

# Liverpool Hope University

## Doctoral Lecture Dr Joan Walton

### Structure of lecture

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2. Chronological account of inquiry
3. Rationale for methodology
4. Significance of the research
5. Current research at Liverpool Hope University

### Summary of the presentation

1. I am locating this research within the wider context of the 'science of consciousness'; where the claim is that if we are going to understand what it means to be human, we need to focus more on what is going on within us, and not just on what is observable and measurable in the external world.
2. I will argue that, globally, we are facing very real problems which threaten humanity's existence – e.g. terrorism, poverty, the environmental crisis – and as we don't have the knowledge of how to deal with them, we urgently need to engage in research that will help us create the necessary knowledge. Time is an important resource, and for me, we waste too much time researching topics that are not of great importance; when really we should be spending our limited resources researching how to contribute to human flourishing.
3. However, if we are to do this, we need a very different kind of research from that which has been used to describe, explain and manipulate the physical world. We need research that is going to help us make a better world, to help us develop better relationships with each other and with the planet, and to help us learn how to live peacefully and harmoniously together. And, I believe, we will not do that through third person, large scale research activities, based on the conventional belief that truth can only emerge from the results of experiments which are repeatable and measurable.
4. The change I think we need will only happen through the transformation of individuals; through each person being aware of their own part in the whole; being prepared to take responsibility for contributing to human flourishing; and being willing to be accountable to others for how they do that.
5. There is no one way of doing this – each person has to find their own way, a way that recognises their own unique gifts and talents. Each person has to find the purpose and meaning of their own life, then to choose what to do to realise that purpose and meaning, in ways that are to the benefit rather than the detriment of others. It is important that we learn to live co-operatively rather than competitively.

6. There is not a prescribed way of achieving this; no research can be undertaken that will say “this is it; if you do this then we will have a transformed world’. There are no general laws that can be applied equally validly to everyone.
7. Rather each individual has to do this for themselves. Ghandi said ‘be the change you want to see in the world’; and I would suggest that what this means for any one person needs to be researched by that person. Individuals should be encouraged to research their lives and professional practice, if they are firstly to discover and realise their own meaning and purpose; and secondly to learn how best to contribute to the flourishing of humanity.
8. This leads to the idea of ‘life as inquiry’. If each person took responsibility for living their life as inquiry along the lines I have been talking about, then I think that we would begin to see the changes that we want to see in the world. Actually many people are doing this – there are many people engaged in what could be termed a ‘spiritual journey’. But this notion of researching your own life has not entered mainstream research activity in academic settings. I want to argue why I think it is important that it does. Jack Whitehead has achieved a considerable amount in this respect with the development of a living theory approach to action research, where individuals are continuously evolving their own values-based theory of living. This is a process that needs not just to continue, but to expand.
9. My thesis provides an account of life as inquiry. My inquiry is unique to me and is not necessarily relevant to others. What may be of relevance, though, is the methodology. If each person were to develop their own living theory within a wider co-operative inquiry, we may well find that common themes and shared truths emerge from our individual and shared experiences. It is a different way of approaching research. I contend that it is a necessary way if we are to address the real problems that exist in the world. Educated into conventional research methodologies, many people do not realise that materialist assumptions underpin them. If we identify and question these assumptions, the full range of possibilities becomes open to consideration. My thesis stands as an original contribution to knowledge which aims to persuade people that we need different forms of research including that of the individual researching their own lives, and engaging in dialogue with others about the learning that emerges. I hope to communicate some of this in the lecture today.

## **Chronological account of inquiry**

### **First critical incident: Experience of the suffering of children**

The story of my inquiry begins in my first job after leaving school, which was as a housemother in a children’s home in Cheshire, looking after 8 children in the long term care of social services. Coming from a strict but secure and loving home background myself, I had real difficulty coming to terms with the kinds of dysfunctional family backgrounds that these children had come from. For example there was a family of four, whose father was in prison having threatened the headmaster of his son’s school with an axe, and whose mother was in long term psychiatric hospital. Each of the children manifested severe behavioural problems, which included aggressive and violent behaviour to the furniture, to each other and to the staff. I was often the object of attack, particularly from the 13 year old girl who could

be superficially charming, but who became a tigress when crossed. She was only 5 years younger than me, but in many ways it felt as though she belonged to a different universe.

