

## INTRODUCTION

‘For to see a problem is to see something that is hidden. It is to have an intimation of the coherence of hitherto not comprehended particulars...we commit ourselves to a belief in all these as yet undisclosed consequences...we are guided by sensing the presence of a hidden reality towards which our clues are pointing...The discoverer is filled with a compelling sense of responsibility for pursuit of a hidden truth...we can know things...that we cannot tell.’

*Polanyi, 1983, p 21-25*

This is a story about a higher education programme in ‘leadership studies’. The very term ‘studies’ immediately conjures up images of students listening to professors delivering lectures about what leaders ought to be doing, reading academic articles, analyzing case studies, and writing formal essays. And yes, all of this does happen on this programme. However, this is a ‘distance learning’ programme with educational materials delivered online, and most of the interaction between students and staff taking place in ‘asynchronous’ and ‘written’ form in learning logs and essays. With *leadership* being a ‘situated practice’, it’s difficult to see how students could genuinely improve their ‘practice’ by following this arms length and primarily cognitive approach to study, and with virtually no face to face contact time between students and staff (Dreyfus, 2001).

Well, against the odds, this programme *is* working and is achieving practical success, with some 70 students graduating over the past 7 years, including 30 with full masters degrees. This thesis tells a story, *my* story as one of the online coaches on the programme, of how this unlikely educational proposition has been made to work. Through adopting a ‘living theory’ approach to action research, I’ve been able to slowly clarify and embody the values and pedagogic principles and practices which have enabled me to achieve two things: to provide coaching that has helped my students on the Masters in Leadership Studies at the Business School at Exeter University, achieve worthwhile practical and scholarly outcomes; and to create and present an original and critical piece of educational research which offers the Academy a new standard of judgement for assessing the efficacy of online education. But much ground needs to be covered before these two assertions can be fully explored and understood and the basic claims confirmed or otherwise – which is what I plan to do in the rest of this thesis.

But to start at the beginning, I need first to start at the end, and admit that it is only now during these last few months while finalising the last chapter of my thesis, that the deeper meanings of my educational work have emerged most fully into my consciousness. These meanings have emerged – in response to a question as to what it was that really constituted the originality of my thesis - in a form which I feel now really does clarify the trajectory I’ve been following for so long. They also create that sense of expectation and stretch that tells me that though I am right on track, there’s still plenty of room for improvement. Such is the nature of the transformatory journey that Polanyi speaks about in the quotation above – in pursuit of a hidden truth that we can ‘know’ at some level but have difficulty telling others about it – and one that continues to promise yet further possibilities of ‘fruitfulness’, and hence heightened validity.

As I notice in the introductory remarks to his own thesis, Geoff Mead also had this kind of enlightening experience after ‘finishing’ his thesis (Mead, 2001). I’ve not quite ‘come full circle back’ (ibid, p 16) but like him, I want to take advantage of the perhaps

paradoxical phenomenon – ‘introductions’ are generally written *last* – to give you an idea of these late revelations and how I’ve decided to treat them in my thesis. As these are essentially concerned with a deepening of the original ideas, and as I’ve since noticed a wide range of clues to these, dotted through-out the thesis, I’ve decided not to re-edit the materials written earlier that appear in Chapters 1 to 6, to take account of these later realizations. Instead I will take advantage of the introduction ‘paradox’ to offer some extra signposting now which readers might find helpful later on<sup>1</sup>. So to the beginning...

## **PRELIMINARY SIGNPOSTINGS**

From an early interest in the mysteries of human communication that I first became aware of over 40 years ago on a dusty power station construction site in Canada, I do seem gradually over the passing years to have been able to get closer to an understanding of a question about ‘reality’ that I’ve been pursuing, as though ‘obsessed’. As Polanyi suggests: ‘looking forward before the event, the act of discovery appears personal and indeterminate. It starts with the solitary intimations of a problem, of bits and pieces here and there which seem to offer clues of something hidden. They look like fragments of a yet unknown whole. This tentative vision must turn into a personal obsession...its content indefinable and indeterminate. Indeed, the process by which it will be brought to light will be acknowledged as a discovery precisely because it could not have been achieved by any persistence in applying explicit rules to given facts.’ (Polanyi, 1983, p 75-76) You will find plenty of evidence in the narrative of my learning that follows in Chapter 1, that it has indeed become a ‘personal obsession’!

