

EPILOGUE

THE EXAMINERS CHALLENGES

I reflect on the examiner's interest in the links between the Eight Limbs of Yoga and action research.

I decided to write a separate chapter on embodied knowledge, inquiring more deeply into the connection between mind and body, and how I convey my experience to others in a yoga class. Bearing in mind the examiners' request for more evidence of practice, I included feedback from 14 students attending two of my classes.

From this I learned more about the direction of embodied resonances, about how I teach and learn and make choices. It added to my understanding and provided coherent links between my embodied experience and language.

This same examiner also asked me to say more about the connections I had made between Spinoza and my experience. There was no time in the viva for further exploration of either his question, or my thinking. But I knew that I did not have an answer that would have satisfied me, and that I needed to address that question in the rewrite.

This is one of the reasons that I wrote Chapter Two, to situate Spinoza in relation to Kant and the philosophers of the Enlightenment. In doing this, I satisfied myself that I could defend my references to Spinoza because he was a western philosopher who did not avoid the relation between feeling and thinking, and who advocated the deliberate cultivation of joyful thinking.

Reflecting further on the viva, I asked myself, 'What meaning does the examiner's attempts not to be rude have for me, what direction does this send me in?'

I hunted around for an answer. I asked a few people what they thought and reread some of this examiner's writing. I decided that he thought the writing was undisciplined and inelegant, and that the most important challenge for me was to

write and structure the writing ‘elegantly’. I decided ‘elegance’ meant being clear and being stylish and neither messy nor passionate.

I therefore needed to take pay attention to the grammar: firstly, my sentences needed to be turned round, so that they were constructed by putting the conclusion first rather than the explanation. Secondly, the sentences needed to include as little affect as possible. Thirdly, I needed to make my message simpler. Fourthly, the thesis needed a very clear structure, adhered to without exception.

Losing stamina

As I began to write the concluding chapters, I began to struggle. The joy of responding to my examiners’ challenges was waning. It had been a long and tiresome process. I was alone, writing alone and my spirits were low. Drawing on my reserves I determined to comply with the structure and the limits I had set myself.

This is an excerpt from my journal at that time:

In a conversation with Madeline about why I am asking readers to mark my text in red pen wherever they recoil from my writing, she suggests that my inquiry now is ‘How can I make meanings and myself understood to the male brain.’

I hear her exasperation, her fear that I may be losing my scholarship. She asks me if Jack is reading it. I tell her that I am rewriting this thesis on my own, that I only seem able to do it on my own. That I am going deep into my psyche in a passionless almost masturbatory process which I find boring and makes me angry. My potential for depression is clear.

In responding enthusiastically to the examiners’ request, I had willingly submitted myself to the will of ‘others’. I found that the only way that I could sustain my response was to become solitary, not discussing the content with others. I asked people for specific feedback on grammar and form, but I could not inquire with others and stay true to my intention to comply wholeheartedly with what the

examiners wanted. I found myself in a tug-of-war between conventional rationality and my relational (e)pistemology, and it was very painful.

I began to appreciate the full meaning of my relational (e)pistemology and in doing so, found further confirmation that I develop knowledge in response to the 'other'. Without relation I am in danger of becoming solipsistic, in danger of being trapped in a bell jar of self-alienation. The writing becomes pointless when it is not developed in response, so there is no practical outcome. I had already discovered my scholarship and found how I might bring this knowledge into my practice. This was a purely academic exercise.

I support myself through this depressive victim state, sitting in silence, meditating, remembering that not being able to discern purpose does not mean there is no purpose. I just have to do it. Like the Path of Duty, just doing it because I have been asked to do it, doing it to the best of my ability. I have relied upon developing this disciplined response in many different circumstances. I want to be able to look back on this rewrite and take pride in my flexibility and capacity to alter what I do, and that includes being able to alter the way that I write, to alter the 'ordering principles' of my language.

EXPERIENCE, THEORY AND PRACTICE

My examiners asked me to distinguish between experience, theory and practice. I couldn't understand what caused them to ask such a question. So I asked myself, 'What do I mean when I say 'My experience'?'

My experience is what I think and feel in the act of either doing or remembering something. It is what I bring into the present when I act, which then informs the next time I act or think similarly. Experience is what I have learned, which I bring into action.

