

Deepening Connectivity: learning about ourselves through others as a way to experience integrity as an inquiry educator

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Abstract

In this paper we (graduate student and supervisor) collaborate to improve our practice through generating new educational knowledge using the conceptual principles of Living Educational Theory research (Whitehead, 1989, 2008). We examine how we might deepen our capacity to work and live in ways that make us feel whole within a variety of contexts through exploring our values of authenticity, diversity and love. To articulate our commitment to this inquiry we describe ourselves as 'servants of connectivity', meaning we prioritize understanding how our actions either connect or disconnect us from our values and from others. Through our inquiry we demonstrate how flourishing of self and community is an interconnected relationship and suggest this relationship can be nurtured by setting three intentions: 1) share spaces with love, 2) be self-fluid, 3) embrace new and creative ways of experiencing time and space. We found that through the collaborative process of our inquiry we could unleash ourselves in playful and exciting ways, and with an openness to seeing ourselves differently, as more capable of authenticity.

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Introduction

The eye of the needle was claimed to be an ancient gate in Jerusalem, a very small gate through which a camel could only pass once all of the baggage had been removed. The image of passing through a narrow opening is also vivid in stories of mountain passes where journeyers become vulnerable as they make decisions about what to discard in order to proceed. The age-old question of what is essential to us and what holds us back resonates with our inquiry which asks: How can we improve how we relate to others so that in our interactions we feel whole as we support our ongoing commitment to inquiry learning? What practices ground us to act with integrity and what practices and beliefs should we let go?

Our interest in the topic of wholeness, or integrity, emerged from our individual observations of disconnection – we noticed times when it was difficult to: make connections with others when values are not shared; embody our many different roles with consistency; make the time needed for developing deep collaboration. Through our collective inquiry we challenged ourselves to think about our relationship to ourselves and to others in new ways – we were exploring collaboration as a way to tap into deeper levels of humanity and seek our highest personal and collective potential. Our search for wholeness was about more than being true to ourselves, it was a goal to develop an integrity wherein, ‘self and culture mutually arise for maximum benefit; for love; for the ‘flourishing of all beings’ (Stone, 2011, p. 7). We were learning about ourselves through each other and, in turn, deepening our capacity to connect to others.

By examining how we might deepen our capacity to work and live in ways that make us feel whole within diverse contexts, within diverse roles and expectations, and with limitations of time, we are becoming what Kelly has termed, *servants of connectivity*. This means we prioritize understanding how our actions and thoughts either connect or disconnect us from others. We are committed to using these observations to develop and deepen connections with others, and are committed to sharing our insights with the hope of awakening new aspects, aspirations and intentions in others. Throughout our narrative, we provide a description of three possible ways to deepen connectivity: intending to share space and give love; intending to be ‘fluid’; and intending to embrace new and creative ways of experiencing time and space.

These findings emerged from data collected through our research about our learning over a five-month timeframe as we engaged in developing a living-theory, which explained how we deepened our awareness of how we relate and engage with others, including each other, through our roles as inquiry leaders and learners. Our focus on the role of relationships in inquiry learning was embedded in a larger collaborative inquiry question: *how do I improve my practice* in ways that contribute to flourishing for self and our community? A living-educational-theory (Whitehead, 1989) is a value-based explanation of one’s own learning, of becoming aware of the influences on this learning by researching their own practice.

We learned about this methodology by participating in a larger community of learners, the Bluewater Action Research Network International (BARNi). BARNi is a

group of practitioner-researchers from across the globe that meets virtually using emails, blogs and Skype. BARNi is designed as a 'living-culture-of-inquiry' (DeLong, 2013). Through individual and collaborative reflections, BARNi members create living-theories, which are organic explanations of human influence on learning (Whitehead, 1989, 2008). We participated in this culture through Sunday morning calls using Skype technology. BARNi dialogues were an opportunity for us to share and receive feedback on our inquiry observations.

Our narrative weaves two primary voice(s) into what we use as 'we' in our writing. Our 'we' is the result of collaborative writing and reflecting between Ph.D. supervisor (Dr. Sabre Cherkowski) and graduate student/middle-schoolteacher (Kelly Hanson). Although we use the language of 'we' in the body of the text, we also include our individual voices – indicated in italics – to share the individual nature of our experience, perspectives and growing awareness of the influences on and of our learning. Through our narrative we share what we learned about ourselves through our inquiry and the processes we noticed about how we learned. We explain in the next section how we used Living Educational Theory research methodology for this research. We then go on to further describe the nature of our collaborative research and the themes that emerged. In our conclusion we express how this inquiry practice was a source of invigoration and life affirmation. We found that through sharing our unique narratives we could unleash ourselves in playful and exciting ways, feeling slightly more detached from habitual ways of thinking and with openness to seeing ourselves differently.