But the opportunity in these last months to step back from this obsession and reflect on the thesis as a whole has brought closer to the surface potential new framings which are good examples of one of Jack Whitehead’s ‘living theory’ principles i.e. the meanings of your embodied values emerge in your interactions with others (Whitehead, 2009). These may take some time to emerge, and only surface in ‘eleventh hour’ moments of fleeting recognition, as these three have. I comment on them briefly here as I believe they will help the reader get a more up to date sense of the context and ground I’m writing from.

### **From ‘possibilities’ to ‘responsiveness’**

The first reframe happened at one of our final supervision discussions in July, 2011 when, in responding to Jack’s challenge ‘so *what* is it that’s really original?’, a new deeper meaning of my educational purpose was ‘presenced’, signaling to us both in that moment that I had moved ‘a little closer’. My first big breakthrough, identified in an earlier supervision session in October, 2008, was that I was driven by *presencing developmental possibilities (PDP)* - for myself as well as with my students. Now in this second game-changing moment, I began talking about my long term and deep, but till this moment largely backgrounded, interest in the process of ‘contextualising’, and mentioning having ‘contextual empathy’ as one aspect of this. As Jack started responding to this ‘admission’ I suddenly realized that coming right up into the foreground, was a potentially much deeper understanding of what I intended by this ‘presencing developmental possibilities’. During my journey home these ideas engaged

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<sup>1</sup> As you will discover, this ‘now-then’ impulse is one which lies at the heart of my desire to ‘presence development possibilities’

in a stimulating dance sparking off other implications and possibilities in my mind, and this continued for several days more before settling down in a new form which I now call *presencing empathetic responsiveness to requisite situated practice (PERTRSP)*: I now realize that it is opportunities to develop this particular capability that I'm *really* trying to presence.

This is not exactly a catch phrase that trips lightly off the tongue, so it's not one I will use again till the final chapter when it will be easier to explore and explain. For now I'll stay instead with the simpler 'presencing developmental possibilities' till that time. However I have noticed since revealing this new framing to myself, that elements of this phenomenon appear throughout my writing over the past year, and even in earlier appendices attached to Chapter 1. So I believe I can offer this new framing as an example of what Polanyi, within his emergent 'from-to' model of tacit sense making, would call a new 'focal awareness' of my earlier 'dwelling in the subsidiaries' (Polanyi, 1983). It does embody an intention and practice which I hope you will grow to appreciate, in terms of meaning and importance, as I clarify the central contribution it makes to my coaching pedagogy, in the six chapters that introduce you to my learning journey over some 40 years. In this new form it now more clearly constitutes an 'inclusional' coaching tool (Rayner, 2010) which seeks to reveal continuities between 'I', 'others', and 'situations' that are usually masked by the so-called 'excluded middle'. And so I put it forward as such as an original standard of judgement which I explore further in Chapter 3.

### **From 'knowledge about' to 'practising with'**

While this insight was the highlight of our July meeting, something else emerged which in the context of a discussion about originality, is something I feel I should also comment on in this opening statement. As you will see in Chapter 2, in scanning the research fields within my horizon, I explore framing statements made at the 2010 annual conference of AERA (Lee and Rochon, 2009), to do with enabling students to make full use of their resources in whatever pedagogic context they find themselves in (and which I certainly attempt to address in my own work). In this year's conference, AERA have decided to inquire into the second part of their mission which they feel they are not yet fully addressing - I italicise this in the full statement which follows: 'to advance knowledge about education, to encourage scholarly inquiry related to education, and *to promote the use of research to improve education and serve the public good*'. In talking about this, Ball and Tyson state that 'Education must become the agent rather than the object of change...' and to do so we must '...expand our vigilance to ensure that our research is central to the enterprise of educating human beings in all circumstances' (Ball and Tyson, 2011).