The greatest impact this first job had on me is that it opened my eyes to the huge suffering that existed in the world; and for me this awareness was particularly acute, because it was young children who were suffering, children who in many ways had no chance and no choice for things to be different. One of my most acute memories is sitting outside the bedroom of a 7 year old boy of whom I was very fond, and listening to him cry himself to sleep night after night asking for his daddy to come back to him; and I knew from his family file that that was not going to happen. I sat there feeling completely helpless to do anything for him.

It was this feeling of helplessness in the face of the suffering of these children that was the first critical incident which triggered my inquiry. Because what I was asking was: “How is it possible for there to be meaning and purpose in a world where such suffering is possible?”

I had been brought up the daughter of Christian parents, so I was well used to Christian explanations of suffering, but these did not help me. No matter how much I thought it through, I could not think of a reasonable explanation as to why these children should be subject to so much emotional pain.

I was working in this home prior to the start of the 40 hour week, so I lived there full time for 5 days a week. Living with these feelings of inadequacy and helplessness for so much of the time did me no good at all, and I went from being a lively and outgoing teenager, to getting very depressed, disillusioned about life, and losing all my confidence. So I too entered a period of psychological suffering.

At this stage, I was feeling that my sense of extreme helplessness was a consequence of my own failures, that my lack of knowledge was somehow my fault; so what I needed to do was go to university to gain the knowledge I was lacking. After nearly two years of being in that home, that is what I did; I signed up for a social work degree at Bangor University, that also allowed me to study Sociology, Social Psychology, Philosophy and Study of Religions. It was a fascinating and wide-ranging course where I learnt a huge amount of interest and value.

However, what I did not learn was how to return to practice, and better help those children in my care. I came to realise that all the theoretical subjects covered in university are all very well, but unless the course is practice based, they do not directly equip you to make a difference in the world. And I wanted to be able to make a difference to the lives of those children.

### **Spiritual crisis, depth psychology, and action research**

All of this was hitting me pretty badly. On one level, university was a great place to be, full of intellectual and social stimulation. However, this was undermined for me by what I can only describe as a spiritual crisis. I was questioning everything – the age old existential questions concerning what life was about. I had an intuitive sense that somehow my life, all human life was meaningful, that there was a purpose to the universe and it had not been created through random chance. I just did not know how to discover what that meaning was. I could not find the answer in science, because it seemed to me that science was based on the notion that the physical world was all there is, that the world was created through random chance – and that certainly did not give a reassuring answer to my questions of meaning. And

I felt intuitively that there was more to life than met the eye. Religion did not provide the answers either, even though I had by now learned about a wide range of religions, eastern and western. Yes, they suggested that life was meaningful – but each one gave different understandings and beliefs which they wanted adherents to accept – and I was always somewhat of an independent thinker who wanted to ensure that any beliefs I held were coherent with my own experience of life, rather than moulding my actions to fit a set of prescribed beliefs and practices.

It was at this time that I encountered Carl Jung and depth psychology. Depth psychology acknowledges the existence of the unconscious, and is concerned with understanding the relationship between the unconscious and the conscious. The theory is that how we think and behave is influenced by what goes on in the unconscious; and that if we can learn more about that relationship, then we are able to live more full, complete and healthy lives. Jung, one of the pioneers of depth psychology, based his therapeutic interventions on this theoretical principle. At the age of 19, I read Jung's autobiography and was completely gripped by it. I could identify with a lot of his earlier experiences: he came from a very religious family and had Christianity imposed on him; he suffered a spiritual crisis, and had a complete breakdown. Although I did not have a breakdown as such, I think I came fairly close. But then Jung went on to develop a range of understandings of what it meant to be human, which included a spiritual dimension. It also included a development of Freud's idea of the unconscious; but to me Jung's understanding and interpretation of the unconscious was much more interesting and relevant than Freud's.

So that set me off on a journey of exploration as to what was going on in my own unconscious. In essence this involved learning to withdraw through a range of what would now be seen as meditative techniques, though at the time I did not have that kind of language to describe what I was doing. I also developed a form of free-flow journaling, which proved to be hugely effective in enabling me to make connections between what was going on in my inner psyche, and what I was doing in the external world. I had discovered what for me was an effective way of integrating theory and practice, reflection and experience, inner and outer. It was at this time I was introduced to action research. One book that was hugely influential to my life and to my future research was *An Experiment in Depth* written by P.W. Martin. In this book, Martin explores Jung's ideas of depth psychology, explaining that he considers there is an urgent need to understand more about the relationship between the conscious and the unconscious. He proposes a number of techniques that can be used to develop this relationship, which he describes as an experiment in depth. Writing in 1955 during the Cold War, Martin says:

There is here an immense new field of activity for the social sciences, the sciences of man. Whether they are capable of rising to such a challenge remains to be seen. A development of methodology which involves a development of faculties latent in the scientist himself is not to everyone's taste. A development in scope and concept which relates the social sciences directly to the greatest social and psychological problems of the age is a widening of responsibility many would hesitate to accept. But this much seems reasonably certain. In the experiment in depth, social scientists have possibilities of action-research vastly surpassing in importance anything so far undertaken by man: an unexpected universe of experience, in which all the great inventions wait to be made. ...As and when (an) understanding of

the human spirit is reached, psychology, science and religion can work as one. (p. 204)

I took this idea of action research into my social work training, and chose to base my practice based assignments on an action research approach to developing practice. I made this choice because I had come to the conclusion that I was not going to find answers that satisfied me concerning an explanation for suffering in either science, religion or in the various disciplines I engaged with at university; nor was I going to improve my professional practice with the challenging young people with whom I worked through the reading of theories and text books. What I needed to do was create an active dialogue between the experience and learning of others expressed through academic and other sources of information; and my own practical experience, so that my professional skills and my ability to relate to and work effectively with young people and their families developed as a result. There was no bank of 'ultimate knowledge' to tell me what to do; but through action research I had found the best means possible of enhancing my practice skills.

So action research became a central part of my practice from the mid 1970's, and indeed I gained funding for several major projects using this as the methodology. It therefore came as a shock when I entered an academic environment, and found that action research approaches to the generation of knowledge, which contribute to an improvement in the quality of people's practice and lives, were not firmly embedded; that in many ways its proponents were still struggling for acceptance. The situation is gradually improving. However even when action research is introduced within an educational setting, it is often used in a somewhat formulaic, problem-solving way, and does not encourage the deeper forms of reflection and creative learning that Martin was proposing in 1955, and that I and others do now.

### **Second critical incident: death of Jerry, my partner**

The next few years went by fairly smoothly. I moved on from social work practice into social work education, then into developing my own education centre. My daughter Rachel was born, and spiritually, I felt able to live in a way that accepted the hypothesis that there was more to life than met the eye, that there was some kind of deeper and more meaningful wisdom to our lives, without feeling the need to explore what that was to any great degree.

Then came the second critical incident of my life. I had not long had my 40<sup>th</sup> birthday. I had separated from my husband, and had for some time been in a personal relationship with Jerry, whom I had known professionally since my mid-20's. Rachel thought the world of Jerry, and for some time the three of us had been looking for a house to live in together. We had found one – our ideal home in an ideal setting. We bought it at the beginning of July. It needed a lot of work, and Jerry was enjoying himself doing it up. Then on the 21<sup>st</sup> July, he died very suddenly of a heart attack.

It is difficult even now to talk about the devastation of that, both for myself and for Rachel. In life, I had only feared two things: something happening to Rachel, and something happening to Jerry. And now one of those two things had happened. Previously I had sometimes thought about what would happen if one of those two things occurred; and my response to myself was that I would fall apart at the seams. When Jerry died, that is what I expected to happen.

But it didn't. And this is where my inquiry moved onto a completely different level. For two things happened. Firstly the support I received from my family and friends, which was way beyond what I could have expected. And secondly, there was what I can only term a form of spiritual support. When I felt that, psychologically, I was crashing to the ground and was about to disintegrate, it was as though a virtual safety net rose up to catch me and hold me. That was not to say that life was easy for Rachel and myself; but we survived and that was the main thing at that stage.

In terms of my inquiry, though, making sense of this experience was not a straightforward process. Six months after Jerry's death, I was at my lowest point. I was surviving, but only just. Despite the experiential safety net, intellectually I was torn between thinking that there could be no meaning in a life where Jerry's death had happened just at the point where Rachel, he and I were to start the new life we had all planned together, and looked forward to so much; and feeling there was actually meaning to what had happened. The decision I made, despite the grief and devastation, was to accept the hypothesis that there was meaning to what had happened. The next stage of my inquiry was to investigate what that meaning might be.

