It’s all about well-being, eh?
Mindfulness of what we’re making in our PhD Ecology

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“It’s All About Well-being, eh?”
Mindfulness of what we’re making in our Ph.D. Ecologies
by
Erin Kreeger

Abstract

This transdisciplinary, relational and interactive dissertation focuses on the co-enactment of well-being through our everyday choices and communication patterns. Though the ideas and practices are applicable to any context, this dissertation is specifically focused on what I refer to as our “Ph.D. Ecologies.” I use this term to foreground that academic communities are complex, richly textured and relational. As such, what happens in them has impacts on numerous relationships (seen, unseen, imagined, unimagined) in the larger ecologies of which we are a part.

This dissertation is grounded in 3 overarching questions: *what are we making in our Ph.D. Ecologies*, *how we are making it* and *how can we co-enact well-being in the world in and through our Ph.D. Ecologies*. It is a praxis-based case study for exploring new meanings and relational processes or practices as a way of making something different in our Ph.D. Ecologies — something which may contribute to well-being with increased frequency. I invite people with orientations and perspectives that are often separated by time, cultures, disciplines and social contexts into emergent, asynchronous conversations and practice space. Drawing on the logical forces of art based practices and traditional scholarly grammar, helps create the space for these transformational conversations to occur. These are conversations grounded in communication patterns which invite openness, curiousity, relational generativity and genuine inquiry over communication patterns of defence, debate and notions of bounded beings.

This dissertation brings together heuristics from CMM (The Coordinated Management of Meaning), social/relational constructionist and action research-based orientations, and Buddhist and Āyurvedic informed practices as frames for inquiring into and practicing with mindfulness of what we are making and how — including discernment of bifurcating choice points. My goal with this dissertation is not to present a set of results or arrive at a set decision or bounded recommendation. Rather, I am interested in learning about and practicing with transforming patterns of communication as a way of evolving our ecologies so we increase the likelihood of acting together with increased phronesis and increased co-enactment of well-being.

There are many ways to describe this dissertation (many interpretive frames) depending, in part, on where you position yourself in relationship to it. Given its relational orientation and construction as a multi-turned, participatory and flexibly punctuated dialogue, rather than an expert led summary, I am including in this abstract examples of how other participants are describing it — creating an invitation to enter into this dialogue with more than just my perspective on what to expect. Catherine Creede, Ph.D. described it in this way:

> Capturing the complexities of interactive, co-creative dialogue on the page is a challenge to everyone who tries to observe and describe socially constructive communication. Erin's dissertation pushes at the edge of innovation in weaving together multiple stories and perspectives while holding the ground of her authorial voice, and invites us in both content and form to continually consider and reconsider what we are making together, how we are making it and the implications of our choices and turns. In that dynamic, we hold a core question: how do we ensure that what we make in our institutional relationships holds our human wellbeing at the centre?

Barclay Hudson, Ed.D. used this language to describe it:

> The dissertation itself is the test case for the theory — the idea of co-enactment, or creation in relationship. Relationships that span history and cultures and academic disciplines. That draw on images as well as words,

> performance arts as well as intellectual scholarship. That draw on evolving action research as well as initially formulated goals and hypotheses. On critical self-examination as well as apriori assumptions. On dialogic co-creation as well as deep academic expertise… On ethical premises as well as functional goals…In short, the dissertation is not just an exploration of multiple epistemologies, but a process of evolution through a set of specific dialectical queries. The dialectic is not a Hegelian or Marxist synthesis (thesis, anti-thesis, synthesis), or a struggle between confrontational opposites, or an attempt to find a balance through compromise, or a way to model the pendulum swings of historical acceptance among competing priorities (see Attachment below, on "dialectics"). Rather, the purpose is to create a space for fruitful encounters among different mindsets and perspectives, that are usually separated by confinement within particular disciplines and social contexts…This involves a form of Satyagraha, in the sense coined by Mohandas Gandhi, as "soul force" or "love force" or "truth force"…Satyagraha involves a "double conversion" — a transformation of the truth-teller as much as the audience. In fact, the teller of truth has the more difficult conversion to experience — having to see the other person no longer as opponent but a human and a partner.

Kimberly Pearce, M.A. described it like this:

> In the spirit of scholarship *and* art, this dissertation cannot be easily described. It is a kaleidoscope of meta-perspectives, theory, voices, and stories that weave together to form an utterly new way of constructing a dissertation. This is entirely appropriate, given Kreeger's topic of Ph.D. Ecologies. Her use of Western and Eastern approaches to epistemology become the framework for deconstructing how Ph.D. Ecologies get (re)made, the effects these ecologies have on the formation of scholars and what counts as scholarship, and the unintended consequences for people, institutions and scholarly work. Among other things, the brilliance of this dissertation is Kreeger's demonstration of how one might study *any* ecology through a more holistic lens.

Though an Abstract often focuses on results, I hope these descriptions have conveyed a genuine invitation to read and participate in the ongoing conversations and transformations that are co-enacted in this dissertation.

Keywords: Well-being; Mindfulness; Communication; Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM); Social Construction; Relational Construction; Action Research; Relational Responsibility; Relational Generativity; Complexity; Change; Evolution; Ph.D. Ecologies; Dialogue; Practice-led; Epistemology; Research Methods; Dissertations; Health; Large-scale change; Organizational Development; Buddhism; Āyurveda; Co-enactment; Performative; Academia; Relationship

Acknowledgements

Imagine if all the people
who want to change the world
knew they could.
- Jim Lord in *What Kind of World Do you Want?*

A critical theme in my work is that what we do is substantive — it is through our relational processes, our ways of being together, that we create our world. I am incredibly fortunate to have so many people in my world who make it better! There are too many people to thank though I will highlight a few who made my dissertation, and our Ph.D. Ecologies, better.

First, I want to thank everyone who shared experiential stories, hopes and aspirations including those of you who participated in the workshop in Byron and those who shared feedback about my dissertation. May we continue to evolve in ways which honour you, our Ph.D. Ecologies and our broader ecologies.

I want to thank Vinay Lal and Borin Van Loon whose book *Introducing Hinduism: A graphic guide* helped inspire how I might visually articulate what I was conceptualizing for this dissertation. It helped me move from idea to the page. I wish to thank Sam Chen for drawing the graphic novel scenes and individual characters early on in my dissertation. Having these visuals helped me move forward. Any awkwardness from how I changed and manipulated them to suit the unfolding turns is mine!

I want to thank the CMM community, the Fielding community, my SP gang, the Taos Institute, Southern Cross University colleagues and all the action researchers and social/relational constructionist folks out there for the work you are doing in the world and what that work has helped me create, understand and bring forth.

I also want to thank the teachers I have in Dr. Vasant Lad, Thich Nhat Hanh and others engaged in Āyurvedic and Buddhist practices who help support me in my practices - in living into well-being in ways that support the liberation of all beings.

I want to thank Barclay Hudson whose openness, trust, pragmatism, Feynman-esque interest in “the thing that doesn’t fit” and great generosity in how he stories me helped prepare me for this dissertation before I even chose it and strengthen it once I did. Your relational eloquence is inspiring, Barclay!

I want to thank Kim Pearce who also demonstrated a huge amount of relational eloquence and who was full of encouragement, practical advice, suggestions, compassion, excitement and love in ways that made my dissertation more coherent and also supported my personal and social evolution beyond this dissertation. I want to thank Barnett Pearce for all the turns you took. I keep learning from you and keep transforming through practicing with your work in profound ways.