Given Jack Whitehead's intention to contribute to this conference, we quite naturally looked at my own work in this context and felt that it could be seen as an example that addresses the *whole* mission statement: in helping my MA students I am making use of 'knowledge about' and 'scholarly inquiry related to' education – see the many examples of this in Chapters 4 to 6 in particular; and in a self-study of my coaching practice, I am also 'using research to improve education' in a live and practical sense, which is in its own small way, trying to 'serve the public good'. While this has never been the primary purpose of this inquiry, I would ask you to bear this claim in mind as you work your way through my narrative and get inside my world view and arguments.

### **From a focus on ‘projects’ to ‘methodology’**

The third insight started surfacing in the weeks prior to our penultimate supervision discussion in October, 2011. In looking back over my career it began to dawn on me that in every role I’d taken up since the mid 70’s I’d found it impossible *not* to lift my focus up from the level of ‘task/project’ to that of ‘methodology’. Without exception, within six months or so of joining a new organization I would begin a process of involving colleagues in ‘meta’ discussions which focused on improving ‘our’ approach and methodology. Though I always seemed to be the main driving force behind this development activity, it was without question always about an ‘us’, and how ‘we’ could improve the services we offered to our clients: it was about a relational commitment to what the organization was supposed to be about (perhaps a little idealistic on my part?) and the clients we served. You will notice clues throughout this work to this intense ‘can’t let go’ interest in seeking improvement in everyday working through exploring and strengthening the foundations that underpin such working practices<sup>2</sup>. And notice too that this ‘can’t let go’ quality is informed by a determination to resist closure, staying open to uncertainty, and the view that any ‘solution’ can only ever be a temporary one. Please bear this in mind especially when you read Chapter 3 when I talk about ‘inventing an aligned methodology’

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So with these three ‘signpostings’ now complete, let me go back to my earlier question (how could this kind of programme work?) and say a little more about this. Given the success the online version of the MA programme has had since it first saw the light of day in 2004, it is easy to forget, or perhaps not even realize, the very real pedagogic difficulties that a distance learning programme focusing on a situated practice like leadership, faces. At first sight, many people, both students and staff, used to more customary face to face methods, are very doubtful that it could work. So let me say a little more about why this might be so, here at the start, so that you can read what follows with more awareness of these potential issues.

### **THE ‘PARADOXICAL POSSIBILITIES’ OF DISTANCE LEARNING?**

Since the initial study by Ladkin et al carried out in 2005-6 (Ladkin et al, 2009), my own continuing exploration of the influence of coaching within the online provision of the programme, has identified a number of further educational ‘barriers’ which cast doubt on the MA being able to deliver genuine development which can influence back home performance and practice. However, as in the initial study, I have found in my own research that it is possible to approach these barriers in ways which offer ‘paradoxical possibilities’ for learning and practice development. I list the six I’ve identified so that you are aware at the outset of the thesis, of the practical local barriers posed by higher education and online provision that need to be circumvented if there is to be serious influence on the learning, development, and performance of a situated practice like leadership. The full text of these remarks appears in Appendix 1 to this Introduction.