Living Educational Theory Research

We position ourselves as inquiry-teachers. We perceive reflection and questioning as an ongoing spiral of learning that we continually engage with. An inquiry-stance involves 'making current arrangements problematic; questioning the ways knowledge and practice are constructed, evaluated and used; and assuming that part of the work of practitioners individually and collectively is to participate in educational and social change' (Cochran-Smith & Little, 2009, p. 121).

Our inquiry-methodology was Living Educational Theory research (Whitehead, 1989). Living Educational Theory research is a way of generating knowledge about how we improve our practice through cycles of research, emphasizing the role of an individual's creativity in making sense of the world. Living Educational Theory research is a transformative approach to professional improvement. Through Living Educational Theory research, educators become both users of existing educational theory and creators of knowledge. A living-theory is, 'an explanation produced by an individual for their educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formation in which they live and work' (Whitehead, 2008, p. 104). In our living-educational-theory we explain how we interpret influences on our learning and our influence on each other. We developed our living-educational-theory through methods, which included co-writing. We recorded our reflections in a shared online document that allowed us to save and work from the

same document, reading and responding to each other's reflections as they appeared in the document. We also discussed our reflections in person or on the phone bi-weekly. Over time, our online document began to look like correspondence.

We shared these reflections with the BARNi group through the social media platform Skype. During these BARNi discussions we gave others feedback on their inquiries and received feedback on our reflections and questions. During these conversations, we were able to see each participant online at the same time and so the conversation took on a very rich and layered tone because we felt that each of the group-members was connected to us and to each other through this live screen-connection. These multi-screen Skype conversations influenced our inquiry and were key to helping us develop a sense of self as relational. Through social media we were able to view and review how we all uniquely contributed to our conversations and were an important part of the whole. Whitehead and Huxtable (2006), describe the relational I, with the term *i~we*. We were influenced by their concept as we thought about our relationship with each other through our co-writing and with the Barni group.

i~we

i) Collaborative Writing

Whitehead and Huxtable (2006) describe '*i~we*' as a relationship wherein the individual (*i*) and the collective (*we*) are equal, they do not subvert or dominate each other. Whitehead and Huxtable write:

...we are also acknowledging that something is created that is beyond the individual but is in the space between ~ it is what is formed at the inclusional boundaries between us, a place of meeting rather than separating, a space for co-creation rather than a void. (p.3)

We felt we experienced *i~we* through our collaborative writing process. We felt we were creating something beyond what could be individually known and, recognizing this relationship, we wondered how to represent our coming together through the voice of this text. This was not an easy process as the act of collaborative writing asks, 'difficult questions about the structures and hierarchies of modern universities and societies and about what it means to publish scholarly work' (Speedy, 2012, p. 353). In our experience in co-writing this paper, we have noticed that it brings to attention the complexities of knowing and representing knowledge, and enables us to enter into a dialogue about how we can engage together to improve our practice, our lives and, ultimately, our society. Over time, co-writing becomes a space for dialogue:

... a powerful pathway to seek a deepened understanding and appreciation of another's perspective and interpretation of experiences...[dialogue] requires a letting go of tightly held agendas in order to enter a space with an authentic willingness and desire to view and understand a situation, tension, event, or topic through the eyes and interpretation of another. (Groen & Kawaliluk, 2015, p. 172)

Engaging in a dialogue about who we are as we work together to understand what it means to improve our practice meant we were letting go of these traditional notions of hierarchy, structure, and power associated with the roles of graduate-student and supervisor. Through this letting go we acknowledged and encouraged the need to critically question what it means to write as 'we'. Co-writing, by its nature, alters the space of scholarship (Speedy, 2012; Kirkpatrick & Porter *et al.* 2014). It does this by altering hierarchical ways of knowing and creating space for the reader. In our case we hoped to alter the hierarchical nature of a typical student/teacher-relationship through writing together.

As we joined together in this co-writing dialogue we noticed that our lived ontologies (how we come to know the world) reflected an understanding of our shared social constructionist (Gergen, 1999/2015) and humanist (Rogers, 1961) orientations to knowing. We both see the world as interconnected and relational. We both see the inherent potential goodness in individuals and groups from the assumption that we are each striving to become self-actualized as part of what it means to create a better world and reach our highest good (Lange, 2006 as cited in Groen & Kawaliluk, 2015, p. 172). Our co-writing helped us make the relational nature of our knowledge(s) more explicit and facilitated our desire to inquire more deeply into the ways that we worked and lived with others. We used our joint journal and face-to-face meetings to help us rethink and relearn how we can work successfully and meaningfully with others.

