mention here. This is the approach presented in several papers by Ann Cunliffe who introduces the process of 'reflexive dialogical practice' which she uses in the classroom with management students to sensitise them to the emergent and improvisational nature of meaning making, and the impact of our assumptions and values on this interactional process (Cunliffe, 2008). In her model she talks about three basic interconnecting activities: *reflex interaction* where we just respond spontaneously to the other; *reflective dialogue* where we make sense of such reflex experience by 'talking about' things and invoking and applying theory and ideas *upon* and *to* this experience; and *critical reflexive questioning* which moves us into becoming more aware of the constitutive impact of our participation in dialogue and encourages us to question our basic ways of being in the world and how our values and assumptions play a key role in such processes. Using John Shotter's ideas here (Shotter, 2008) we can talk about making sense *from within* our dialogical relationships. Again, though not framed as 'coaching' as such, I can see how this kind of reflective and reflexive activity in group discussion in the classroom can facilitate the kind of learning that coaching is designed to support.

Articles which appears in newer journals devoted specifically to coaching, like Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research, and Practice, tend to focus on mainstream face-to-face coaching in non educational settings like executive and life coaching. However they do offer reports on interesting research which might have some application in the more online, asynchronous, and text-based setting of the MA. Two caught my eye. The first reports into research into 'conversational identities' adopted by coaches by Stein (2009) who has identified some 16 different 'hats' coaches can put on during conversations in order to respond appropriately to client needs. Though I find her approach linear rather than relational, looking at actions only from the point of view of coach intentions, and not checking her research claims with any coachees, her Typology of Conversational Identities for Professional Coaches does provide a useful basis of comparison for my own typology that I mention in Chapter 3 and report on in Chapter 7. The second article by Askeland (2008) looks at the effects that different coach ideology/assumptions – in this case 'strategic choice theory' and the 'complex responsive processes' model developed at the Complexity and Management Centre at Hertfordshire - can have on the nature of coaching interaction. What I like about this article is the way it demonstrates the very different effect an ideology based on human interaction being seen as 'a continuous flow of gesture and response' where the coach is *'very much a part of what emerges'* and 'is *not* uncovering something that is already

there and that only belongs to the client' (p 73). Influenced by 'complexity theory' (Stacey, 2003) and the work of G H Mead (1934), these first person research findings very much mirror ideas by others like Shotter on 'conversational realities' (2008) which I believe offers a more fruitful way forward to establishing the nature of the 'local ontologies' in which we all live and work (Foucault, 1984).

So for me the great divide here is between seeing coaching as a well mapped out instrumental process where the coach uses various mindsets and tools to support problem solving by the client, and where the learning, which is mainly of a cognitive 'knowing that' and 'knowing how' nature, is done by the client/student; and seeing it more as a relational and dialogical practice where coach and client mutually interact within a practice and where the knowing, which is of a more embodied and situated nature, emerges in a joint and more uncertain 'knowing from' process. The demands on the coach in terms of receptiveness and responsiveness are much greater in the latter more dialogically structured process (Bahktin, 1986) where, following Barnett's 'supercomplexity' criteria (2000), the coaching relationship needs to imbue the epistemological and ontological uncertainty which the student needs to learn to work within.

Research

> Research is to see what everybody else has seen,
> and to think what nobody else has thought
> *Albert Szent-Gyorgyi*

There is an enormous amount of interesting and relevant research on research methodology which, despite considerable change and progress over the past 30 years , still seems to suffer from the division between 'academic' and 'work' based approaches. Though this has been a complex, messy and contested process, the nature of these developments can be to some extent captured by the notion of 'turns'. To begin with, as Reason and Torbert (2001) point out, discussions of research methodology in organizational and social science have for long been trapped in a tussle between 'empirical positivism' which still dominates the academy, and the counter-movement of 'postmodern interpretivism'. They further say: 'In their 1978 ASQ article, Susman and Evered pointed to a crisis in organizational science in that "the findings in our scholarly management journals are only remotely related to the real world of practicing managers" (p 582). They pointed out that the positivist approaches to science which have dominated our perspective on research "are deficient in their capacity to generate knowledge for use by members of organizations" (p 585).' Since then empirical positivist assumptions have been called into question and their place as the dominant paradigm of our times increasingly challenged by e.g. Gergen (1994), and Lincoln and Guba (1985) as the 'linguistic turn' has swept the social sciences and humanities.