And I want to thank my partner, Jan Elliott, who supported me in countless ways so I could create this dissertation and spend time and energy on what was important to me. Sweetheart, I can’t thank you enough for all you bring into my world and what we co-create. You are amazing. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

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Preface

"'I'm in the process of becoming, in the process of evolving...I'm creating my future with every word, every action, every thought. I find myself in a very dynamic situation with unimaginable potential...I have all I need to engage in the process of awakening.
- Pema Chödrön

Our First Turn

My partner Jan and I were in conversation with a young doctor from Santiago, Chile about a surgeon we were all working with in different contexts. In sharing our reflections about how much we appreciate him, Jan and I talked about our experience of him as a skilled listener who explains things well, who recognizes the complexity of people's lives and so knows one solution does not fit all and who seems very present with people. He has many accolades and is a top surgeon technically but it is *how he is with people* that, for us, makes him such a great doctor. The woman from Santiago listens to our reflections, nods her head and leans in a little. "*This*," she says "is the real medicine."

Thousands of years ago (and still today), Āyurvedic[1] physicians were teaching that how a physician is with a person makes a difference in that person's well-being. That, for example, bringing clarity, sensitivity, compassion and awareness into the relationship is critical for diagnosis and treatment. From an Āyurvedic orientation balance and harmony in relationships in general are not just important contributors to health but are, in a sense health itself or what creates well-being. Well-being from an

[1] The term Āyurveda (आयुर्वेद in Sanskrit's Devanāgarī script) and is often translated as the Science of Life and the Art of Daily Living. Āyurveda is considered by most scholars to be the oldest healing science - estimates are that it goes back 5,000-10,000 years - and it is still being practiced today. It is even experiencing a revival with people now training in Āyurveda around the world.

Āyurvedic perspective is not just about the absence of defined disease but about, among other things, balance and harmony of relationships[2]. The choices we make day to day (e.g.what we eat, how we are at work and with our families, how we respond to someone yelling at us or bullying someone else, what we do with our trash, what we do when we get behind the wheel of a car) matter to our personal and collective well-being.

I offer this story of the doctor from Santiago believing that how we are with people is an important part of medicine and this brief reference to Āyurveda — a tradition which offers profound insights into relational well-being - to bring attention to a couple of important concepts or orientations with which I enter this dissertation. One is that life is relational and the worlds we live into, are worlds we make together. They are relationally created or constructed — nothing exists independent of relationship. This concept exists in many cultures and fields of discipline including, for example, in Āyurvedic, Buddhist and social constructionist communities as well as among some physicists and communication theorists (Lad, 2002); (Easwaran, 2007); (Plum Village, n.d.); (Gergen, 2009); (Feynman, 1964); (Pearce, 2007.)

Figure 1: To be is to inter be by Thich Nhat Nanh

[2] In Āyurveda, individual life as seem as a microcosm of the cosmos so when I say relationships, I am talking about relationships of all kinds as nothing exists outside of relationship. For example, I am speaking of relationships with the elements (ether, air, fire, water, earth), time, direction and seasons, digestion, basic psychophysiological organizing principles called *doṣas* (vata, pitta, kapha), food (that which nourishes our body-mind-consciousness — all we take in, digest, draw nourishment from etc. with people, architecture etc.

A related concept is that well-being is something relational and dynamic rather then an individual, static state. This is also an Āyurvedic concept (Lad, 2002.) Our (communication) patterns (how we are in relationship at work, in institutions etc.) have the potential to impact more than just our "work." They have the potential to nourish and contribute to well-being. These concepts inform the "hypothesis" or orientation I work from: mindfulness[3] of our relational worlds (i.e. mindfulness of what we are making together and how we are making it — specifically in our public institutions and group cultures — can help us notice or discern choice points and opportunities to evolve how we do things together so that we are more and more likely to co-enact well-being in the world. In my dissertation this is not just a hypothesis or topic to analyze but also an ongoing practice to live into, work with and reflect upon and therefore informed how I approached my dissertation — the choices I made.

What I am engaging with in this dissertation is something many people in a number of communities are also engaging with in some way. It is full of complexity and so I approach it transdisciplinarily — at once between, across and beyond disciplines (Nicolescu, 2012)[4]. As such, a single, static answer to the question "what is this dissertation about?" is not always easy to articulate nor is it always useful for

---

[3] Mindfulness, as I use it here, is a translation in common use of the Pali word *sati* and the Sanskrit *word smṛti* स्मृति. Additional translations are awareness and remembrance/that which is remembered. That remembering pertains to being in the current moment and opening to not just fragments of our lives (our stories of "self" and stories of "others", what we like or dislike, how we characterize experiences or people and what we view as important) but to the whole of the present moment. It is a difficult word to operationalize as it is a wordless experience. I would like to offer opening, awareness and remembering the larger picture as concepts to hold when I talk about mindfulness.

[4] I have gained knowledge from and draw upon ideas, grammars, conversations and publications from many domains yet this dissertation is not intended to be a representation of any of them. As you engage with it, you may find notions, authors, words and approaches which are familiar and others which may seem new. You may be surprised to see someone named or to see someone absent on the page. In this way, this dissertation is more of a kaleidoscope or fractal than it is a map with territories or even a tree with various branches.

conversation and sharing of knowledge and practices. Just as people describe an object differently based on where they are standing in relation to it (differently when they walk around it than when they stand only in one place) this dissertation can similarly be made meaningful through a number of interpretive frames. What contributes to the most generative coordination, coherence and increased meaning making (Pearce, 2007) depends in part on what shared meaning we (you and I) bring into the conversation (where we stand in relation to each other and the subject.) When talking with people about this dissertation, I often opened with different frames depending on what shared meaning we have (e.g. is it about organizational development, social change, communication, spiritual practice, public health, cultural studies, education, research methods, a form of yoga[5] or something else.) This has been a very generative approach. Not knowing all of you as readers, however, I need to talk about "what this is" without the benefit of that shared meaning making so I will choose some descriptions which feel significant for me. I will also assume that those of you who will be reading this in this iteration will be used to reading dissertations or other scholarly work and will be used to particular ways of communicating (for example using in-text citation.) I will weave those assumptions into how I tell this story and hope we can build from these initial descriptions in ways that bring your unique positions and interests into the conversation. I will begin with a broad description and narrow the context and frame from there.

In one of its broadest interpretive frames (one way of perceiving it or grounding some of what is going on), this dissertation focuses on continually

[5] Yoga here meaning unity and skilled action. For example karma yoga as an active life of service as referenced in the Bhagavad Gītā (the translation I use is introduced and translated by Eknath Easwaran (2007.)

evolving how we coordinate[6]/communicate or “do things together” so that what we are making as we engage (particularly in public institutions, organisations or “fields of discipline”) are experiences which are increasingly likely to contribute to — i.e. to ‘co-enact’ — well-being in the world. It focuses on attending to ways of being together as we organise for particular purposes in ways that not only have positive impacts on those said purposes but also on our world more broadly. More specifically, I have narrowed this scope or context to focusing on a purpose we come together around in academia: Ph.D. related activities — what I refer to as our Ph.D. Ecologies[7].

This dissertation is not only *about* Ph.D. Ecologies, but is also a practice itself (some may call it a case study) where the making of the presentation is just as significant as (and not separate from) the context. It is not only about Ph.D. Ecologies in theory but a practice in mindfulness of what I (and we) are making and re-making in our Ph.D. Ecologies through my dissertation and participation in this ecology. I have an aspiration that throughout engaging with this, I (we) will be acting with increased phronesis[8] so that what we do together is more and more likely to “make” well-being in our worlds. In taking a context to study and becoming an active participant in that inquiry, I have simultaneously been changed and have created

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[6] I’m drawing the term *coordinate* from Pearce, 2007 — using it as a place holder for looking at ways people interweave their actions and stories.