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<sup>2</sup> A current example of what I mean by this intense focus on ‘methodology’ appears on my website at [www.the-pin.co.uk](http://www.the-pin.co.uk) which I set up with my Exeter CLS colleague Roger Niven in 2010

- **Distance learning:** there is a strand of literature which is sceptical of the potential for on-line technology to equal or surpass the educative outcomes offered by face-to-face teaching and learning relationships (Arbaugh and Stelzer, 2003; Brower, 2003). How can 'dated' propositional knowledge located in a 'distant' university be experienced by students as a stimulus for thinking and behaving afresh in their workplaces?
- **Transmission mode of knowledge provision:** given that all students already have a very full 'day job', the unyielding week in week out 'transmission' of prepared 'packages' of academic knowledge is intense and can be experienced as mechanical, rigid, and oppressive, especially if students get behind in their work, as can often happen.
- **Asynchronous relations:** in contrast to face to face modes of education, here the provision of knowledge, the reflective work done by students, and the coaching which follows, is provided in an asynchronous, arms-length, written, and virtual manner. Due to the demands of their jobs, student's 'logs' and the coach's 'responses' can be weeks apart and lack closure, and students can get months 'out of synch' with the programme schedule.
- **Asymmetric power relations:** the presence of a distantly located centre of expertise providing 'propositional' knowledge - framing notes, theoretical articles, professorial critique - supported by a summative approach to grading, often generates conditions where students undervalue their own experience and tacit expertise.
- **Learning transfer gap:** given the largely propositional knowledge base of the MA, and the university's focus on the reproduction of such knowledge in graded essays, one would normally expect that the learning and knowing achieved by students would tend to be cognitive in nature. How could this process support the transfer of learning that leads to improvements in situated practice?
- **Discontinuity between theory and practice:** as in much higher education, theoretical considerations dominate in the university, and within their organisations, the students as practitioners of leadership, are dominated by matters of immediate practicality. There seem to be few formal links and little interflow between these zones of different kinds of knowing and practice.

These six areas are often seen to be, and in practice can be, major barriers to the kind of educational influence that might be associated with the development of a situated practice. Is it possible to overcome these or reduce their negative influence on the educational process, such that they offer 'paradoxical possibilities' for students on the programme? The remainder of the thesis is devoted to exploring these questions, not directly as such, but through reflecting on action research of the everyday interactions between students and coach as we work our way through the two year part time programme together, and I as coach seek to improve my practice. I will come back to respond more directly to these so-called 'barriers' to development in the final chapter.

## **SOME INITIAL CALIBRATIONS**

When you read through the text I'm conscious that there may be a number of influences at work which may not be visible to you. While there has not been a deliberate attempt on my part to camouflage or 'smooth' the flow of writing, this final text represents a significant reduction of a much larger draft, and many re-positionings of text to create a more 'readerly' version of my earlier 'writerly' drafts. As such you'll notice I include in appendices to most chapters, many supporting writings so it's possible for the

interested reader to go deeper where necessary. There are also other issues which I've only really become conscious of myself in the latter stages of finalizing the text, as I've been able to step back and look at the meanings of what I've written – I mentioned three earlier - and these too are likely to be hidden in the subtext, and not visible certainly at a first reading. For example you may be expecting and you may think on first impression, that this thesis fits into a traditional form of social science research, following a typical qualitative research sequence: for example in Chapter 2 there seems to have been a literature search seeking to identify a niche topic within a recognized research field, in Chapter 3 there is talk of epistemology and methodology, there's lots of data gathering and analysis in Chapters 4 to 6, and throughout the piece there are plenty of references to the literature. Further given my strong interest in theory and method, you might think that I'll be focusing mainly on epistemological issues and the development of propositional models and knowledge. But these clues would give a false impression of the process that I've been engaged in, and so to highlight some of these now largely hidden dynamics influencing the shape and style of my inquiry as it has developed, I offer a few preliminary explanatory comments.