As Reason and Bradbury (2001, p 5) put it: 'The cognitive turn focused on the cognitive structures (schemata or mental models) which allow us make sense of the world. The linguistic turn…looked at the hitherto underestimated role of language in our construction of our world…In scholarly circles it is difficult to suggest that the world exists outside our construction of it (Gergen 1994, 1999; Schwandt 1994; Shotter 1993)' They invite us instead to consider what kind of first-person "critical subjectivity" (Reason, 1994, p 327) can help each of us become aware of, deconstruct, and go beyond our taken-for-granted assumptions, strategies, and habits. These authors emphasize the

important principle that *all* ways of framing and interpreting the world are human constructions framed by language in social interaction. (Reason and Torbert, 2001)

But as Reason and Torbert go on to claim 'still another transformation, this time toward the *action turn*, is necessary to reach a full understanding of the action research that Susman and Evered called for so long ago…we argue that since all human persons are participating actors in their world, the purpose of inquiry is not simply…to contribute to the fund of knowledge in a field, to…deconstruct taken-for-granted realities, nor even to develop emancipatory theory. Rather, the primary purpose of human inquiry is to forge a more direct link between intellectual knowledge and moment-to-moment personal and social action, so that inquiry contributes *directly* to the flourishing of human persons, their communities, and the ecosystems of which they are part…' (Reason and Torbert, 2001, p 4)…whereas the primary purpose of research in the academic tradition is to contribute to an abstract "body of knowledge" available to third persons, the primary purpose of research… after the action turn is a *practical knowing* embodied in the moment-to-moment action of each research/practitioner…human knowing…is essentially *participative*, growing from collaborative relations with…other…co-inquirers…all knowing is based in the sensing, feeling, thinking, attending *experiential presence* of persons in their world…and all movements of the attention, all knowing, all acting, and all gathering of evidence is based on at least implicit fragments of *normative theory of what act is timely now*…The action turn returns the fundamental questions concerning the quality of knowing to the practice of the knowing person in community (see also Toulmin 1990; Shotter 1993)'. (Reason and Torbert, 2001, p 5)

So, it seems that the instruments of inquiry and the criteria of excellence in social research after the 'action turn' might no longer be primarily methodological (Reason and Torbert, p 6). Or so we might have thought… But alongside this 'turn' there have been a growing body of researchers who have been developing something called 'practice theory' or the 'practice turn', where again we find that we've got interesting but difficult methodological questions to think about! As I noted earlier, in their critique of competency, Bolden and Gosling (2006), by implication pointed towards a more practice oriented approach to leadership. However in their 2008 paper to the International Conference for Studying Leadership in New Zealand, they suggest that despite the criticism of the competency approach, they believe it has a role to play in understanding what Whittington (2006), one of the second generation of practice theorists (Brauchler and Posthill, 2010) calls the 'practice' arm of his three stranded model of practice theory (the other two being 'practitioners' and 'praxis'). They also note that there are several criticisms of the 'practice' perspective due to the varied and confused nature of the definitions used, and due to the emphasis on action, the potential for practice to be seen as just 'what people do', ignoring the view that these actors are also the product of practice, and ignoring the effects of other dimensions like power relations, ethics, and legitimacy. Their conclusion that the interrelation between practitioners and practices influences the nature of praxis suggests that the leadership developer needs to consider a 'more experiential, embedded approach that enables the emergence of contextually appropriate knowledge (Raelin, 2007) and the development of practical wisdom or "phronesis" (Grint, 2007)' (Bolden and Gosling, 2008, p 9).

So let's take a deeper look at this current 'turn' in the light of the criticisms noted by Bolden and Gosling. Though there is no coherent and unified version of 'practice theory', it starts from understanding the history and development of the practice itself, the internal differentiation of roles, and consequences for the people participating in them, and not from individual decision making or the functioning of systems. The first

'wave' of such theorists like Bourdieu (1981) and Foucault (1979) sought a virtuous middle path between the excesses of methodological individualism and those of its logical opposite, methodological wholism. For example 'both social order and individuality … result from practices' (Schatzki, 1996, p 13). Reckwitz distinguishes between 'practice' (praxis) which describes the whole of human action; and 'practices' which are routinised behaviours made up of interconnected elements like bodily behaviours, emotions, mental states etc (Reckwitz, 2002). Schatzki sees two kinds: a *co-ordinated entity* which is a temporally unfolding and spatially dispersed nexus of doings and sayings; and as *performance* in which practices are enacted in ways which actualize and sustain practices in the sense of nexuses.