Through this dialogic writing process, we came to a greater awareness of our shared interest in understanding the self (I) in relation (we). However, the writing of this paper was not without challenges. Though we considered our audience as we wrote, and were conscious of the cues and information they would need to engage with our story, we could not offer our narrative as one seamless stream of thought that would clearly articulate stories belonging solely to Kelly, Sabre and We. Instead, we ask you, the reader, to consider how, 'a relation is more real than the things that brings it together' (Bingham & Sidorkin *et al.* 2010, p. 6) and further to note that, 'relations are complex; they may not be described in single utterances. To describe a relation is to produce a multi-texted voice' (Bingham & Sidorkin *et al.* 2010, p. 7).

Our co-writing, which started as a call-and-response-style Google document – texts written from our separate computers at different times and from our different places (though even then we were influenced by relations) – morphed through dialogue and rewriting into this mutually edited and structured narrative. Through this process we also shared these reflections with our BARNi colleagues, inviting them to engage with us in our dialogue. This added further complexity to the voice offered as 'we' as we reflected on the questions and insights offered through these Skype conversations.

We recognize that the 'we' of our writing will likely remain an ongoing problem within our co-writing, as it has in the co-writing of others that have gone before us. For example, as Gale and Wyatt (2012) write:

The 'we' of the opening paragraph emerged as Ken wrote at home in Cornwall, typing those words you have just read, and sending them to Jonathan, who inserted these italicized words here and made suggestions to 'Ken's' first paragraph. We allow our individuating voices to leak on to the page in this and the following italicized texts; allow our becoming's Ken, becoming's Jonathan, becoming's Ken-Jonathan to be present in our stutterings as these words, which we struggle with, come alive in their tentative form in what will be the (not) ending of this edition. We suggest that the We in collaborative writing should not be neutralized, and should be read as murky and perhaps unclear. However we see the murkiness, the imperfection, the cracks in this dialogic space in the same way as we see other cracks--it opens new spaces, new spaces for inquiry into knowledge production and consumption. (p. 468)

Similarly, St. Pierre (2011) resonates with us, '*But I could not have thought those thoughts by thinking alone*' (use of italics in the original, p. 621, as cited in Gale and Wyatt, 2012, p. 468) as we come to understand that we could not have written this paper without each other. Bolstered by St. Pierre's sentiment, we affirm that our collaborative learning and writing about our relationships are essential for us to come to know and to learn about our self, each other, and the world we co-construct. In this spirit then, we present our emergent thinking about our learning and how we come to know our selves and each other more deeply through this research. In so doing, we are extending our learning community to invite you, the reader, to engage with us in this dialogue.

Kelly's Reflection

For me, as a new scholar, working with Sabre through co-writing was emancipatory. I felt like I was an important part of the research process and that my thinking and writing was worthy of scholarship and engagement. This was an invitation into a new world, a loving invitation, as I had the support of others.

Sabre's Reflection

This co-writing experience was both a delight and a challenge. I relished the idea of engaging with Kelly as learning partners, while I also struggled to let go of long-held assumptions about what it means to be a scholar and a supervisor. Kelly's thoughtful and compassionate invitations to interrogate my assumptions through our dialogue of co-writing was a transformative learning experience for me.

ii) Multi-Screen Skype-Conferencing

The sharing of themes that emerged from our collaborative writing through Skype with the members of BARNi was a valuable opportunity to be seen and to be heard and to benefit from immediate feedback of the group. Our Skype conversations were recorded using Amolto (a technology that records Skype videos). These videos were posted on YouTube so there is the possibility to review the Skype sessions and to bring the analysis from the video review back to the group as well as the video footage. Kelly found this to be an exciting way of going from seeing only her own viewpoint to experiencing the system from the perspective of the other participants. Exploring the edges of experiences, exploring the multiple ways we can interpret an idea or event is a very important part of understanding the whole. The edge of experience refers to incorporating perspectives that are distant to our own, and so

are likely to be significantly different. We found that our understanding of i~we deepened through the insights we gained through others' interpretations and perspectives. Through the Skype conferences we came know ourselves in new ways: within the group the 'I' changes. Through Skype we noticed how the 'I' and the 'we' are interrelated, because when one participant is missing from the discussion the experience of 'I' is somehow different. A significant part of developing i~we is reviewing the videos of the taped conversations between the participants in BARNi. Reviewing the videos looks different at different times. Sometimes in reviewing we:

- Looked for body language, e.g. leaning in, times when everyone seems animated smiling, crossed arms, etc.;
- Looked for a particular event from memory;
- Reviewed and re-experienced the video noting how the ideas made us feel.