### **A focus on improving practice**

Since registering at Bath in 2002 and becoming a coach at Exeter in 2004, I've been focusing my efforts primarily on the everyday, ongoing work involved in responding to student work in their weekly learning logs, and grading and providing formative feedback on termly essays. My 'research' as it was in those early years was focused more on 'improving' my practice as against 'researching' my practice - although with action research it may not be that easy to differentiate between the two. The 'research' element consisted mainly of reflections committed to a digital recorder that occurred most often while on long drives along motorways between Exeter, Bath and where I was living at the time - for some reason these journeys particularly stimulated my reflective mind. Reflecting on and transcribing these 'digital diary' or field notes which I've now kept going for some seven years, very often informed my formal writings on the first part of the Bath CARPP PhD programme – as you will see in the chapters that follow – as well as the self initiated writings I later developed for Jack Whitehead, my supervisor, once the formal 'diploma' part of the programme was completed.

As a result I've discovered that many of my 'research' ideas have in fact been ideas which I've already embodied in my own coaching practice, like e.g. 'presencing developmental opportunities': I've been applying this to myself for decades though obviously not using this term until more recently. This has also meant that my engagement with the ideas of others has usually come from the grounds of my own experience and motivated *not* by an intention to find a niche for my research or through a systematic literature search. Instead, very much as Winter describes, I've been *pulling in* research (Winter, 1989) as signaled by the demands of improving my practice, and often on an intuitive basis as I pursued Polanyian 'clues' emerging from my work. So you are likely to find 'gaps' in my review of *the* literature, as well as perhaps a surprising range of ideas from outside the immediate field I'm working in.

### **An emergent research process**

As Paulo Freire says 'we make the road by walking' (Horton and Freire, 1990), creating our way forward in *what we do* and *how we do it* with others, more so than through design and planning. And my road has changed quite radically in nature over the past 15

years or so since I first registered for a PhD. One important aspect of the change has been my focus and role: over the years I've moved from 'consulting' about change, to 'facilitation' of change, to 'researching' in change, or in this last mentioned activity, to how *I've* changed as I've sought to improve my practice. This has been paralleled by a sympathetic movement from a 'third person/them' to 'second person/us' to 'first person/me' perspective (Heron and Reason, 1997) as I've increasingly saddled the boundary between facilitator and researcher over the past 7 years. And these changes in positioning have been accompanied by parallel transformations in my epistemology – from 'systems' to 'systemic' to 'social constructionist' to 'embodied practice', as I discuss at the end of Chapter 1.

These shifts in consciousness have enabled me to gradually bring a sharper focus to my research, reducing my field of vision against the centripetal pull of my many and varied interests in e.g. multiple ways of seeing and rhizomatic notions of validity (Lather, 1991). And in this focusing process, my attention has shifted between e.g. what was happening with the students and their studies, to what I was doing/being in my coaching practice, to the more relational view of how I could assess the impact of what I was doing on what the students were doing in their practices, both as scholar and leader, and to the reciprocal influences between these various actions and the overall social formation in which we were learning together. So again this certainly has not been a straightforward march down a clear sequence of discrete research activities. Rather you will find evidence of my wanderings in a forest of emergent knowing, clearing a path whose edges have gradually become clearer as I've settled methodological, epistemological, and validity issues along the way, to create a pedagogy which has been guided all along by the question 'how do I improve my practice?' of helping others with their developmental challenges.

### **A shift from epistemology to ontology**

As you will notice in Chapter 2, I have an aversion to what I see as often arbitrary 'punctuations' that academic disciplines make in order to restrict their field of view for research, publishing, and career development purposes. I prefer to locate an issue in its context – what the Milan School of Systemic Family Therapy called a 'problem determined system' (Anderson et al, 1987) – and have often found it baffling when say psychological texts, never seem interested in looking over the wall at more socially influenced interpretations. This is probably why I have a tendency to prefer writers like Bateson, Capra, Wilden, Gladwell, and McGilchrist, who have no difficulty in crossing 'formal' boundaries to explore an issue. And that's also why in this text you'll find lots of ideas from different fields being juxtaposed with each other, either to round out a framing, set up creative tension, or seek a synthesis of some kind. This also explains my attraction to using a non-dualist approach to leadership like 'practice theory' (Schatzki et al, 2001). In sympathy with this I've also found in the past couple of years that my interest has been moving from a focus on different epistemologies and a notion of developing a new 'epistemology of practice' – so an 'epistemology first' position - to an 'ontology first' position, where I've become far more interested in finding ways of working more directly and 'roundedly' (McGilchrist, 2010) with the ontological skills involved in the practice of 'knowing how to go on' (Wittgenstein, 1958, no 154).