[7] I use the term “Ph.D. Ecologies” to describe what some call our doctoral system (i.e. how we research, ethics reviews, publishing and peer review, funding, how we define knowing and what we see as knowledge etc.) I chose the term ecology as a reminder of the larger world we are a part of — what happens in the microcosm of academia has ripples in other parts of our macrocosm. In other words, Ph.D. ecologies are complex, richly textured, impact numerous relationships (seen, unseen, imagined, unimagined) and create this world we live in. I use the term Ph.D. though in that narrowing do not mean to exclude the experiences of other higher education degrees such as Ed.D.s I do believe we can all learn significant amounts from each other. Similarly, I believe much of this context is useful for people in other kinds of public institutions, not only higher education as I have framed it here for the purpose of this dissertation.

[8] I use phronesis here to mean practical wisdom or habituating ourselves to practical wisdom through mindfulness of our relational actions. I am not connecting it with rhetoric as some people do.

change. It has been very important to me that my dissertation presentation be part of the inquiry itself including that it be dialogic and practice-led[9].

I wanted to facilitate a dialogue that would bring together people's stories and wisdom in a way that cross-fertilizes and connects ideas across time and discipline. I also wanted to encourage further dialogue and create a sense that what you are reading here isn't all there is to be said on the subject. It is one episode (Pearce, 2007) or conversation in a dynamic web of conversations that have occurred in the past, are occurring in the present and will continue in the future. In the body, I played with visual cues and language usage to try to help evoke that sense of this being one (asynchronous) turn — albeit an extended one. In addition, I hoped people would take what came up in these transdisciplinary dialogues into other parts of their lives and work. It turns out people (myself included) did do that as I will highlight later on.

The intent to create space for multi-turned and cross-pollinated dialogue filled with questions, curiosity, negotiations, choices and ongoing practice was much more important to me than (and so privileged over) a process focused on control or mastery where I came to and presented specific "answers" or "plans." That dialogic orientation I chose to aspire to differs from the narrow, deep, exhaustive or expert model many people I spoke with aspired to with their dissertations. There are many approaches we can take to a dissertation. The one I chose was meaningful for me and for other people in ways that invited rich learning and transformation. Some of those stories are still unfolding and others are highlighted in the body of my dissertation. The body of my dissertation is itself a dialogue where I wove together reader's and conversation partner's asynchronous comments and stories with

[9] Some might use the language "performative."

publications (quotes) from other contexts, times and from a variety of fields[10]. If at any point you would like your ideas, stories and comments to be woven into the dissertation body, please let me know. I would love to include them as I have others!

As part of approaching this dissertation as a practice in mindfulness about what we're making together, I focused on and played with what each turn I was taking (each step, each choice) maintained or reproduced, invited, called forth and/or recreated. My priority was to discern bifurcation points and critical moments and to work with the infinite choices we have for how to be in relationship in ways which taught me about the connectedness of communication patterns and well-being, while simultaneously helping create and habituate myself to generative practices for creating well-being in each step (Hanh, 1991), each breath (Hanh, 2011). Part of the transformation I experienced with taking this practice orientation was that my dissertation became more and more inseparable from other practices and ways I make sense and meaning in my life including becoming part of my Buddhist and Āyurvedic practices. This was not only generative for my personal well-being but also was a kind of alignment and growth opportunity that many people I talked with found missing in their Ph.D experiences. My dissertation journey was a kind of action research and lived inquiry into Ph.D. Ecologies and also into what taking a social constructionist orientation can invite and enable in research.

With a penchant and talent for seeing the myriad choices available in any moment, and in the absence of a doctoral co-operative inquiry group or community

[10] I intentionally do not introduce each character in the dialogue that takes place in the body of my dissertation or include standard citation indicators in these dialogues. Rather than explain why here in this introduction, I would like to invite you to hold some openness around this as you read. The reasons behind my decisions will unfold in the dialogue itself and references to the quotes I have woven in from published sources will be provided at the end. Thanks for your openness in trying this.

of practice, I found it very useful to identify some “touchstones” to help guide me and frame my choices. These are personal to my learning goals, structured around ways I story well-being in the world and drawn from the work of people I thought of as mentors who have taken many, many turns in the conversation about living well together before I ever began. In some dissertation contexts you might also call these touchstones evaluation criteria. They were as important to me as, for example, some people’s preferences around reliability and validity are to them. Though I talk about them in more detail later in my dissertation I also offer them here as a way of helping highlight what I was trying to make and how I was trying to make it. As a participant in this inquiry (a reader, committee member, fellow learner etc.) I invite you to use them, if you would like to, to help support me in aligning my choices with my intentions and to help discover or create additional choices which may enhance this work, the dialogue, our meaning making and our co-enactments of well-being. I also invite you to use these for yourself and your team and organisation if they resonate with you or to create your own lists for that purpose. My touchstones are continually evolving (informed by many different people and experiences) but this is the list of questions I used as guides through the majority of my dissertation process:

- Am I, or in what ways am I, being mindful that I am participating in a multi-turn and multi-storied process?
- Am I, or in what ways am I, tapping into the wisdom of our collective intelligence? Am I, or in what ways am I, tapping into my own wisdom and knowledge from a variety of sources not just cognitive or intellectual but paying attention whole body-mindfully? Am I, or in what ways am I, developing new capacities/practices for working with multiple ways of knowing which help me enter into generative relationships with others, even under less than optimal conditions?
- Am I, or in what ways am I, opening up possibilities with the turns I take? Being proactively compassionate - constructing opportunities where people can be more open/ inviting a particular kind of

- response? Saying no when appropriate and in ways which open doors and pathways/inviting conversations over ending them?

- Am I, or in what ways am I, embracing all stories as incomplete, unfinished, dynamic (even inconsistent), relational, complex and valid? Am I, or in what ways am I, able to welcome and relax into wonderment, expansiveness, paradox, playfulness, movement?

- Am I, or in what ways am I, making a positive or generative difference in other people's lives? Am I, or in what ways am I, getting that feedback?

- Am I, or in what ways am I, honouring the notion of relational responsibility with others who have been or will be engaging in this inquiry - including reviewers/examiners? Am I, or in what ways am I, being generous and gentle with myself and others, giving people an "A" when imagining or anticipating their responses? Staying excited?!?!

- Am I, or in what ways am I, developing practices and skills of listening deeply/with curiosity while also standing tall (Buber's standing my ground while remaining profoundly open to the other) in ways which foster inquiry and invite others to engage in creative conversations based in genuine inquiry?

- Am I, or in what ways am I, acting on what I love in service to something else? Working in ways/creating something that reflects and feeds into my commitments to fostering well-being/improving existing social worlds (what some may call liberation of all beings) and calling into being better social worlds?

- Am I, or in what ways am I, working with emergence in generative ways - seeing evolving choices and shifts in perspective as signposts of learning? Am I, or in what ways am I, practicing with mindfulness, impermanence and non-attachment (including allowing ideas, approaches, methods, petals on the daisy flower (CMM) to drop away?)

- Am I, or in what ways am I, practicing Ben and Roz Zander's "one butt playing"? Going for it with passion and enthusiasm? Am I, or in what ways am I, going beyond where I would usually stop? Am I, or in what ways, am I singing with my unique voice?

- Am I, or in what ways am I, staying present with living into the open questions/the conversations? Feeling curious?

- Am I, or in what ways am I, embracing boundarylessness? Am I, or in what ways am I, able to be with the fullness of an experience without needing to come to conclusions/reify things? Was I allowing room (stillness, space) for things to arise/emerge?

- Am I, or in what ways am I, having fun? Experiencing joy, nourishment and growth? Am I, or in what ways am I, engaged? If I am not, am I, or in what ways am I, discovering what I need to change so that I am?