I went on a weekend retreat with a friend; and during that weekend picked up a leaflet produced by an organisation called the Scientific and Medical Network, an organisation which aimed to "*deepen understanding in science, medicine and education by fostering both rational analysis and intuitive insights. By remaining open to intuitive and spiritual insights, it fosters a climate in which science as a whole can adopt a more comprehensive and sensitive approach.*"

The founder of the organisation, George Blaker, talked of "*the possibility that forms of intelligent life exist that are invisible to us and operating in quite a different environment of their own, some of it interpenetrating ours but all of it undetected by our ordinary bodily senses. Such an expansion of the unspoken but compelling assumptions confining human thought would be bound to lead to a new renaissance of human creativity in all directions.*"

Because the organisation believed in taking a scientific approach to understanding life, but did not exclude the possibility of spiritual dimensions, it seemed as though this was a place where I could explore my intimations of the spiritual in a grounded and evidence-based way – albeit accepting different forms of evidence to that required by more traditional forms of science.

I was an active member of that organisation for about 5 years, and during that time I met more fascinating people, and was involved in more fascinating conversations than I had ever done previously. But I am by nature, it seems, an action researcher; in other words, the relationship between theory and practice are central to me. It is important to me that my beliefs about the world are validated by my experience; and that my understanding of my experience is informed by rational and robust theories. In the end the Network was too much of a talking shop; people fascinated by all kinds of ideas, but not wanting to talk about what these ideas might mean for how they lived their lives. I was really only interested in ideas in so far as they had a relevance for making a difference in the world.

A number of people within the Network agreed with me, and we started a process of looking at our various understandings of the spiritual. This represented a key development in my

research activities. Although there was a wide range of experiences and beliefs, there was one thing we had in common; we all felt that the various threats to global wellbeing, the terrorist threats, the environmental threats, etc. were not going to be resolved by conventional science, that what was needed was a transformation in hearts and minds, and that this transformation would not just be about the intellectual and emotional, it would also be about the spiritual dimensions of our being.

Some of the discussion focused on what could be done to resolve those crises. There is always a tendency to look for the 'big solutions'. Science is rather like that. If we can discover the ultimate truths about life, find the theory of everything, then we can find the definitive answer to all problems. Others have different versions: if we can only find the right political system; or the right religion....what these all have in common is a belief that there is one way of seeing, one way of doing things that would be true for all. The basis of methodology for traditional science is that for something to be true, it needs to be repeatable, verifiable and predictable.

Yet the conclusion reached by this group of people that I was working with at the time was that if the planet and the people on it were not to be destroyed through the action of human beings, if transformation were to happen on a global scale, then it was not going to happen through the finding of one magical answer, be that scientific, political or religious. It was going to happen on an individual basis; transformation of the world would only happen through the transformation of each person within that world – 'transforming the world through transforming self'.

This then raised the question: so what is involved in transforming self? What does living in a transformative way actually mean in practice?

A group of us decided to engage in a co-operative inquiry with this question as its central focus. Co-operative inquiry is a form of action research developed mainly by John Heron, who has written amongst other works, a book called *Sacred Science*. Co-operative inquiry allows a group of people to come together to explore any question relevant to improving the human condition, sees all experience as relevant, and prioritises the dynamic relationship between theory and practice.

A group of 10 of us met for 6 weekends a year, initially for a year, but then extended this twice, so that actually we met for three years.

Each individual was inquiring into the question: "What does transformative living mean for me?" We would each live our lives in the world holding that question in our minds, and exploring it in our own unique ways. We would then meet, and in turn we would share our experiences.

It was in that meeting and sharing that the most profound shifts took place. To hear about another person's spiritual journey, to have the privilege of engaging in deep conversation about its significance, and to have the pleasure of others listening in a caring, respectful, fully attentive way to one's own experiences and reflections, is really one of the greatest and most rewarding experiences I have had.

Much of my current research and writing explores the value of integrating individual with collaborative inquiry – and it was the work we did in that group which generated this

learning. Ultimately each person is creating their own ‘living theory’ – their way of living their life that is right for them, founded on a value base and belief system that had been uniquely shaped from their own experiences and reflections. However, this has not been shaped in isolation from others – there is a sense of connection, of belonging, of community, which is hugely nourishing at all levels, spiritual, emotional and intellectual – whilst at the same time encouraging liberation and autonomy, and not obedience and dependency.

In one of my journal entries at the time, I wrote an extended piece which included the following:

If this is a research enquiry, seeking to discover that which is not currently known, how can I provide evidence to demonstrate the validity of my findings? I know I cannot prove any of it. But each person has the choice to enter into a process of this kind, and test it for themselves.