This I feel has been a natural consequence of my abiding interest in the phenomenon of tacit knowledge where as Polanyi says 'all thought dwells in its subsidiaries, as if they were part of our body' (Polanyi, 1983, p x), and my desire to know the world in this

way. My extensive grounding in body oriented and dialogic approaches to learning and healing has also influenced this shift, helping me work with the dynamic flow of experience in an 'inclusional' way (Rayner, 2010) trying to do justice to *all* kinds of knowing. And this I hope has allowed me to write *through* my experiences, giving my writing a 'from' or 'with' rather than an 'about' quality (Shotter, 2008).

## **HOW MY STORY UNFOLDS – THE CONTRIBUTION OF EACH CHAPTER**

Can I now offer you some clues as to what is in the chapters that follow, and the role each plays in bringing out the learning and ideas that lead me to claim in this thesis that I make a coherent and original argument for the contribution that a coaching-based pedagogy can make to an online higher education degree devoted to developing a situated practice like leadership?

I think the most important point to make here is that in contrast to a conventional form of thesis which would have a chapter devoted to 'methodology', this whole thesis is concerned with my methodology as it develops and emerges over the period under review. So though Chapter 3 does address methodological concerns, you'll find many of these have already been foregrounded in Chapter 1, but in a different more narrative mode. And you'll find that many of these are again treated in different more specialised ways in Chapters 4 to 6. As Dadds and Hart explain in the context of facilitating what they term 'methodological inventiveness', for some practitioner researchers it's just as important to develop their own unique way through their research as their self-chosen research topic; and where the focus is primarily on creating 'enquiry approaches that enable new, valid understandings to develop; understandings that empower practitioners to improve their work for the beneficiaries in their care.' (Dadds and Hart, 2001, p 169). So you'll find that in each chapter, particularly in Chapters 4 to 6, that I seek to reprise and extend the key ideas/experiences which have helped me develop the complex 'artifacts' that allow me to engage in a particular kind of educational activity which helps students transform cognitive input into improvements in situated practice (Ilyenkov, 1977 in Burkitt, 1999)

So as I say at the end of **Chapter 1**, 'in looking back at the narrative I believe it provides evidence of several significant transformations of sense of self, focus, and nature of my knowing...that I've undergone'. These transformations have not been planned in a deliberate fashion but have crept up on me as I've refined my inquiry instrument to get a closer experience and understanding of my quarry. That they have been life changing has only become evident later on when, as Polanyi, talking about the process of 'interiorisation', suggests, 'the creation of new values is a tacit process in which people submit to these new values...by the very act of creating and adopting them.' (Polanyi, 1983, p xi) In addition to shifts in my sense of self and what it is to be a living social being, I've moved a long way in how I now believe I can know – from everyday common sense 'facts', through the use of systems and then systemic lenses, to taking account of the power of language and social interaction, and finally to focus more on embodied sense-making in the present moment. And it is this new epistemology that is closely allied to a 'becoming' ontology that now infuses my inquiry allowing me to see new ways of tackling the challenges in the online environment. So this chapter is very much about charting in 'patchwork' form, this emergence and evolution over 40 odd years, so that you as reader, can begin to grasp the worldview and values that characterise my 'living theory' as I practice it.