- Am I, or in what ways am I, engaging the five core strategies of appreciative leadership? The wisdom of inquiry - leading with positively powerful questions/the art of illumination - bringing out the best of people and situations/the genius of inclusion; engaging with people to co-create the future/the courage of inspiration; awakening the creative spirit/the path of integrity; making choices for the good of the whole?

- Am I, or in what ways am I, becoming more intimate with this ecology? Am I, or in what ways am I, bringing my intimacy to the surface of this inquiry/(re)presentation (letting people into personal parts of my journey in service to/as part of this work?)

- Am I, or in what ways am I, being gentle with myself and others? Am I, or in what ways am I, I including “mistakes” in my definition of performance? Able to laugh at myself when I notice my practices lapsing?

- Am I, or in what ways am I, being both an attractor of and generator of possibility?

- What am I doing/are my practices helping habituate me to openness and mindfulness? Helping co-create better worlds?

The universe is a continuous web.
Touch it at any point and the whole web quivers.
- Stanley Kunitz

Why Examine Ph.D. Ecologies as a Lens for Co-Creating Well-being

Considering well-being in the context of our Ph.D. Ecologies, including exploring what we are creating through our actions and how that compares to what we aspire to create, has been an interest of mine for a long time and became pronounced a number of years ago when I was working on my Master’s Degree at Fielding Graduate University (Kreeger, 2006). At that time I saw a lot of what I storied as a disconnect that many scholars or scholar-practitioners were experiencing that was troubling to them, and to me. This disconnect was between the kind of world

that mattered enough to them to want to research and help create (often one grounded in social justice, personal and social evolution and wellness of bodies, families, communities and organisations) and the kind of world they were actually creating using the grammar and rhetoric of their academic communities (Pearce, 2009). Those patterns and assumptions people named tended towards feeling like they needed to live into expert models over ones which left room for beginner's-mind, not knowing or mystery, "arguments for" and "defence" of over cultures of curiosity, dialogue and room to say "this didn't work as I had expected or hoped." These particular constructs or stories they adopted led to a great deal of stress in different ways. Often they felt they had to uphold particular communication patterns as part of their research in order to be seen as legitimate, authoritative, coherent, a member of their desired community etc. However, these communication patterns often felt inconsistent with what they wanted to create. As an example, they may have wanted to create social justice, empowerment and inclusive, equality based participation but were designing or constructing research projects which in Orlando Fals-Borda's words, were full of "asymmetrical relationship[s] of submission and dependence implicit in the subject/object binomial" (Fals Borda & Rahman, 1991, p. 5). As a scholar-practitioner who was working to create better worlds I was confused by, and felt both frustration and compassion for the inconsistencies in many people's work that I was exposed to at the time. It impacted me in many ways and, to be honest, I often found myself embarrassed when people identified me with Academia — an Academia they viewed as out of touch, too theoretical and impractical, un-useful, "Ivory Tower" elitist, hegemonic and oppressively colonising.

I went looking for alternative models for ways people were engaging in research practices and felt excitement over the ones I found[11] as well as for the possibilities of enhancing my practices and expanding what we as a community value and determine to be legitimate or "good work." In the years since I was working on my thesis, I continued to hear an overwhelming number of stories from people about their experiences in Ph.D. Ecologies and how problematic they found them and how those problems and patterns were creating distress and dis-ease rather than contributing to well-being or to the better worlds that had hoped to be contributing to through their academic work. I will share examples of this later. What I would like you to hold here is the possibility that the way many participants (and indicators such as retention rates) tell the story, doctoral education does not seem to be reflecting, developing or making a significant contribution to well-being in the way that it potentially could. I believe that we have the ability to shift this through evolving our (communication) patterns and thus evolving what we are making together in our Ph.D. ecologies in ways which increase our well-being and (through our relationships in other ecologies or the broader ecology) contribute to well-being in the world in additional ways. I felt enough frustration, resignation and distress from people and saw enough need and opportunity that I decided to dedicate significant resources to bringing up this idea and exploring it through my dissertation.

I began focusing on the questions "what kind of world do we want to co-create and what kind of Ph.D. ecologies may co-enact that?" and "What would Ph.D. ecologies be like if they were a reflection of that world we want to co-create?" Some of the other questions I was asking and exploring (or some alternative ways of

[11] The University of Bath's Centre for Action Research in Professional Practice program was a place I found many examples of alternative ways of attending to and presenting research.

forming those questions) will come up later in the dissertation, however I would like to include some of them here as well as a way of helping fill out the picture of my "research question" and what this is about. I asked, for example:

- What kind of world do we want to make and how do we need to "be" together to make it? How can Ph.D. programs help us be together in those ways?
- I think of Ph.D. programs as ecologies — living systems made up of inter-dependencies, interactions, relationships and balances — and so what happens in academia has ripple effects in other parts of the ecology. How can we communicate/act (supervise, publish, cite, think about ethics reviews/IRBs etc.) in ways that are ecologically responsible (*eco*-centric over *ego*-centric)?
- What might happen to our patterns/habits in Ph.D. ecologies if we orient ourselves relationally or if an orientation towards relational generativity/ relational eloquence takes precedent over notions of bounded beings?
- What can we do in and through Ph.D. ecologies to move towards/create/live into well-being in the world (including social justice, environmental sustainability, peace, compassion, kindness, a richness of human capacity...) and what might that afford/enable? What might mindfulness of choices and intention to create well-being call forth?
- If we approach Ph.D. programs with a devotion to possibility, what does that look like/feel like and how does it help us get to this new place? Where does it take us if we use a lens of (or live into) a relationship centric perspective? If we take a communication perspective? An orientation towards well-being?
- What are we making together right now as I and we engage with this dissertation? What realities are we maintaining, living into, re-creating, and changing in our Ph.D. Ecologies and how do those impact well-being?
- We are all making and re-making the world all the time. What's next for us in our evolution of Ph.D. ecologies/what do we want to (re)construct?
- What are the assumptions we're making that give us what we're currently experiencing? How can we be together that will give us something new? Or help us be more of our best together?
- How are we being together in Ph.D. ecologies that people's eyes often aren't shining when they talk about us/that so many stories are negative?
- How do we evoke a qualitative evolution in how we are together in Ph.D. ecologies (and thus in the larger ecology?) How can we create practices which create capacity for creating better worlds/well-being more broadly? How do we build a sustainable environment for different stories, contexts, orientations, ways of knowing to thrive? To expand what we value and what we see as valuable?

- What's our highest level of context for Ph.D. ecologies? What stories will create/call forth what we want to become? What do I want to call forth in each turn of my life/with my doctoral inquiry?
- What role does compassion play in these turns/this inquiry? How can we have more compassionate practices more frequently? What can we do that helps us be better than we need to be together in our practices? And what does that in turn create for the world?
- How can I engage with my dissertation in ways that cultivate possibility? Engage in ways some might name civic responsibility, relational responsibility, citizenship, engaged Buddhism, karma yoga, being a good ancestor, spiritual practice? What is going to be most useful for entering into and carrying this conversation forward? What's the next most useful thing to do or say?
- How can I hold/live the questions and ambiguities of what it might look like to have a Ph.D. ecology that is part of, a reflection of and helps create a better world knowing it must co-evolve?
- What kind of artifact can I generate that would respect the ways of working and living into the world that I'm practicing cultivating, be useful to others, expedite or invite access to diverse conversations, invite continuation of conversations, be enjoyable to read...? What am I calling into being/co-enacting with the frameworks, practices etc. I'm using? Choices I'm making? Am I contributing in a way that feels generative, that co-enacts well-being/ co-creates better worlds?