What have I learned about what I need to do in order to continuously engage in transformative living? I have always known that I cannot learn this by observing others, and analysing their behaviour from without. I can only do this by going within, and allowing what is there to emerge in whatever shape or form it chooses.

The road to transformation is not an easy one – all the great myths and spiritual traditions say this. But there are huge rewards to be gained – the myths and traditions say that also.

We seek to achieve wholeness and harmony in the external world. Through spiritual practices, we can go within, and experience the peace and stillness to be found there. When we emerge from that place, we can enter into the world, carrying that sense of peace with us. As within, so without.

Action research as a methodology allows us to integrate the external and internal, the action and reflection, to ensure that what I do in this moment emerges out of the moment just passed. It is a form of Jack Whitehead’s Living Educational Theory, in which his enquiry: “How do I put my values into practice?” is located for me within a broader question: “How do I realise in my external life my sense of relationship with an internal spiritual source of Love and Wisdom – and ultimate Unity – that connects me to all aspects of existence?”

The act of developing forms of research such as the co-operative inquiry, of which I have been a part, acknowledges me as a participant in the world, where my every action affects the whole – where I seek to discover that which will support the unfolding of the universe through discovering how to unfold that which lies latent within me. I and the world are one – as soon as I separate myself from it, I diminish both myself and the world.



### **Rationale for the methodology**

My thesis is a narrative of my lifelong inquiry based on an action research methodology which includes both co-operative inquiry and living theory. The question can very validly be asked: how can your research be seen as making a contribution to educational knowledge, when clearly it is a story of a personal journey, and as such gives accounts of experiences and reflections that are idiosyncratic to you? I have recently heard it said of action research that “the plural of anecdote is not evidence”. Research which focuses on the ‘I’ is often perceived as being narcissistic.

However, these viewpoints are based on the assumptions that questions concerning meaning and purpose, questions concerning the significance of pain and suffering, questions about preventing the very real crises that threaten human existence, can somehow be answered using the conventional methodologies of the sciences. These assumptions are that there are only ‘physical’ laws determining all that happens, that we can discover these laws using conventional scientific methods, and that when we do that, these physical laws will lead us to the answers to all other questions.

There is a growing body of evidence from diverse fields of research including quantum physics that challenges these assumptions. The claim that this third person ‘objective’ methodology is superior, in that the nature of the truth it generates is superior, is based on an unverifiable assumption – the assumption that the material world is primary, and that everything else is derived from the material world. It is seen to be irrational to think otherwise. Richard Dawkins is a major proponent of this point of view – he seems to set himself up as a Tsar for Rationality. What is less often recognised and acknowledged is that his claim for the superiority of rational thinking is based on a completely irrational belief – that is, the physical world is all there is. I would like to illuminate the unequivocal fact that there is no more evidence to support the view that the physical world is primary than there is to support the view that consciousness is primary, and that the physical world has emerged from consciousness.

I think this is an important hypothesis for every thinking person to inquire into. For in our western society and in contemporary Britain, we have been so completely socialised into believing in the primacy of the material world that it is very difficult to think in different terms..... yet this is what I believe we must do.

I want to say here that I am approaching this from a rational perspective myself. I can equal Richard Dawkins in terms of rational thinking – I am a member of Mensa, my formal IQ puts me in the top 1% of the British population. In my student days, I would gain near to 100% in subjects such as philosophical logic, and statistics. I am not saying this in boast – more as a response to people who might claim that I do not have Richard Dawkins rational thinking skills, hence cannot argue with him on equal terms. I know that in this arena of rational thinking, I am at least his equal. So I believe I am justified in stating that, under the cover of his claims to rational thinking he is in fact using rhetoric to disguise assumptions that are not based on verifiable evidence. His assumptions are based on a leap of faith as great that of any religious believer. Indeed I cannot escape the ironic notion that the extreme nature of his non-rational claims, combined with the great zeal with which he delivers them, gives him the air of a fundamentalist. Because of this and the fact that many of the things I am interested in can be criticised as flakey or ‘hocus pocus’, I want to state my claim to rationality. All of my contentions have a rational basis to them. A considerable amount of my

thesis discusses the development of my hypothesis and my examination of it for weaknesses; rational and otherwise.