In **Chapter 2**, I look outwards from my own inquiries to offer a ‘problematizing’ inquiry into six ‘fields’ that I see as encircling my own area of research. This leads to my conclusion that most of the mainstream approaches within these fields appear to be subject to ‘splitting’ behaviour of various kinds (Reber et al, 2009) and consequently provide an unbalanced approach both to appreciating the different kinds of knowledge that exist, and how to acquire and embody these. For example, models about *leadership* seem dominated by the usual debate between ‘agency’ and ‘structure’, and approaches to *development* generally split between an epistemological ‘building’ approach to do with increasing knowledge, and one using more ontological processes of ‘dwelling’ to focus on situational, embodied, and relational qualities of knowing (Heidegger, 1971). Further when looking at teaching/learning methods these divides seem to be mirrored in higher education’s ‘clean’ but narrow focus on decontextualised objective knowledge as against the messy practical ideas emerging from practice.

Uncomfortable with the effects of this splitting activity in these and the other four areas, my focus has been on finding a more synthesising and balanced approach to knowing and living based on that knowing, and so this chapter starts to identify some of the elements which could facilitate a more balanced approach. Similarly, distance learning approaches seem to go for a passive ‘transmission’ model of teaching knowledge or attempt through more ‘blended’ approaches to make use of a much wider variety of interactive modes of exchange to explore other kinds of knowing. Even the more pragmatic activity of *coaching* divides between well tried recipes that focus on increasing ‘know-what’ and ‘know-how’ required for short term problem solving, or enter more challenging territory where coach and client mutually interact within a relational practice and where the knowing, which is of a more embodied and situated nature, emerges in a joint and more uncertain ‘knowing from’ process (Shotter, 2008). Finally in *research* the damaging divide between objectivist and subjectivist views of ontology and epistemology and the continuing struggle between the positivist and constructionist camps, continues unabated. From this I identify several themes that I hope will permeate my research.

In **Chapter 3** I trace the evolution of my action inquiry approach to developing and improving an online coaching practice. What emerges is how I’ve been driven in my lengthy Polanyian-like search for enlightenment by a strong constellation of values. Partway through my stint at Exeter, this constellation led me to a shift towards the research pole of my action research practice, so that I might better elicit my knowing and ‘carry the word’ into the public domain. And this has helped me clarify my own aligned version of the quartet of ‘ologies’ – axiology, ontology, epistemology, and methodology - that are critical to what I can know and how I can present and support my claims to knowing. I also have made explicit my evolving methodology for coaching and how I’ve gone about learning what might make it an effective way to support the development of a situated practice like leadership through an online programme of higher education. So this chapter covers much of the territory first encountered in Chapter 1 but is now more directed towards highlighting the elements which will in time synthesise into an online coaching ‘pedagogy of presencing’ which I bring together in Chapter 7.

Having set out my context and research approach, in the next three chapters I continue to develop my methodology in order to better notice and understand what I begin to consider are signs and examples of learning, development and educational influence in this online distance learning medium:

- In **Chapter 4** I demonstrate the possibility of the existence of ‘fleeting moments’ of educational influence, starting very much with Wittgenstein’s idea of a *primitive reaction* being that very first spark of potential new knowing, and the precursor to the creation and evolution of a language-game (Wittgenstein, 1958). So this chapter is very much about how the characteristics of normal conversation, such as their anticipatory, suggestive, and improvisatory character, can also take effect within the asynchronous environment of the MA, leading to mutual meaning-making between coach and student.
- Building on these findings in **Chapter 5** I go on to show how such primitive reactions can evolve into new *language-games* during what I call ‘development episodes’. In these, through a largely tacit process of ‘dwelling’ in what Polanyi calls the ‘subsidiaries’ (Polanyi, 1983), students evolve the new ‘focal’ framings that enable them to ‘know how to go on’ (Wittgenstein, 1958) in everyday situations which they find novel, difficult, or unsatisfactory in some way. So in this chapter I make the case for language-games being seen as deeply enmeshed in practice, and so enablers not only of new ways of talking/thinking but also of the development of new ontological skills needed for authentic embodied performance.
- In comparison to the findings in the chapters on ‘fleeting moments’ and ‘development episodes’, the longer term distillations in **Chapter 6** provide more of an aide memoire that reminds, stimulates, and provokes further reflections and self reflexive questioning about the phenomenon of leadership, about the efficacy of leadership development activity, and about the contribution of the student-coach relationship towards improved scholarship and practice. The more patchwork form that these *reflexive biographies* take on (Scott, 1995), indicates the desirability for greater engagement and creative involvement of the student in sense making after the event through e.g. finding the ‘red thread’, filling in gaps, providing evidence for claims, defining outcomes, and so on – and in most instances this is provided. So this chapter is about providing evidence of significant changes of an ontological as well as epistemological nature that have taken place over the longer period involved, and further provide evidence that the educational relationship between student and coach has played a pivotal role. So e.g. as one of the students reported: ‘I think that it is my tutor who is the *fulcrum*’. [my emphasis]