When I began my doctoral work, I had not planned on focusing on how we are together in our Ph.D. Ecologies nor was I planning on focusing explicitly on well-being though it was implicit in my work. That shifted, a semester or so into my first doctoral program. My dissertation began as a cross-cultural approach to online communications and the only references to our doctoral practices were about choices I was personally making with how to approach my doctoral work. Considering, attending to and creating well-being in the world was at the centre of many of the choices I made, including significant career decisions, my leadership style, the choices I made in my home and in my way of making sense of the world. As I was working on my dissertation though, I began to feel an increased urgency to more directly and overtly attend to what we're making together when we engage — particularly at work or in public institutions and specifically in what we are making as

we work with and perpetuate or create new practices of scholarship. Our (communication) patterns (how we are in relationship at work, in institutions etc.) have the potential to impact more than just our “work” — in this case more than just my dissertation or scholarship in Academia in general. They have the potential to nourish and contribute to well-being — ours and the rest of the world’s. Like the concept Michelangelo is reported to have talked about where stone has a sculpture in it that the sculptor discovers or sets free, I went to work on freeing what I was so passionate about but had been trying to keep on the side of my plate and explored shifting my spoken focus to well-being and how that can be made or co-enacted in, through and because of how we are with each other — specifically how we are together in our Ph.D. ecologies.

That turn in my journey and my newly freed topic came from a confluence of other turns. Like all conversational turns, it came about in response to turns I and others have taken. It is one entry point into conversations in multiple (inter)related contexts. The nexus of contexts I found myself in as I made this shift in focus, not only included an overall commitment to well-being in the world and to helping shift people’s stories of Ph.D. Ecologies, but also included and was inspired by, a) the work I have done as an organisational leader, b) years of living amid multiple cultures, and c) the experience of living and working in times and places marked by acute or pending change. For me, this was a fascinating and compelling place to be living and working in and from.

As an organisational leader, much of my focus had been on shifting organisations out of what felt like stagnation or crisis so they could not only function at what has been defined as acceptable levels but also so that they could thrive. Part

of doing this had been about attending to and evolving spoken and unspoken cultural assumptions or stories about “how we do things around here and why.” Those assumptions underly a host of related practices. By addressing and changing those practices and their embedded cultural assumptions, we as teams have been able to improve the organisations in ways which made them, by most people’s accounts, better places to work and better positioned to serve the community and their purpose for existing in more successful, fulfilling and sustainable ways.

I have had the good fortune of living as an adult in multiple cultures, including more than a half-dozen different countries in Asia, Europe, Australasia and the Americas. I have enjoyed opportunities to engage with people with profoundly different assumptions and ways of coordinating, communicating and generally being in relationship. These intense immersion experiences help keep me limber in my own assumptions and help continually expand what I see as options and pathways. They have contributed to and exercised my capacity for living with situations which are vague, unpredictable, and unfamiliar. They infuse what I see and do with a sense of possibility grounded in experience of differences which “work”.

In addition, I recognise many of us are living and working in times marked by acute or pending change, where large numbers of people and groups are expressing an urgent desire for large-scale shifts — citing multitudes of stories about how our current trajectory as a planet is neither sustainable nor desirable from a fiscal lens, an ecological lens, a health-lens, an educational lens, a civic-lens, a social-justice

lens etc.[12] Some of these conversations are about how formal education programs, including universities and, sometimes specifically, doctoral programs, are no longer meeting people's/societies' emerging needs. Some of these concerns are coupled with stories that doctoral programs are so old, traditional and rigid that they will not change even when faced with irrelevancy or inadequacy. Students, graduates, employers and professionals at times feel that what many people see as "ivory tower educational systems" are woefully lagging behind the demands of our current worlds. This is accompanied by a cynicism many people hold that change in academia is unlikely or even, as I have heard spoken over and over again, impossible.

Graduate programs are not islands unto themselves and research is "not just the period at the end of the sentence" (Elder Lionel Kinunwa, as quoted in Wilson. 2009, p.60). As the Stanley Kunitz quote at the beginning of this section speaks to, they are (inter)connected to many other ecologies or parts of our world that people may not think of as academic. For example, research in medicine, psychology and any other field impacts things like hospital protocol and hiring practices.[13] People who participate in research inquiries are impacted by those inquiries in many ways (Smith, 1999) and people who learn ways of being through their work places (universities) often bring those ways of being home and into their interactions with their families. These are just a few examples of interconnectedness.

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[12]If you're interested in reading some published writing on the topic, some examples are Peter Senge's book *The Necessary Revolution*, Frances Moore Lappé's book *EcoMind*, David Suzuki, Crunchy Betty, Peter Block or Otto Scharmer's blogs including Scharmer's January 28th blog post after returning from launching the Global Well-being and Gross National Happiness (GNH) Lab, Good.is, or Third World Resurgence Magazine's Issue No.266-267 from Malaysia which contains several papers presented at the June 2011 international conference on "Decolonising Our Universities." Though many of these examples of published works come from what many people think of as the West or the Global North and our traditions of publishing, there are copious examples around the world where people and organisations are making shifts in patterns, habits and ways of going on together.

[13] This makes research practices (including "fraud" in research) important issues (Alok, 2012)

Approaching this inquiry from the orientation that all the world is relationally constructed/that we are all (not just Ph.D. Ecologies but the world in general) interconnected and do not exist separately from each other, means that evolution or stagnation in Ph.D. programs, then, is important to our ecology everywhere. As someone with a relationship to Ph.D. ecologies — one which could be described by Patricia Hill Collins' concept of an “outsider-within” with the social-locational between-er status and power differentials that go with that (Collins, 1998), I was in an interesting position to begin inquiring into possible evolutionary choices in doctoral programs and what was possible for my own dissertation process.

My aspiration for our Ph.D. Ecologies is that, as with other social institutions or parts of our ecologies, we in academia may continue to evolve our stories and practices, making mindful choices with the intention that our Ph.D. ecologies more optimally meet our societies’ changing needs and contribute to our overall well-being[14]. I look to mindfulness of bifurcation points and choices as a practice that helps co-enact well-being. My intention for this inquiry is to habituate myself to this practice, participate in our evolution and help support others in their participation and practice. Though researchers are often thought of as data gatherers, analysers and reporters, I saw myself also as convener, host, facilitator, cross-pollinator and participant in a dialogic space. I focus on a) drawing our attention to the stories people are telling about their experiences with Ph.D. ecologies which are less relationally generative, sustainable or co-enacting of well-being than they can be or

[14] This aspiration and approach to my dissertation is grounded in a social constructionist orientation and is value-laden. It differs from some other approaches to doctoral work in that it is nether intended to be value neutral nor unbiased in a way that separates researcher/researched. Also I have not intended it to be representative of a particular Truth or single Reality. I would describe it as relational, as one of many stories, approaches and perspectives, as reflexive, personal, dialogic and practice-filled.

that people want them to be, b) foregrounding that we have opportunities everyday to be evolving our Ph.D. ecologies in ways that better serve the shifting needs of our larger world and c) innovating and practicing with shifting assumptions about how things need to be done so that new possibilities may emerge. I worked hard to practice making shifts in what some might name as my methodology based on what came from the dialogues and emerged throughout the inquiry.

A Prominent story of Ph.D. Ecologies

A lot of what I have introduced could use further discussion or background information. I go into more detail in the body of my dissertation but there are things I would like to attend to here as well. One is a prevailing narrative that Ph.D. Ecologies as a whole are not currently co-enacting well-being (in the many ways in which people may define that) as much as it could be or that there are opportunities to evolve our practices so that we co-enact well-being more frequently.

Many people have had wonderful experiences with Ph.D. Ecologies. I want to honour and appreciate that. There are also a number of stories people are holding and telling that include experiences of profound discontent, stress and frustration with Ph.D. Ecologies. The frequency with which I was hearing negative stories (often before the people sharing the stories even knew I had any interest in the topic) was significant enough to attend to. Rather than taking an average of stories or even taking an Appreciative Inquiry approach where I focused on when people felt we were at our best and how to get more of that, I felt it important to attend to the general narrative that was forming in the stories I was hearing as a way of highlighting the opportunity, invitation or need to evolve what we’re making together.