### **The significance of the research, and its contribution to the creation of knowledge**

My research to date has led me towards the growing area of scientific study known as the ‘science of consciousness’. The scientific study of consciousness has been developing since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. I went to one of the first conferences on this in Tucson, Arizona in 1996, and have pursued an interest in it since. This area of study has emerged from the realisation that we understand little or nothing about the thing we experience as consciousness. We do not know where it starts or ends – humans clearly experience it, most people would accept that animals experience consciousness – but how about insects ...trees...flowers..... People have differing beliefs about this...but no-one can prove whether they are right or not, because we have no form of instrumentation to measure whether consciousness is absent or present.

The significance of this, in the particular context of my thesis, is that it is equally valid to assume that consciousness precedes the material world rather than seeing it as an emergence from the material world.

An alternative to the conventional way of viewing the universe is to say that the brain transforms a reality that exists beyond the brain into what we experience, rather than being the originator of all our experience.

To be clear about the context in which I am saying this:

1. The dominant western world view is based on conventional scientific thinking which tells us that the brain is the physical origin of all experience, and that all conscious experiences– beliefs, wishes, desires, etc – are epiphenomena of the brain – are by-products of the brain’s functions.
2. Conventional academic research is based on the premise that the material world is primary, and the nature of reality can be determined solely through methods of observation, measurement, and repeatability.

Of course, coming from a Christian family and speaking, as I do, from within an ecumenical university, I am acutely aware that any person coming from a Christian perspective immediately challenges the conventional world view; because within the Christian worldview, God is responsible for creating the world and all the people within it – so obviously there is a spiritual reality that is primary and the physical world is created by that spiritual source. However it seems to me that there often develops a confusion of thinking. For ‘God’ is so often perceived as a ‘physical’ being separate from the world – is usually spoken of as ‘he’ except by those who decide to be rather more broadminded and refer to ‘she’ – but either suggests a gender and a person. Much within Christianity takes a physical form, for example, the Virgin Birth, the Resurrection, or in specific set rituals such as Orders of Service and Communion.

In any religion, a believer's life is largely set out for them, where the laws of the physical universe are replaced by, or seen as of lesser importance than God's laws; where the physical origins of the universe are seen to reside in God's hands, rather than in a chance, cosmically-originated, 'big bang.'

Indeed for many scientists who are also religious believers, the laws of God, and the laws built into the physical universe are not incompatible and frequently reside quite happily alongside each other.

What is missing in this is the autonomy of the individual; permission for the individual to accept the principle of a spiritual source to reality, and then to be free to investigate what that might mean for him or her through their own exploration, free from the constraints of any prior belief system or a predetermined set of laws. It is actually quite difficult for someone in a religious context to liberate themselves from the set of beliefs which they have so long subscribed to within a community of believers, and to set off on what is largely an independent inquiry. But there are considerable benefits in doing so.

As I have shown through my own inquiry, taking an independent path does not mean that you do not find a community of others engaged in a similar exploration – it is just that the nature of the relationships and of the conversations are somewhat different.

To free myself from preconceptions associated with religious viewpoints, my way of phrasing my worldview is to say that I accept the hypothesis that consciousness is primary, and that the physical world has emerged from consciousness, rather than the other way round. The implications of this are huge. It means that if I as a human being am grounded in, and connected to, a source of reality that exists beyond the physical, whilst including it, then I am not wholly constrained by the laws that govern the physical universe. It means that if I use methods that enable me to access that wider consciousness, then I may be able to access sources of knowledge and wisdom that are not available to conventional scientific discovery. When I use these different methods to explore my consciousness – meditation, journaling, contemplation, deep reflection – what I may be doing is discovering a reality that exists beyond the material.

My research is ultimately about exploring the hypothesis that consciousness is primary; and the worldview that I provisionally accept and live by is one that acknowledges the existence of a wider reality beyond the physical. But I am staying open to what the nature of that reality is. This is what differentiates the way that I explore from the path of the religious believer, who generally accepts the beliefs and rituals given to them by their particular belief system.