Finally in **Chapter 7**, I build on these earlier understandings about challenges and educational progress in the thesis, and turn to capturing and creating a more integrated picture of the key elements that have formed my own personal working pedagogy over the past five years or so. This framework includes all the key elements I’ve already explored in some detail in earlier chapters, like *presencing developmental possibilities*, the *responsive repertoire*, the *development container*, and *online indicators of development*, but these are discussed now as parts of an online pedagogy, and in the light of my deeper framing of educational mission – *presencing empathetic responsiveness to requisite situated practice*. Finally, in the light of what I now consider to be exemplars of a postmodern pedagogy for supporting the development of situated practice, particularly in online programmes, I set up a short critique of the pedagogy I’ve developed, and invite you to join me in assessing this contribution in terms of the meaning framework I’ve developed in these pages.

To legitimate my claim that coached online education can support the development of a situated practice like leadership, I believe this thesis has to articulate at a high level of argument and provide evidence for, the following five assertions:

- *conversation* understood as an anticipatory and improvisatory dialogical process, is the ‘ultimate context in which knowledge is to be understood’ (Rorty, 1980)
- ‘gestural’ language (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) and psychological ‘instructions’ (Vygotsky, 1986) offered in ‘dialogically structured’ interactions (Bahktin, 1981) can provoke ‘primitive reactions’ which through ‘indwelling’ (Polanyi, 1983) can lead to new ‘language-games’ (Wittgenstein, 1958)
- engaging in new language-games that enable students to ‘know how to go on’ in their everyday working life, develops the tacit knowing and ontological skills that enable improvements in situated practice
- development processes like this can take effect in online, written, and asynchronous online interactions when coach and student are able to co-create a culture of inquiry that generates and values multiple ways of knowing and ontological experimentation
- *presencing empathetic responsiveness to requisite social practice* is an inclusional and contextualising coaching tool that forms the centerpiece of an online coaching pedagogy that supports inquiries that lead to improvements in scholarship and situated practice.

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Having set the scene in this Introduction, I now invite you to continue reading this narrative as I begin my story more formally in Chapter 1 by taking you on a Cook’s tour through my own reflexive biography of the past four decades. As I do this I’m very aware of my own sense of vulnerability as I commit my personal knowing, with an attendant claim to ‘universal intent’ (Polanyi, 1983), to the public domain. I’m hoping that as you engage with the multi-media text you will experience what Marie Huxtable has called ‘empathetic resonance’ (Huxtable, 2009, p 221) and be able to get closer to what I’m striving to communicate in this text<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> As Daniel Everett who spent 30 years in the Amazonian jungle living, learning, and researching into the lives and language of the remote Pirahas tribe, says: ‘These are *my* lessons. Someone else would no doubt have learned other lessons. Future researchers will have their own stories to tell. In the end, we just do the best we can to talk straight and clear.’ (Everett, D. 2008. *Don’t Sleep, There are Snakes: Life and Language in the Amazonian Jungle*. London: Profile Books)