So what is action? It is practice - the practical act of doing. I think about what Jack Whitehead's definition of practice – it is acting – doing anything. Peter Reason seems to use the word to mean practice-in-the-world, professional practice, as in CARPP – Centre for Action Research in Professional Practice. I ask Sara (Glennie) what she means by practice, and she replies, 'My inquiry

practice'. That was interesting, because I call my practice of inquiry, my methodology. I realised that I needed to decide on a meaning of 'practice' and that this would refer to my practice teaching yoga and my leadership practice. That any other 'practices' would have a descriptor (such as spiritual practice). This might help to make my meaning clearer to my readers! In this way, experiential knowing becomes practical knowing.

What does the word 'theory' mean to me? It is the words that describe meanings more fully in contrast to, or in conjunction with, others words in the same field, as in 'mathematical theory' or philosophy. Or it is words that describe how something is constructed or how to implement something, as in 'How to grow vegetables' or 'Diversity and Equality Strategy'. It is the use of language to research new meaning, as in Foucauldian theory, or it is using language to inform. So when I say that I have developed my living theory, my theory is a description of my experience of how I improve my practice. In this way practical knowing becomes propositional knowing, becomes theory.

Because my learning is derived relationally, my knowledge is relational. That is why my experience of love is described in relation to what I do and what I read. It is why I bring my 'experience of love' into my writing about my teaching and leadership activities. It is why I need to be reminded of love's resonance when I reread my living educational theory of love and evaluate its usefulness. I seek a wholeness, unifying resonance, which is disclosed in the parts, and which come together like the petals of the lotus flower.

If my examiners see theory as ideas and models written about in books, then I must clarify the relation of my initial thinking to the cultural frame in which it sits and show how this influences me. I have to show how my reading alters my experience, which alters my writing. And how my experience of this is then theorised.

Evaluating the thesis from the standpoint of the examiners

In the prologue, I summarise the examiners report in the following way:

The examiners say:

1. how this is work inquiry, and in particular how is it action research?
2. the absence of a strong methodological discussion
3. the flow of argument was often unclear
4. the primary chapter ...was disjointed and disconnected from theoretical themes
5. the patterns of the thesis must be made clear to the reader.
6. the process of inquiry must be made explicit, such that cycles of action and reflection are articulated and that strong links be made between experience, practice, and theory.
7. the evidence provided supports the conclusions reached.

Point (1) is explicitly covered at the beginning of Chapter Three.

Point (2) is covered in Chapters Three and Four

In relation to point (3) I have introduced summaries in most of the chapters where I think that is necessary in order to clarify my meanings.

The exception to this is Chapter Five, referred to as the 'primary chapter'. This is reflective writing. I have now explained this more fully in Chapter Two, and also provided a full justification for this approach in my methodology chapters. I have also 'signposted' the sections throughout this chapter to indicate the direction of the reflective flow.

On point (5) I have completely restructured the thesis, introducing the propositional frame at the beginning and providing two concluding and evaluating chapters. I have explained my approach in the Prologue and outlined the structure in the Introduction.

On point (6) I have represented my inquiry practice to show the cycles of action and reflection as requested.

And on point (7) I have responded to my examiners by providing a current example of my leadership practice, which shows how I apply my methodology and allow love to influence my actions more fully.

Revisiting the conversation in the viva: Making the connection between experience and practice.

The re-presentation of my thesis is based on the examiners' report. The penultimate sentence of this report reads:

‘That the candidate ensure that the evidence provided supports the conclusions reached’

These innocuous few words belie the emphasis placed on this in the viva. On the tape of the conversation I hear, over and over again, repeatedly, the examiner ask the same question, ‘You use concepts as labels and stay on labels...big ideas standing for something...linking would be magical...I can't link to anything...how are you evidencing...reflective evidence does not constitute a body of evidence...’. I hear myself on the tape giving a robust defence, explaining, making connections, and giving many examples that linked the experiential accounts with the accounts of practice. The conversation goes on for hours, much of it travelling around this same route. I kept remembering that the examiners had said beforehand, repeated at the commencement of the Viva ‘We are open to persuasion’, and by the end of the session, I was thinking ‘I can see no evidence that they are open to persuasion.’

This is why we had, what is referred to in the examiners' report as ‘an extended discussion’ about the revision. I was asking them to be precise about their requirements, not because I did not understand what ‘major rewrite’ means, but because I wanted some reassurance, that they would stand by what they said. In the viva I experienced a dissonance between the examiner's verbalised

statements and their judgements, and I wanted a sufficient clarification in order to attune myself to their understanding.