The outcomes of reviewing the videos also varied. At times, we:

- Heard something we might have missed the first time;
- Developed an new understanding of how others are interpreting what we share;
- Noticed patterns in our own thinking.

Reflections on the videos are then shared with the inquiry group again, sharing what we think about what we saw. Reviewing the videos in this way helps develop new ways of thinking. The videos and the dialogue were vehicles for the collaborative and continual reflection that provided feedback, input, and perspectives from others, the cornerstone of Living Educational Theory research. Our living-educational-theory started with self-awareness and over time bloomed into a living document of the power and possibility of deepening how we came to see ourselves. Through this process we became more grounded in our own beliefs. In sharing our reflections, our blind spots (our tacit thoughts and beliefs) became illuminated. Reflecting together about our emerging self-awareness helped us to begin to develop a greater sense of integrity, wholeness.

Mindful Learning And Systems-Thinking

The sense making in this inquiry has been influenced by concepts of mindfulness and systems thinking. Mindfulness is being aware and present in the current moment without analysis or judgment (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). It is a beginner's mind, or the capacity to see things anew. In our inquiry we found our interaction with others as helpful in cultivating a new and open approach to seeing the world around us. Similarly, systems' thinking encourages participants of a system to learn from the perspective of others. Systems thinking values the interconnectivity of the whole and participants are encouraged to seek feedback from various aspects of the system (Scharmer, 2009; Senge, 1990; Wheatley, 2012). Through the lens of Living Educational Theory research we were able to see our reflections with a beginner's mind and also from multiple perspectives.

Theory U, a systems-thinking approach to change, offers a new approach, or map, for learning that moves beyond attending to experts and canonized knowledge to re-create existing knowledge to fit a new situation or problem. Instead, Scharmer (2009) urges us to embrace learning from a deeper source of knowledge, from a social field that is the source of all potential knowledge, and one that holds many possibilities for innovation and creativity in response to problems and issues. This social field can be accessed by anyone, at any time, through attending with deep awareness and stillness from a systems-mindset.

This notion of learning may seem abstract and lacking in direction for how to access and use the social field for co-creating new understandings about any target issue. Margaret Wheatley is a systems scholar and writer who uses the metaphor of maps to illustrate how we need to let go of assumptions about learning, teaching, and change. Wheatley (2012) suggests that those who aim to bring about change in any context should not be following maps that were developed in a different time and for a different place. She sees that these maps are outdated and often impede our efforts to move forward in ways that will create the outcomes we seek. Using old maps leads us to reproduce and edify the current systems that we hope to change. She describes how those who are lost in the wilderness:

...move through predictable stages. The first reaction is to deny they are lost. They know where they are; they just can't find a familiar sign. They convince themselves that everything's okay. They still know where they are going; the maps are still correct. But gradually, confronted with a growing number of strange and unfamiliar sights, anxiety seeps in. They speed up their activities, fueled by a sense of urgency, needing to verify as quickly as possible they are not lost. Those lost on a mountain walk faster. Those lost in a project work harder. (p. 67)

Influenced by Inoue (2012), we used East Asian epistemology to re-write our learning map and deepen how we express our connection to the social field. We used Inoue's (2012) insights from Japanese culture, to learn a new way to embrace mindfulness. This path to mindfulness is called Kizuki (Inoue, 2012). Along Kizuki there are many deaths and rebirths; these deaths might be a loss of a worldview or an assumption, or bringing forth something new, such as a new belief or idea. We found that throughout this inquiry, making sense of our experiences often required us to let go of the past. Again, Inoue's (2012) reflection on the idea of letting go and wisdom development were useful for guiding our inquiry. He described:

Growing out of who you are right now requires letting go of yourself, from which you can grow into a new you. This wisdom is captured beautifully by the old Japanese saying: 'Mio sutetekoso ukabu semoare.' This means, 'You can float in a river only if you let yourself in the flow'.... Our growth takes place as we attempt to see the other side by de-centering ourselves and outgrowing ourselves in the constant flow of meanings that surround us. (p. 172)

As a way of expressing what we learned through Living Educational Theory research, we used the language of intention to express three culminating lessons that we will take with us as we move forward. These intentions represent benchmarks that emerged from struggle and growth. Each intention marks a shift in

the way we engage with ourselves and with others as a result of this work. These intentions are our living-educational-theory.