Based on a reading of Schatzki et al's work (2001), many of these theorists regard the human body as the nexus of people's practical engagements with the world e.g. Bourdieu's 'habitus' where the world's structural constraints form 'permanent dispositions' (Bourdieu, 1981). Thus the single individual acts as a *carrier* of a practice or practices, of patterns of bodily behaviour, as well as certain routinized ways of understanding, knowing how, and desiring. A closely related notion to Bourdieu's 'habitus' is Foucault's (1979) concept of 'discipline' where 'disciplinary power' works through the body as subjects learn to self-regulate their bodily practices, However, in both instances, these are *qualities of a practice* in which the single individual participates, *not* qualities of the individual, with practices preceding individuals, both historically, logically, and ontologically. There is no presumption of the primacy of individual action, and social life is seen as a constant struggle to construct a life out of the cultural resources one's social experience offers, in the face of formidable social constraints; and where one develops predispositions to act in certain ways. Critically, performance presupposes a practice, and practice presupposes performances. 'Dispersed practices' (Schatzki, 1996, p 91-92) appear in many sectors of social life, examples being describing, following rules, explaining and imagining; whereas 'integrative practices' are 'the more complex practices found in and constitutive of particular domains of social life' (Schatzki, 1996, p 98) like farming, cooking, and business.

Practice theories are neither individualist nor holist and comprehend non-instrumentalist notions of conduct, both observing the role of routine on the one hand, and emotion, embodiment and desire on the other. So for Schatzki et al (2001, p 3), 'the social is a field of embodied, materially interwoven practices centrally organized around shared practical understandings'. The maintenance of practices over time depends on 'the successful inculcation of shared embodied know-how' (2001, p 3) as well as on their continued performance. Because activities (or actions) and bodies are 'constituted' within practices, 'the skilled body' is where activity and mind as well as individual and society meet (2001, p 3). It follows that we can only understand actions within their specific practical contexts.

So in this brief review of the Research 'field', I feel the great divide between mainstream approaches and more postmodern ideas is between 'I'-less objective knowledge about individuals on the one hand; and increasingly shared and practical understandings based on situated and embodied knowing that is constituted within practices, on the other. With my own preference clearly being toward the latter, I believe the challenge for me is to do with developing a research approach which will allow my students and I to stay open and responsive to the ambiguities and difficulties involved in inquiring into what is primarily a distance-learning, asynchronous, and text-based educational practice. I believe this is going to require open participation between us at both the level of educational 'activity' and educational 'pedagogy', which will

demand a certain minimal amount of face to face dialogue over and above the customary online contact, if we are to fully exploit the learning hidden within the rich textual records generated in the web-based educational system.

IDENTIFYING GENERATIVE CONDITIONS FOR MY RESEARCH

> Psychologists call this tendency the Fundamental Attribution Error (FAE)…We will always reach for a "dispositional" explanation for events, as opposed to a "contextual" explanation
> *Gladwell, 2000, p 160*

In this chapter I have been talking about six 'fields' as though there really *are* six different areas of knowledge and practice – which is partly why this feels such a complex research ecology in itself. But following the natural inclusion frame (Rayner, 2005), I feel I can also say that these are temporary punctuations of things that are different but not discrete, which enable certain kinds of thinking and behaviour, while at the same time constraining and preventing others. Using Rayner's terminology, they can be seen as 'local neighbourhoods' which show or form certain kinds of figural responsiveness in dynamic spatial relations with each other and omni-space (Rayner, 2005). Though this is a more difficult framing for me to hold, it offers such potential for revealing new kinds of understandings that it's one I definitely want to keep returning to as the meta-frame in which to make sense and offer judgements of the educational practices I'm involved in. So instead of going along with the persistent 'splitting' and division between e.g. the academic and work worlds, theory and practice, explicit and tacit forms of knowing, mind and body, knowledge and behaviour, and so on, I'm hoping that I'll be able to see from time to time, the dynamic multi-dimensioned field in which my work and living theory research is unfolding. And that these fleeting moments of insight will enable me to position and present the knowing emerging from my action research work in an original, useful, and accessible form that contributes to new standards of judgement in the Academy.