Here is where I return to two points made earlier:

1. Why this kind of research is important.
2. Why it has to start with the individual, then broaden out from there.

I am repeating myself here; but hopefully you will now be able to understand this in a wider context. I said earlier that I think we need a different kind of research if we are to deal with the current crises in the world. The reason for this is that I see the crises as having their origins within the human mind; within individual and collective consciousness, which translates into human behaviour. Hence it is only through a transformation of consciousness that we will resolve those crises, and enable humanity to truly flourish. And to repeat, that

will only happen by each person accepting responsibility for their own transformation. There is no magic wand we can wave which will achieve that outcome, no scientific formula that will tell us all what to do. Each individual has to do the hard work for themselves, has to take responsibility for determining what their own life means. In many ways, in this fragmented world, so many people are operating in the dark .....feeling their way forward with no systematic guide ....sensing there is more to the world than meets the eye, but if they cannot relate easily to an existing religious belief system, then they are alone and truly struggling. And this is what leads to destructive and dysfunctional behaviours such as taking drugs or alcohol, over (and under) -eating, or clinging to a belief system as a means of gaining security in an insecure and threatening world; pursuing more & more power or money, or both, in the belief that they will provide fulfilment, or struggling to survive in dysfunctional relationships which do not offer emotional or spiritual nourishment.

Through telling my story in my thesis, I offer a rationale for all of this, and suggestions as to how people might find their way through their difficulties, and find their security deep within themselves, rather than from externally, through their possessions or status in the world.

In conducting my exploration of the nature of consciousness, and my inquiry into the possibility of a deeper spiritual source, I have called, searchingly, upon the disciplines of depth psychology, Buddhism, quantum physics, the science of consciousness, and meditative traditions. It has been a process of experimentation, of systematic and rigorous research; of constant questioning and testing out.

The more people who are able to engage in this kind of independent journey and provide a verifiable and accessible account of their learning and experience, then the more resources there will be for others to draw upon. There will be more role models for those yet to accept the responsibility and take the first courageous steps on the journey of finding out what they were born to do, finding out what the particular meaning and purpose of their life is.

No one can be sure exactly where this research will lead us, nor can we be specific about the benefits that may emerge from it but, given the nature, the huge scale and the imminence of the challenges faced by humanity, the onus is on us, in our search for solutions, to fully investigate the possibilities and to use whatever we find for the benefit of future generations.

Right now, it is truly the journey and not the destination that is important. But, when the number of people engaging in this kind of practice reaches a critical mass, my hypothesis is that our collective human psyche will undergo a major transformation. The next significant stage in human evolution may not be a physical development but one which emerges, as language did, from our minds. In this case, I hypothesise, from our deliberate engagement with our conscious~~ness~~.

## **Current research at LHM**

All of this seems a long way from the research I have been doing at Liverpool Hope University since I came here. I want to show the connections in two respects;

1. Why I chose to join an academic community in the first place.
2. The work I have been doing with early years practitioners in Liverpool.

### *Choosing to join the academy*

I have worked for most of my career with professionals, mainly in health, social work and social care settings, but also in the wider context of businesses and corporate organisations. What I have realised is that there is great work and learning going on; there are many hugely committed individuals, working with a sense of responsibility for the wellbeing of those they work with or for. I have seen practitioners often drawing on sources of knowledge and wisdom that lie beyond conventional academic knowledge; perhaps not explicitly in ways that I have documented in my thesis, but in undocumented ways they have discovered through their own personal experience and exploration.

Many are in their daily work generating knowledge that is invaluable, but often it is retained within the specific contexts in which they are working, and is not shared with others elsewhere. Which means that all over the country and indeed the globe, people are continually re-inventing the wheel.

This invaluable experience is rarely reflected or disseminated in academic research or journals, which tend to focus on the conceptual and theoretical; they are generally not written in ways that are of direct relevance to practitioners.

This fragmentation reflects the fragmentation that I am suggesting epitomises the world we live in; and in many ways we need to be seeking greater cohesion and unity. I came to the academy in an attempt to do this in relation to creating greater unity between the work of the professional and the work of the academic.

### *The work in Liverpool*

I joined Liverpool Hope University, and set up the Centre for the Child, Family and Society with the aim of integrating research and practice. Janice Darkes-Sutcliffe from Liverpool City Council approached the university after realising that the practice improvements made possible by the traditional training methods she had been commissioning for early years practitioners in Liverpool were not producing the results she wanted to see. We discussed how we might collaborate to find more effective ways of working with practitioners to improve their practice. As a result of these discussions, we invited a group of early years practitioners to join a process which involved an open-ended commitment, the participants' sole motivation being to improve the well-being of children.

The methodology we chose closely resembled the one I describe in my thesis. Firstly we asked each group member to tell the story of how they came to be doing the work they did, what really mattered to them in life, what their values were, how they wanted their work to make a difference in children's lives, and how they thought they could improve their practice. After supporting them through learning to articulate their innermost feelings about the most important things in their lives, they shared their stories, and listened to each other, in a

process that was powerful and profound, very similar to the kind of experience I had had in the co-operative inquiry that I discussed earlier.