Some themes that emerged in that narrative were around how people were expected to or asked to work (the way they were told things — research, scholarship, academic discipline — “ought” to be done) when those “oughts” conflicted with their research topics and/or their own personal and social evolutionary paths and/or what they wanted to learn and become through their work in Ph.D Ecologies. One way to group these themes is under a title of misalignment between espoused values, goals and practices. Other themes (with overlap) were about disturbing experiences in community relationships — often having to do with power imbalances and included, for example, being bullied by peers, supervisors, editors etc. or feeling like they were acting in relationally inappropriate or uncomfortable ways with “research subjects” or participants. Some people felt their experiences, though terrible in their words, were “just to be expected” in Academia and that they did not have the “right” to question that it could be otherwise. Others said Ph.D. Ecologies really need to change if they are to survive or have any relevance and value in the world today but feel Ph.D. Ecologies are so old and reified that they can not change no matter how much we may want or need for them to.

Throughout the stories I heard, there were strong feelings of “oughtness” around traditions, expectations and what people felt or were told they needed to do to get into and get ahead in academia. In this inquiry, I have played with the idea of evolving our ecologies through evolving patterns of how we are together (including those “oughts” people talked about) to create —and to create the conditions for —

co-enactment of well-being in Ph.D. Ecologies and, as an extension, in our lives more broadly and thus in the world more broadly.[15]

Many people were eager and grateful to talk about their experiences, though I encountered some people who felt they could not speak about their concerns openly because their location in an ecology of power differences makes them particularly vulnerable to repercussions. Other people are speaking in more public forms. For example, Mark Taylor, a department chair at Columbia University, in his Op-Ed in the New York Times (Taylor, 2009) refers to graduate education as “the Detroit of higher learning,” expanding on the notion that they produce a product for which there is no market, skills for which there is diminishing demand, separation rather than needed collaboration and all at a rapidly rising cost. Donna Lee Brien, Professor at Central Queensland University, explores the economic theory of planned obsolescence and the increase in the corporatisation and market segmentation of Ph.D. programs in her article “Unplanned Educational Obsolescence: Is the ‘Traditional’ Ph.D. Becoming Obsolete?” (Brien, 2009). Simon Head in “The grim threat to British universities” talks about the contingent academic workforce and the managerial, profit and loss mentality that brings “the call center and the Wal-Mart store to higher education.” He concludes his article by reflecting that "the times are not propitious for those hoping to liberate scholarship and teaching from harmful managerial schemes. Such liberation would also require a stronger and better-organized resistance on the part of the academy itself than we have seen so far (Simon, 2011.)” The Carnegie

[15] There are myriad ways to interpret, play with and attend to this. My interpretations and practices are only some examples and not meant to be presented as “best”, “wisest” or “most appropriate” — I do not believe the complexities of our world are so singular or bounded that there is any one “best” practice. Part of what I am making is a contribution to the many possibilities that grow out of relational participation. One of those practices is engaging in mindfulness about choices which call into being episodes which create well-being more and more frequently.

Foundation devoted five years to studying Ph.D. programs. In their book *The Formation of Scholars: Rethinking Doctoral Education for the Twenty-First Century,* the authors offer that "the importance of doctoral education to [the United States'] current and future prospects can hardly be overestimated...What will it take to meet the challenges that doctoral education faces today and to make the changes those challenges require?" (Walker, Golde, Jones, Bueschel, & Hutchings, 2008, p. 2). The authors use a Will Rogers quote to open their first chapter: "Even if you are on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there." A quantitative illustration of people's stories may be seen in high attrition rates.[16] (Tamburri, 2013); (Walker et al., 2008); (Willis & Carmichael, 2011). People are asking questions such as: What do high attrition patterns suggest? Do academic disciplines encourage competition when modern problems necessitate interdisciplinary collaboration? Does a culture of 'experts expected to defend knowledge' interfere with innovation and a mindset necessary for new insights? What could scholarly communication look like today?

Part of what I am adding to these conversations is a) a social constructionist communication perspective for looking at what we're making together, how we're making it and that what we are making impacts the larger world, b) an invitation to be mindful of what we're making and to play with a lens of co-enacting well-being as one goal of what we make and c) a practice turn where I use my own dissertation process to practice with or perform the many complexities of this invitation. I practice

[16] Attrition rates are very high - particularly compared to other professional degree programs like M.D., J.D., MSW etc. (Tamburri 2003; Walker et al., 2007; King, 2008; Willis and Carmichael, 2011) especially in the United States and Canada where they are generally thought of as about 50% of people completing and often taking as much as 10 years to do that. The most extreme of those numbers are people enrolled in Ph.D. Programs in the humanities and social sciences. In Australia, the last couple of years have been stress-filled for many doctoral students and faculty as changes in government funding have decreased the amount of time people have to complete their doctorates once they start.

with mindfulness of what I am making with the choices I make and with what can I do now, in this moment, that helps co-enact well-being in and through our Ph.D. ecology in ways which may support the continual evolution of our larger ecology.