CRITICAL SUBJECTIVITY

The viva conversation started with a set of questions about critical subjectivity. Questions like, 'How do I judge your account as a remote reader?' Referring to Jack's email (included in the original submission) the question was, 'What would you say to me as an impersonal third?' and 'Dissolving of self...I can't link to anything'. Finally a general statement was made in relation to first person inquiry, 'we are looking at ourselves, treating ourselves as objects in some way...the dynamic of first person inquiry does this.'

I see these questions as emanating from the great debates in western philosophy about the nature of 'essence' and 'universality' and 'truth'. I think there is an underlying assumption that the truth can only be established if we can see ourselves as separated from the whole and pretend to be outside ourselves. That we can only make the connection between some-thing and another thing if we are not a part of it. That for truth to be established we must be clear thinking, which implies that there is no feeling getting in the way of thought. I spent the first 40 years of my life seeing myself as others see me, and I have spent the passed 20 years practising leaving this perspective behind. I will not judge my first person inquiry against these epistemological standards.

Heron (Heron, 2001) points out that critical subjectivity is a way of 'developing (*their*) attention so (*they*) can look at themselves – (*their*) way of being, (*their*) intuitions and imaginings, (*their*) beliefs and actions critically' (ibid. p. 184). I don't disagree with this definition.

However the standpoint from which my critical subjectivity takes place is not from outside, but from within. My critical standpoint is developed in spiritual practice, in the timeless being of silence. The worth of that critique is judged in its enaction and by the effectiveness of my leadership activity. Post-modern philosophy demonstrates that truth is relative, so the truth is unlikely to be found by standing outside oneself. Neither will it be found by becoming divorced from feeling. What is important in my first person practice is to judge the worth of my

practice when talking to, and working with, others. It is the continuing discrimination between the relation of my feeling, thinking and acting which enables me to improve my practice. What my inquiry has demonstrated is how I make the links between spiritual practice, first person practice and professional practice, and how I go on to develop my living educational theory by reflecting on this practice.

In Chapter Five I distinguish between the psychological and the spiritual. I show how feeling can overcome thought, and I distinguish this from the development of embodied spiritual values. In Chapter Four I show how I discriminate between strong feeling, thinking and acting through disciplined attention, journaling and meditation, and how this discrimination enables me to develop my methodology.

In this way I do not attempt a split or a separation of mind or body, or a 'bracketing off' of affect and thought, but I do discriminate between the movement of these inward qualities in order to improve my contribution in the world. The critical aspect of this is that in my inclusional world, my subjective meaning of 'good' work and 'loving' practice is constantly being clarified by the changing nature of the culture in which I live and work. The social definitions of what 'good' work and 'loving' practice are always changing. There is nothing 'transcendent' or universal about these meanings.

EVALUATING MY LEARNING FROM REWRITING THIS THESIS

As I made it clear in the Prologue, this rewrite is not a labour of love. Instead it has primarily been an exercise in meeting the first of my standards, which is

To recontextualise (reframe) what I am or we are doing now; so that our joint work can become easier and more pleasurable.

I set out to make myself better understood to my examiners. To do this I needed to create a definite frame for my thesis and ensure consistency of language and method throughout my explanation.

In the first submission I wrote with love, and was careless about order, expression and language. I had lots of questions, not just about the relatedness

of eastern and western philosophy, feminism with Hinduism, competition and collaboration, but also about what went wrong in the organisation (WHHA) that I had worked for, and which merged with another Housing Association a year after I had left. As I wrote I developed my propositional knowledge. The writing itself was a practice that was improving, and could be shown to have improved by the end of the thesis.

Consequently, I left out many accounts of practice and tidied the whole thing up. I left in the confessional accounts in Chapter Five, to make a case for 'disruptive excess' and 'voluptuous validity' (Lather, 1993), as well as to 'ground my truth values' (Heron 1996).

In this second submission I have rewritten and recontextualised my scholarship because I would like my scholarship recognised. The measure of my success will be the pleasure (or not) that I feel (or we may jointly feel) when I am meet my examiners again to defend this account.

By doing a complete rewrite, I have learned more about how I use language, about the intersection of spiritual practice and action research, and have found further confirmation of my scholarship by expressing my 'truth' differently.