The purpose of this chapter has been to look more carefully and critically at the educational world around me in which my own small and local study is located, to find out how my inquiry might link and contribute towards one or more areas in this broad and diverse 'field of practices' (Schatzki et al, 2001) and to identify ideas that might further help me in my quest to improve my practice. After this brief but critical tour across the territory in which my study resides, I think I'm now in a position to identify what these seem to be. It appears that nothing of particular significance has been done in my focal area i.e. online coaching in leadership, apart from the earlier 'pathfinding' paper by Ladkin et al. So this appears to be a 'gap filling' opportunity par excellence!

However there is much of interest that does or could impinge on my studies that flows from the other fields in which the MA resides. These come either from 'gap filling' and/or 'problematisations' of existing approaches which I'm not comfortable with - like faulty thinking about learning and development, the absence of active consideration of the contextualization work needed to apply 'tools' effectively, the under-valuation of the importance of dialogue in constructing local realities, and the lack of attention to the ontological assessment of progress. Or they stimulate building on ideas from people like Polanyi, Foucault, Whitehead, Rayner, and Shotter, which seem to me to offer more fruitful ways of understanding and working with unfolding experience in my chosen field of educational development. And so I want somehow to be able to appreciate and be creatively liberated by all this complexity *while* also being sufficiently disciplined,

critical and focused to draw some original and practical conclusions about how to improve the higher education of situated practices like leadership.

I believe the following vantage points that have emerged out of my reflections in this review will be able to help me do this, by acting as searchlights that not only shine a bright critical light on my current reasoning but also light up the way ahead to a future where amongst other things, students are enabled and motivated to 'recruit and exploit the diverse repertoires of participation and application they may bring from other settings' (Lee and Rochon, 2009, p 301). Following Garfinkel (1967), I believe each of these areas represent ideas that are 'developed and developing' and so are open to further elaboration and refinement from an inquiry such as this one.

Tacit/marginalised knowing: staying open, sensitive, and responsive to widespread tacit and ever-present marginalisation of various forms of knowing particularly those involved in the local contextualising and embodiment of 'tools' (Polanyi, 1983).

Learning from 'practice': counter-balancing the scholarly approach to learning with work-based educational methods (Raelin, 2007) using the 'practice' perspective (Shatzki et al, 2001) to frame and make new sense of embodied interactions between persons and their contexts.

Conversational realities: basing my epistemological and ontological judgements on a 'third kind' of knowing (Shotter, 2008) - to do with how to be a person of a particular kind, not only according to the 'culture' but also the 'exchange' one is engaged in - in a jointly constructed 'knowing from', or what Bernstein (1983) has called a 'practical moral knowledge', that emerges from the creative, improvisational and embodied nature of the dialogically structured events (Bahktin, 1981) that occur in conversations between people.

'Living theory' action research: using an open and dynamic approach to 'action' and 'research' which allows me to attend to and appreciate the values-based, living, embodied, and emergent nature of my own thinking/behaviour and those around me, as we take part in and mutually constitute educational practices on the MA in Leadership Studies (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006). And as a key part of this, to make use of multi-media forms of data collection, analysis, and presentation to provide *ostensive evidence* in ontological as well as epistemological terms, of marginalisation and tacit knowing, and the educational influence exercised on my own knowing, the knowing of others, and the educational social formation and practices in which we perform.

Natural inclusion: adopting inclusional thinking (Rayner, 2005) as the overall meta-frame through which to attend to, treat, and devise more 'revelatory' approaches to the multiple splits/divides permeating the researching, teaching, development, and performing of leadership in the 'field of practices' in which my leadership research is taking place.

I return to these 'beacons' in the final chapter when I use them to form a critical framework through which to critique and extend the pedagogy I have developed. With this setting of the background to my research, I'm ready now in the next chapter to take you through how my own 'focal' research approach has been forming and developing over the past seven years and how it's been shaped by the 'subsidiaries' I've been dwelling in and exploring in this chapter (Polanyi, 1983).