The first intention is to share space with love. Through our ongoing research we noticed that when we focused on the space we were creating and setting an expectation that it would be a loving space, we were more open to and able to interact with a diversity of thinking and feeling. This intention grew from the embodied experience of being loved and supported in the BARNi group and between student and supervisor. Our second intention was to notice how and when our sense of self shifted or changed. We called this experience, self-fluidity. Through our intention, we hoped to come to a place of honouring and accepting ourselves as evolving beings. We needed to let go of our preconceived images of our selves as teachers, supervisors, friends, wives, sisters, mothers, in order to more fully embrace who we might become through this inquiry process. We hoped that this intention toward self-fluidity would help us to connect more openly with others in the spirit of moving everyone forward in their learning, rather than clinging to old and habitual ways of knowing and thinking (Inoue, 2012). Our third intention was to be playful with time and space. In order to feel balanced in unbalanced times we found we needed to be creative with how we value and think about time.

Through this article, we offer our living-educational-theory in the spirit of continuing this discussion. We hope our commitment to sharing our practice and the organic nature of inquiry not only comes alive in these pages, but also engages you to notice, share, and debate your own practices with us. In this next section, we describe examples that reflect the deep learning that we experienced through this Living Educational Theory research process.

We Intend to Share Space with an Open Heart

Kelly's Reflection

In my earliest reflections during this inquiry I noted experiences wherein I perceived myself to be in a leadership role, but where I also perceived that others did not value my approach to inquiry learning. I noticed that I was drained by these situations and looked for solutions for how to engage other teachers in the inquiry process. Sharing my reflections with BARNi influenced my thinking around these experiences.

For example, during a Skype session I was prompted to think about what assumptions I created about people in the group where I was feeling frustrated, and how these assumptions might have impacted on the group. I knew that my espoused value is to honour people where they are at and accept them for it. Yet in my reflections I noticed that I expressed anxiety/frustration that my worldview was not immediately valued by the group. I noticed that I assumed a need for all of us to share the same values to work together. I also value participating in transformative learning experiences from which new knowledge is created, not learning experiences where my own worldview is mirrored back to me. I knew that experiencing disconnect

between what I valued and what I was frustrated about did not feel right. Noting my living contradiction (Whitehead, 1989) caused inner turmoil.

My sense of contradiction deepened when, during a Skype session, another member spoke of how difficult it is to always try to support people, describing people in need of support by their deficits and describing how their needs overwhelmed the leader. At the time, I related to the leadership burnout being described; however, when I re-watched the tape I experienced a strong desire to go back to situations where I felt frustrated and learn about what the participants did well. I wanted to learn how I could access the positive potential in the group and how I could learn with and through deeper appreciation for others.

As I reflected, I returned to the suggestion to question the assumptions we bring into our learning. I came into BARNi meetings with a sense of wonder and anticipation, rooted in the assumption that I have much to learn. Noticing my open-ended eagerness to learn prompted me to question if I always offer this assumption when I enter a space or do I sometimes demand, however collegially, that participants attend to my agenda? Intuitively I was beginning to feel that to be a servant of connectivity, I had to let go of the impulse to influence using a set agenda and embrace my capacity for open-heartedness, to be open to perspectives that are different from my own as a way to prioritize relationships and live my values.

A later Skype conversation provided further feedback about how I interact with groups. During this conversation I could not see everyone in the group (I was having video issues on my computer). Without being able to see everyone I did not realize that some had not contributed to our conversation. When another group member asked for the contributions of the quiet members, the dialogue shifted and grew richer with their input. This learning moment became a powerful metaphor for me. It was a realization that I can be blind to the group as a whole: this usually happens when I focus more on my own contributions than the contributions of others.

When I set the intention to learn from others, I gain access to the ~ of i~we, the space of co-creation (Whitehead & Huxtable, 2006). For me this space is accessible through an opening of the heart, an openness to truly be with and learn from others. Moving forward I cannot expect that all groups I interact with will share my values and worldviews, but I can set the intention to learn from every encounter. Shifting my awareness from seeking to share values to a recognition of the need to value people without further expectations was transformative for me as a learner and a leader of learning. To me, focusing on space implies an openness to new information and an implicit awareness of more than one perspective. Focusing on space allows for mindful system learning which includes the ability to see beyond the self, to see the whole system and is fostered by: an openness to novelty, an alertness to distinction, sensitivity to different contexts, and an orientation to the present (Langer, 1989).

When I shared my reflections on my evolving thinking about space with BARNi members, they prompted me to dig further to uncover more assumptions about my perspective. For example, they asked me to consider the influence of how people come into a space. The BARNi group suggested that I consider the importance of allowing people to choose how and in what they participate, and to consider that

participants do not always come to an experience on their own, in which case it takes more time to build trust. This example illustrates the cyclical nature of Living Educational Theory research. My thinking about space continues to expand through the probing of the learning community.