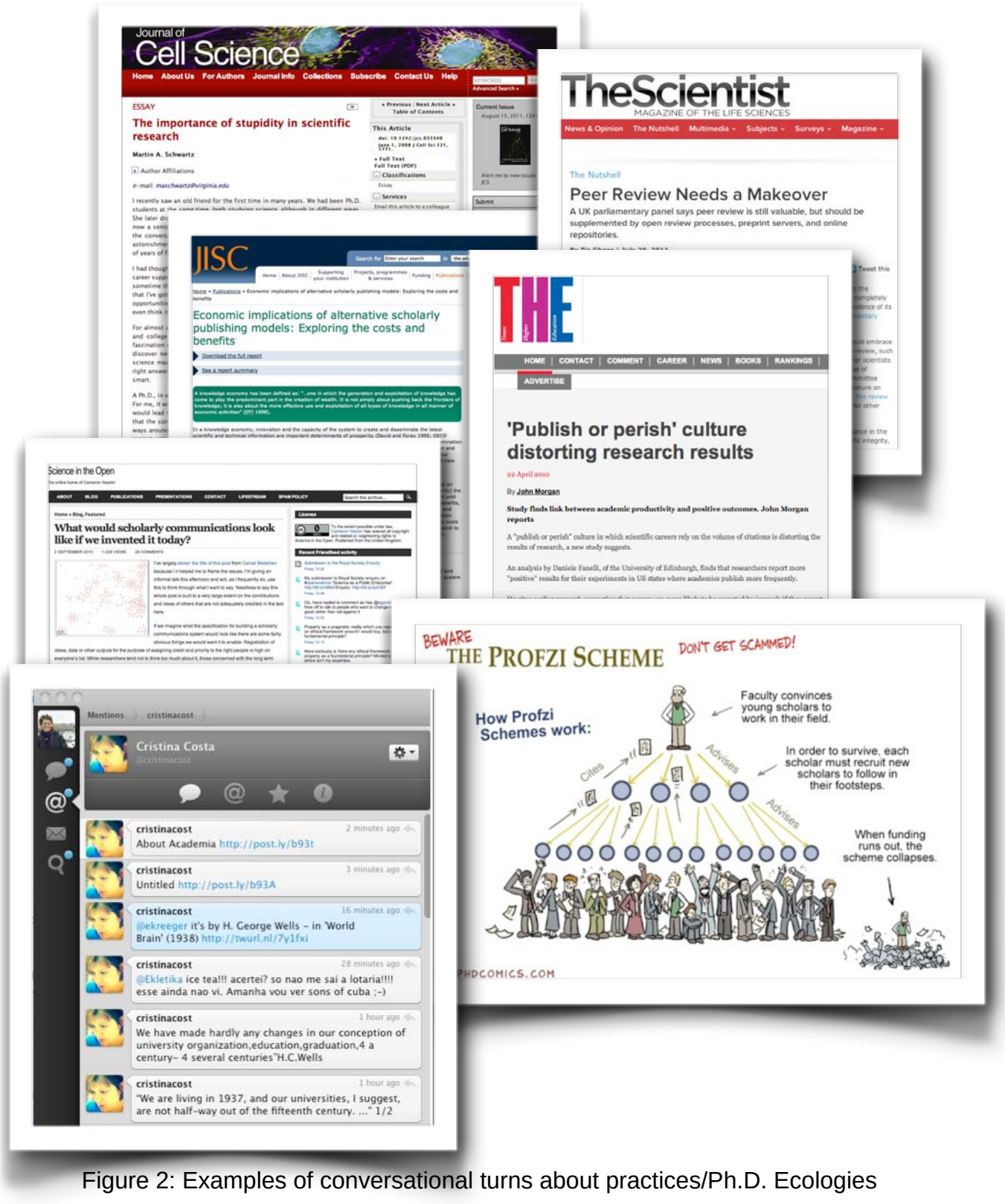

Figure 2: Examples of conversational turns about practices/Ph.D. Ecologies

Like any story, there are many, many elements to, and interpretations of, the stories people tell of Ph.D. Ecologies.[17] I heard from people who loved their experiences in some ways but also felt bullied or like they were struggling to survive in Ph.D. Ecologies (and therefore in much of their lives.) Many people felt that this was something to expect and tolerate because of the doors it will open — the privileges of community membership (having a doctorate, having tenure, receiving grants etc.) that will be bestowed. Sometimes I heard the feelings that whatever does not kill you makes you stronger and that because people before you suffered, you need to suffer. Another layer of story that was prominent was a strong sentiment that as much as we might want things to change and as much as it may benefit the ecology, things "cannot change." People hold a story that Ph.D. Ecologies are so old and the culture so entrenched that things will not change. As I said earlier, I hold a different story — one where we make and re-make our worlds in relationship in each moment and therefore have the potential to evolve our Ph.D. Ecologies in ways which nourish well-being. I will unpack this further as I continue to share more background (including who else is talking about or from this orientation), lenses and approach in the following pages.

My Approach to Ph.D. Ecologies in this Inquiry

In the opening quote I chose for this Preface, Pema Chrödrön talks about how she is "in the process of becoming, in the process of evolving," creating our futures "with every word, every action, every thought". This is how I story our Ph.D. ecologies and approached this inquiry — that whether people believe we can change or not, we *are* in the process of evolving with every word, action and thought. *How*

[17] The Social Constructionist Communication Theory CMM uses the "LUUUUTT Model" to call attention not only to the stories that are being told but also to stories untold, unheard, unknown, and untellable. Other "U's" are also possible.

we go about this, how we co-evolve our futures, are important considerations and these questions are at the centre of this dissertation.

I approach this inquiry within the paradigms of participatory/dialogic/ collaborative inquiry (Reason & Rowan, 1981; McTaggart, 1997; Reason & Bradbury, 2001; Hudson, 2010), social and relational constructionist inquiry (Gergen, 2009; McNamee & Hosking, 2012) and lived inquiry and practice (Marshall, 1999; Mattis-Namgyel, 2010). It is not a positivist oriented inquiry with an aim to “solve” a problem or prove something but is more about contributing to personal and social evolution with the aspiration of building relationships in various ways so that we may come to new understandings or different awarenesses which support us in acting with increased phronesis or practical wisdom and co-enacting well-being in the world.

As I noted in previous pages, there are many stories and ways of describing anything (including people’s experiences with our Ph.D. ecologies) and so too there are many ways of describing this doctoral inquiry — of addressing the question “what is this dissertation”. Not unexpectedly, throughout my inquiry people would ask what my ‘dissertation was about’ and rather than have one description which remained fairly static (as it might in a typical abstract), I found it very useful to change how I talked about the inquiry based on who was asking/what shared contexts or experiences we had in common or as part of our interpretive repertoires. I was conscious that my description could feel to various degrees accessible, invitational, disconnected and unintelligible and, depending on how it came across, would make a difference in what we would make in those conversations. Changing how I described it based on shared meaning and interests was one of my practices for playing with a relational orientation to my dissertation. For example, I have named

how we co-evolve our futures as one story of what this is about. That we *can* co-evolve our futures is another. Evolution in our organisations and “fields of discipline” to co-enact well-being in the world and the relationship of Ph.D. ecologies to well-being in the broader ecology are others. And there are more ways to name it and additional contexts and ways of approaching or relating to this inquiry including, for example, from lenses of mindfulness, dialogue, research methodology and sharing of knowledge, communication scholarship, community and organisational development, and stress research. Depending on who you are, our conversation about what is at the centre of this dissertation may look/sound different — based on our shared experiences, meanings and understandings. The choice I have made to live with an impermanent, non-reified description has been very valuable for coordinating and managing meaning with a broad spectrum of people — perhaps a greater number of communities than a typical dissertation may expect to connect with. I have had meaning-full conversations about my dissertation topic with people who locate themselves in the communities of religious studies, government, health and medicine, organisational development, cultural studies, design, communication, Buddhist practice, literature, social work, social justice, biology, hair dressing, house minding and physiotherapy just to name a few. Each of the conversations and the breadth of communities they were situated within, impacted or became part of this inquiry in generative ways. They also were part of my practice in continuously developing increased communication literacy and interactional mindfulness (Pearce and Pearce, 2011) that may help create conditions for creating well-being more broadly.

I view stories (including the story of my dissertation) as relational and so they are impermanent or constantly changing based on, among other things, who is part

of the conversation, who is doing the asking and the offering, who or what is foregrounded in the relationship. Within the prevailing culture of the Academy as I have been exposed to it, this social constructionist influenced orientation is a different and sometimes more challenging way of approaching a doctoral inquiry than the more typical research paradigm of objectification, of identifying independent and dependent variables, of clearly measuring outcomes and changes, etc. My experiences, however, demonstrate this orientation as potentially very generative. It was for me. How it was generative will unfold throughout the dissertation.

Figure 3: Nourishing great togetherness by Thich Nhat Hanh

Additional Lenses and The Role of Context in this Inquiry

Jerome Bruner wrote in the preface to his book *Acts of Meaning* something that reflects how I think about context for this inquiry. He said that:

> Books are like mountaintops jutting out of the sea. Self contained islands though they may seem, they are upthrusts of an underlying geography that is at once local and, for all that, a part of a universal pattern. And so, while they inevitably reflect a time and a place, they are part of a more general intellectual geography (Bruner, 1990, p. iv)

Earlier I referenced choices we make around punctuation (choosing beginnings and endings.) The way I punctuated this dissertation is only one of many potential ways

of binding it — more and less of the geography can be made visible. Inspired by Bruner and the work of many others including, for example, Judi Marshall (2004), Four Arrows (2008), Kathy Absolon and Cam Willett (2005), Shawn Wilson (2009), Valerie Malhotra Bentz and Jeremy Shapiro (1998) and Charles Eden (2007)[18], I want to provide some additional contextual or locating information that may not be visible from where the sea is reaching the island today.