One example of the valuable insights that emerged from the inquiry was the recognition by all the participants of the importance of the quality of the relationship between practitioner and child *in each and every moment*. The well-being of a child can be positively or negatively influenced by what happens, moment-by-moment, in their relationships. From this realisation and group discussions came the phrase 'Every Moment Counts'.

Putting this learning into practice requires the practitioner to give high quality attention to every child throughout the working day, with considerable skill, energy, patience and focus. The group came to know that to provide such continuous attention, they needed to have a deep level of belief and confidence in themselves and their abilities, which many discovered they did not have. The process of articulating and sharing their strengths and weaknesses, their values and aspirations, and listening to those of others enabled them to both identify this need, and for many of them to achieve it.

One concept from outside conventional training methods which the group found helpful was that of 'mindfulness'. A concept with origins in Buddhism, mindfulness has been described as paying full attention, non-judgementally, in each present moment. As a consequence of the individual and collaborative process, many of the practitioners experienced a transformation which not only helped them to improve their day to day practice with the children in their charge, but it had a major, positive effect on their beliefs about themselves and on their confidence as individuals. This not only proved to be of great benefit to the quality of childcare they provided; it also very positively influenced their relationships within the group, and with other colleagues and stake-holders.

The experience and learning of the project has been the subject of a conference held by the practitioners themselves, has been published in two academic journals, and has been the subject of a student's essay submitted as part of a doctoral qualification. These all contribute to my aim of grounding research in the experience of practitioners, and of making their accounts accessible to the academic community.

## **Conclusion**

In concluding this presentation, I just want to comment on a statement that has been included in the strategic map of the Faculty of Education here at Liverpool Hope, written by the Dean, Professor Bart McGettrick. Bart has written that he sees education as having a humanising influence on society, and that it should be based on values emerging from hope and love. The strategic map for the faculty includes the purpose: "To contribute to the development of knowledge and understanding in all fields of education, characterising all work with values arising from hope and love".

It is unusual and visionary to introduce concepts such as hope and love in an academic context, and I admire Bart's courage in doing this. I am also in complete accord with such a mission, and have explicitly supported it since I first became aware of it. However, like many great values and calls to action, I think words of this order are very easy to say, but not so easy to know how to put into practice. It reminds me of the time I sat in church as a 16 year old, very shortly before I decided that confirmation into the Christian Church was not for me. I would listen to sermons and they would have a positive impact on me. They would all

be based on good Christian principles, such as ‘Love thy neighbour as thyself’, and ‘Do unto others as you would have them do unto you’. However when I came to live my life through the week, I found that those principles did little in themselves to help me work out how to respond in a situation where someone (either teacher or peer) clearly did not like me very much, and was behaving in a way that made me miserable; or my best friend went off with someone else, leaving me feeling very jealous and unwanted; or indeed when I found myself not liking someone, and saying negative things about them behind their back. What I wanted even then was to work with others to establish how to put such positive values into practice, and how to respond when faced with challenges in doing that. In other words, I wanted people to research their own practice, to be accountable for how they put their values into practice, for us all to be open to challenge if others felt I / they were not living my/their values in practice, and be able to work and learn collaboratively about how to create communities that reflected those values in the best possible way.

This is what I have now, through my long and very rewarding professional relationship with Jack Whitehead, learned to call ‘developing my own living theory’, and through experiences such as being in the co-operative inquiry, have learned to engage in this process of dialogue and knowledge creation in community with others.

The human brain is the most complex object in the known universe. Through our brains (although the exact mechanism is uncertain), we experience our ability to love, to create and to appreciate music and every other form of beauty. It is also a phenomenal calculator, investigator and reasoning tool. The contribution I aspire to make to the science of consciousness is to encourage us all to use this remarkable tool, which each of us possesses, to investigate the mind *from within* and to search for the means by which we can create a new order for the whole of humanity, drawing on the love, hope and wisdom that is already within us at the source of our individual and collective beings.

My belief is that if we are to live not just in a university, but in a society, and indeed in a world, that lives in accordance with values that emerge from hope and love, we need to urgently review the research methods and broaden what we see as acceptable within the academic community. I hope that my thesis provides one example of what such an approach to research might look like.

Thank you.