The more I engage with Living Educational Theory research the more I am able to articulate my experiences and the more I am able to change and evolve. The changing self is the theme of the second intention: however, the two intentions fold into each other. Sharing space with an open heart improves my practice with others, and improves my practice of being myself. Space and openheartedness are as essential for my relationship with myself as they are for my relationships with others. Though this inquiry I made space for my sense of self to shift and grow. This space was cultivated through an open-hearted appreciation for myself as I stumbled through my journey to better my teaching practice.

We intend to be self-fluid

Developing self-awareness and sense making as a group was a series of small deaths and rebirths as we shifted how we saw the relationship between our concept of self and our meaning-making process. Stone (2011) reflected, 'We study ourselves so that we can move beyond the self. What you learn about is you. When you study this 'you' closely, you start to disappear' (p. 8). Through our inquiry we often wondered: How does our understanding the fluid nature of letting go and letting come shift my understanding of who I am? These questions were useful as reflections often examined the diverse nature of our roles. The following is an example to further explore the complexity of relationship between self and others from our joint journal:

Kelly: *When we met on Thursday we discussed your experiences as a parent of a child in the school-system. After chatting for some time about concerns you had and emotions you were experiencing, we transitioned from this conversation dismissing the first conversation as venting. When I sit down to write about that meeting I return to your reflections on your children and their experiences with school. I felt this conversation cut to the 'why' of our work. We both see a need to improve student's experiences in classrooms, yet at the time we dismissed this part of the conversation as unproductive. I want to examine the assumptions embedded in this dismissal.*

Sabre: *As I think back to our conversation about my frustration with school, I remember that I had set my intention from a 'doing' perspective from a 'supervisor' ego-space (i.e. thinking that I wanted to make sure to get done what you need so that you can move forward) and that as I talked about matters of my heart, I felt almost apologetic for having gone off 'the agenda'.... It would've been a different dialogue if I had set my intention as, 'connecting with an educator who shares my commitments for growing learning in schools'. Inoue (2012) talks about the importance of allowing Jikkan (gut-feeling) to develop as part of gaining wisdom...connecting heads to bodies to hearts. Scharmer (2009) talks about connecting heads to hearts to hands*

as part of the system-shift and what the case-clinic makes space for...a visceral, or body and heart, reaction to the presented case, rather than just the head reaction of, 'I think that...'

This process of reflecting with you about what I think and feel resonates with Inoue's (2012) descriptions of how sharing omoi (wisdom gained by accumulating and reflecting on jikkan—gut-feelings) as teachers are the most essential aspect of collaborative professional development:

It is often the case that our omoi serves as the foundation and reason for us to make efforts to improve our educational practices. In these attempts, sharing and discussing our omoi with others would serve as an important arena for mutual empowerment and examining our beliefs and identity as educators. (p. 86)

He also shows how as educators we can use our inquiry into how students learn as a mirror for also seeing how we learn and how we have come to know what we believe:

...in educational practices, educators are confronted with many questions regarding what it takes for students to develop a certain set of knowledge. In doing so, educators could encounter two types of mirrors, one for reflecting on students' learning for improving educational practices and the other for reflecting on our own learning experiences for guiding students. (p. 85)

Your question about how I felt about having invited all those people from different parts of my life to my talk was an opportunity for me to hold up a mirror to my beliefs about what is 'research' and what it means to think about being 'whole' as a researcher.

Part of our inquiry process was learning to hold on less tightly to what we think we know about our selves and how we should enact these selves through our various roles and responsibilities. The way we were able to loosen our grip on this tacit knowledge about our selves was to share our thinking with each other and to make our private thoughts and beliefs public. In Japanese tradition Inoue (2012) describes how teachers will come together to share their practices with each other as part of a *lesson-study* approach to professional development. In lesson-study, Japanese teachers come together with the understanding of creating *Ba*:

...the communicative for co-developing a new understanding. Ba is co-constructed by the participants in the communicative space with an understanding that it is for engaging in organic dialogues and co-constructing a new understanding (or Kizuke) of the targeted issue with others. (p. 92)

In this tradition, collaboration and professional development are about gaining awareness and understanding of personal beliefs, thoughts and attitudes that affect teaching and learning and sharing these with others with the intention of developing a new awareness about what teachers know. Inoue writes that:

Ba is experienced when you participate in the communicative field in which you sense the participant's willingness to engage in the dynamic and often non-linear dialogues

with the attitude to reflect on others' ideas and intentions to co-develop a new understanding of the targeted issue. (p. 92)

During these lesson-studies, some of which can take up to a year, Inoue (2012) notes how teachers share their *omoi* – their beliefs and thoughts that influence the issue – with each other. Professional learning and development in this process starts with a dialogue about how and what we know. Furthermore, teachers uncover together how the beliefs and knowledge they claim as their *omoi* influences how and what they teach to their students. This reflective process happens as a collective dialogue toward a co-construction of *omoi* that more accurately reflects the desired teaching and learning-intentions. In this way, teachers creating *Ba* are letting go of thought-patterns that no longer work well for their desired outcomes, and constructing together more helpful patterns of belief and thought to let come a new way of teaching and learning.

Sabre's Reflection

For me, creating Ba with Kelly through online reflections and face-to-face meetings was a new experience of teaching and learning as a graduate supervisor. This co-construction of meaning about our inquiry created a positive and dynamic energy that helped fuel motivation and commitment for continued inquiry. It also created disturbing thoughts and feelings as I wrestled with a more Western belief about the need for hierarchy and expertise of supervisors over students. Reflecting on my omoi, my beliefs about the usefulness and need – or not – of my habits for looking to experts outside of myself for answers, and for needing to be the expert for students led to uncomfortable moments of noticing when I engaged authentically as a learner with Kelly, and moments when I assumed a more distanced role of expert and supervisor. I also noticed this pattern as a parent of young teens who question much of what they notice at home and in life, and even with my extended family as I thought about what it meant for them to attend an evening celebrating my work as a researcher. Co-constructing through dialogues with Kelly and through the BARNi Skype meetings has brought new thoughts and beliefs about what it means to share a space of learning with graduate students and others in my life and has called forward a letting go of ideals, beliefs, and commitments and a letting come of new ways of thinking about what it means to teach and learn in higher education settings.

Kelly and I noticed that we have often found ourselves exhausted, drained and overwhelmed from working harder and harder to find solutions to the problems we encounter in our work as teachers. However, through our reflective dialogues in writing and face-to-face, we were slowly interrupting our old thoughts about what it means to be a teacher and to learn. We were doing as Wheatley (2012) suggested and starting to see that:

...being lost is only frightening until we admit that we are lost. Once we stop denying our situation, our fear dissipates. Our thinking becomes clear again and we can recognize the truth of our situation. It becomes possible to settle down, quiet our minds, look around and discover that there is more than enough information available

to create a new map that accurately describe where we are, a map that can help us find our way. (p. 69)

From our inquiry-experiences, we have come to understand that clinging to old maps of what we already know will only help to keep us lost, and that we need to learn to let go of these old maps and trust that we can find our way together toward change solutions that make sense for the world we want to create. This idea of working together in a state of possibility-oriented dialogue reflects Inoue's (2012) descriptions of Ba.

For Kelly and me, our living-educational-theory includes experiences of creating spaces of openheartedness and invitation, of co-creating meaning through authentic dialogue. These are new maps of learning for us and challenge what we think about what it means to be a teacher, a student, a scholar and a researcher. Our conception of our selves is challenged and disrupted as we meet together to create Ba and share our omoi. We trust each other and trust ourselves as we grow from this experience, mirroring Wheatley's (2012) urging to move forward in our work, feeling the rightness of the work, despite not knowing at the outset if we are going to make a difference and create change with this work. While this new way of thinking calls into question the more popular Western maps of outcome-based and results-based approaches to work, she cautions us to resist thinking that anyone can ever really know that full impact of their work, given the complexity of the systems within which we work and live. She suggests instead that we take comfort in knowing that the shared destination for all projects is building relationships, and urges us to remember that planning to, 'go somewhere with others' (p. 160) is always the worthy goal.

We intend to embrace new and creative ways of experiencing time and space

When we look at the nature of the influence that the BARNi culture of inquiry had on our learning, we reflect not only on what was said but how we heard it, through seeing the faces, hearing the voices and also through being able to go back and review and revise our thinking. The Skype-forum developed a creative and generative space that crossed conventional face-to-face dialogue. It seems there is a freedom in Living Educational Theory research that transcends time and space. Learning happens during the session and after the session, creating reverberations of the various moments that alerted us to contradictions, to connections, and to further questions. That this learning happens beyond the boundaries of time and space is valuable to us. We have noticed that when we invite people into learning communities they often respond with questions about the barriers of time. We noticed that we are also often concerned with time, specifically the lack of it. We wanted to understand how to free ourselves from seeing inquiry work as merely an addition to an already intensive work life within busy lives. We wanted to understand how we could transform our way of seeing professional inquiry as something that takes away from personal time and space.

Sabre's Reflection

I've been intentionally noticing how I respond to time in my life after our conversation on Thursday. I had a very visceral reaction (in a good way, as I'll get to in a moment. I had a bit of freedom feeling) to your description of time and my wondering about how maybe we (humans) have created an illusory conception of time that fits with our need to be in control of everything (this is an ego-approach). If time is 'out there' I can control it. From our talking, we are wondering about the possibility of time being 'in there' in terms of our reactions to how our lives are split up and siloed according to time. Time is real. I know that. I know that time passes and that we don't recapture what happened except in memories. But, I am struck by how my life shifts when I notice my 'in there' approach to thinking and feeling about time...I notice that I often feel pressed, rushed, frazzled, and never quite enough when I measure myself according to time. I also notice that I feel 'cut up' when I compartmentalize myself into bits of time – I am 'mom' for a certain moment and then 'writer' and then 'friend' and then 'supervisor' and then 'daughter'...this feels frantic. This is how I often feel at work as a teacher. It's how many of the teachers I connect with to ask about their experiences describe their daily pace. I wonder if there's another way to experience time, and what happens to my thinking and feeling when I do? Jump forward a few days....I've been noticing time and my reactions to it for the past few days. I've been staying present to the tensions I feel when I start to panic at 'not having enough time'...I've been challenging my need to carve myself up and only present certain parts and feelings during certain activities. I noticed that most of my day is spent competing with my expectations of what I think I'm supposed to accomplish in my many different roles. I feel mostly not enough because of an artificial imposition of time. I've been breathing more as I notice the competition and feel a freedom to choose how to react. I know this seems 'simple' and even a little corny, but it is making a difference in how I spend my days.

Concluding Reflection

Our inquiry and our writing began with the question of how examining the ways we relate to others develops a more holistic experience of self and supports the ongoing development of inquiry-learning. Through our inquiry we included examples of Kelly's struggle to connect with those who may not share similar intentions for personal and collective inquiry, and times when Sabre found her commitment to inquiry difficult due to perceived conflicting roles. Through our inquiry we also explored our capacity for wholeness by transforming and re-imagining boundaries of time and space. We did this through ongoing cycles of Living Educational Theory research, through offering our stories to each other and to the participants of BARNi through co-writing and Skype conferencing.

In developing new interpretations of the world around us we were able to see that the boundaries we thought were cutting us off from others, and creating a sense of fragmentation and frustration, were in reality self-imposed. We reflected on three intentions to shift these self-imposed barriers into learning-opportunities to deepen

our connection to our self through our relations with others in various, open-hearted, ways – crossing emotional divides through focusing on space rather than assumptions, focusing on self in relationship to others and by focusing on re-imagining the physical divides of time and space.

These intentions are predicated on the belief that awareness is a collective process: by reflecting on and sharing our learning together we can identify how our inner stories/thoughts and actions are contradictory, complex and lacking in cohesion, and we can create space to develop a broader perspective of ourselves wherein challenges are illuminated and become a starting point for growth. Through this collective learning-experience we have come to see self as flexible and ever-evolving, and we are growing more comfortable with the process of letting go of some aspects of self that do not serve us well in our learning and growth.

Through this inquiry we noticed that 'I's' became 'we's' through our emerging collective wisdom. We see this wisdom as holding the power to generate new and greater potential through how we each enact this growing collective wisdom in our separate worlds. Together we are holding space, creating a space to pay attention to the emerging moment and inviting others to join us. In doing this we realize even the ground is groundless, that, 'the ground we stand on is always moving, and new actions are always required. Every time we arrive at a new viewpoint, the conditions change, and we must once again tune in to what is under our feet' (Stone, 2011, p. 4).

As we have tried to show through sharing our learning process, transformative learning happens as we are alerted to, and confronted with, our contradictions and tensions, and that we can see beyond our limitations through an openhearted engagement with colleagues who also share an intention to learn. This learning unfolded in a safe, supportive, loving – but challenging – environment, where we were literally and metaphorically opening ourselves to the group through our Skype-medium. There were moments in the process when, through collective reflection, we were able to see ourselves becoming persons we didn't want to be. These observations became moments of possibility. We learned that disruption could be leveraged for more learning from accessing the collective wisdom of the group.

In sharing with each other we are not only learning to let go, but also learning to sense and learning to know what it feels like to build relationships as a way to experience authenticity. Through deepening connectivity we can relationally learn our way toward building a meaningful life and sustainable life as a teacher.

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