To start, I will offer a reminder that this inquiry is part of a formal dissertation process and how it looks is shaped dramatically by being part of a specific doctoral degree program (with traditions of academic writing, research and critique, discourses of what a dissertation is and what it is not and what is academic or scholarly and what is not, which have been established and re-established over centuries). I chose the doctoral program at the Taos Institute in conjunction with Tilburg University in the Netherlands. The Taos Institute itself is just celebrating 20 years together. It is a not-for-profit organisation working to foster "productive dialogue at the intersection of social constructionist theory and societal practices" offering on their website under Theoretical Background and Mission Statement that:

> Social constructionist dialogue - of cutting edge significance
> within the social sciences and humanities - concerns the processes by
> which humans generate meaning together. Our focus is on how social
> groups and the relational practices within those groups create and
> sustain beliefs in the real, the rational, and the good.
> We recognize that as people create meaning together,
> so do they sow the seeds of action. Meaning and action are entwined.
> As we generate meaning together we create the future. (n.d.)

[18] I was also influenced by the overall writing and speaking styles of Audre Lorde, Anna Deavere Smith, bell hooks, Maya Angelou and my experience living in multiple communities and contexts simultaneously including, my experience living as an expat in different countries and as both part of the majority and the minority in my home country — although I belong to a number of communities, and hold many social positions/locations, in many ways I do not belong to any communities and my social positions/locations are continually shifting which makes me particularly aware of the role context plays in our stories and choices, as mine have in this inquiry.

Tilburg University was founded in 1927, and today is primarily dedicated to the social sciences and humanities. The university has a very good reputation. Their mission, as presented by the University's website (Profile Tilburg University), is:

> to inspire students and faculty members to reach their full potential, and in doing so, reap a positive impact on the society around them. Our educational programmes instil a broad social awareness in our students along with critical personal and professional skills...We strive to maintain a very prominent position in all our specialist areas of academic endeavour... We intend to build upon our established reputation in every way possible. (n.d.)

This joint Taos-Tilburg program is designed for professionals with Masters Degrees and substantial experience in practice "who wish to pursue a line of inquiry that will enrich their endeavours and speak to the concerns of a broader audience of scholars and practitioners" ("The Taos Institute Ph.D. Program | the Taos Institute," n.d.). If I had engaged with this inquiry without it being connected to a doctorate (as a consulting appointment, for example) or had the inquiry been under the purview of a different institutional partnership (one with different orientations, priorities, missions etc.) the resulting dissertation would have necessarily been different.

It is also relevant that this inquiry takes place in a time and context wherein many people have been developing a sense of how interconnected we all are and there is growing concern for how our daily practices have broad implications[19]. Also, this inquiry has taken place at a time when Buddhism, meditation and

[19] Some general examples include concern for people's health around the world after the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster; the impact of recycling on helping sustain future generations; the economic and financial interdependence of countries around the world and the reality that this interdependence creates hardships for smaller and poorer nations; the role of social media in influencing how people respond to various situations occurring around the globe and, the impact stress and lifestyle has on morbidity and mortality etc. I primarily worked on this dissertation in Australia, Canada and the United States but have also heard these conversations in other parts of the world I have lived in, including in Asia and Europe though the conversation looked very different from place to place/context to context. What is normative and what is seen as needing to change, along with the locus of responsibility for that change varies.

mindfulness practices are becoming more and more common in “the West.”[20] Another relevant location is that I am writing this in a time when participatory, relational ways of engaging in inquiry such as action research, Indigenous Research, social constructionist orientations and art-based practices have been written about, worked with and performed in academia for decades[21] though these approaches to research are often significantly different enough from the rhetoric and grammar of other research communities that they may still be viewed as marginal and may be framed by some as “not rigorous or scholarly.” I took many risks with this dissertation including that one.

In talking *about* this dissertation, I find myself perpetually coming back to the idea that there are many stories that exist and which we are living into, and out of, in any given moment and we give those stories different attention or importance — noticing or foregrounding different ones at different times (Pearce, 2007). Which stories we attend to and tell, which dialogues we engage in (and how) and which

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[20] A few examples: The Shamatha Project at UC Davis’s Center for Mind and Brain is investigating psychological and physiological processes underlying the benefits of meditation and how intensive meditation training affects how people think and feel. The project involves a collaborative team of over 30 investigators and consulting scientists from universities across the United States and Europe. In his book, *A Mindful Nation* (Ryan, 2012), U.S. Congressman Tim Ryan talks about the importance of Mindfulness, the difference it makes and how it is being incorporated into many different sectors, including health care, education, and the military. Harvard Medical School, The Department of Psychiatry and Cambridge Health Alliance Physicians Organization Medical School are hosting their 8th annual conference on Meditation and Psychotherapy. At this conference, titled “Deepening Mindfulness” they will be featuring Thich Nhat Hanh, who is one of the most respected Zen masters in the world. Doctors affiliated with the American Medical Association say they are "ready for a different approach" and use mindfulness to soothe physician stress, find relief from burnout symptoms and aid in patient communication (O'Reilly, 2013). Meditation and mindfulness techniques are being introduced with great success in schools from Los Angeles, to Detroit and London ("Meditation in Schools (Quiet Time Program) - David Lynch Foundation," n.d.), (Erricker & Erricker, 2001; "Meditation in Schools | Bringing Peace to the Next Generation," n.d.).

[21] The examples are too numerous to name here but a selection of ones I have found useful throughout my academic tenure (which cover only certain paradigms and perspectives and not other very important ones) have included (Guba, 1990), (Harding, 1991), (Fals Borda, 1997), (Selener, 1997), (Delpit, 1988), (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998), (Smith, 1999), (Truman, Mertens, & Humphries, 2000), (Ellis, 2004), (Jacobs, 2008), the collections of work by Gergen, McNamee, Marshall, Reason, Heron, McTaggart, Denzon, Lincoln. For a list of art and education practice based research publications see http://m1.cust.educ.ubc.ca/Artography/ab_r.php

questions we ask are fateful — they make our worlds (Block, 2002/2003); (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). In this inquiry, I've chosen to foreground and attend to what we're making together in our Ph.D. ecologies and, as an extension of that, how we can make better worlds more broadly — in the larger ecology. What is "better" is a question to live and hold, to co-create and act into together. The "answer" or "answers" may vary for each of us. In this doctoral turn (this moment in the conversation), I have given attention and importance to well-being as an element of better worlds. I connect well-being to, among other things, mindfulness of continuously unfolding choice points. Noticing or discerning choices in difficult situations (that presented as having no choice) was an important part of my practice of this dissertation and my participation in our Ph.D. Ecologies. It was part of the co-enactment of relational well-being.

Making of Better Social Worlds

I have said I view well-being as relational — inseparable from and created through our environment, our relationships with people, food, etc., rather than, for example, about genetic determinism or something "that happens to us" as many people and medical schools view morbidity and mortality (Chaudhary M.D., n.d.). I view it as a kind of social enactment — something that is made in our inter-actions and can be developed.[22] When I talk about well-being, I am not isolating physical health but rather our well-being whole body-mind-spiritually, environmentally, socially etc. It can also be connected to many experiences people are talking about including, for example, what Cate Creede calls relational generativity (the inter-

[22] In addition to aligning with Āyurvedic medicine and other ancient (and still practiced) systems of healing, there is perhaps some resonance with what some scientists think of as epigenetics which is, loosely described as there are thousands of possibilities for gene expression, caused by mechanisms other than changes in the underlying DNA sequence.

actional choices that we make that create “relationships where we are able to enact our ‘best selves’ — the versions of self that we most aspire to live into – in a way that is also sustainable and fertile for the relationship” (Creede, 2012, p. 7).[23] Another example is what Barnett Pearce has spoken of as “‘inter-actional mindfulness’ that would enable [us] to be more empathetic, compassionate, and help [us] find ways of moving forward in difficult situations” (Pearce & Pearce, 2011, p. 10), acting in ways which create a qualitative evolution of how we are together with forms of coordination that are better than they need to be and developing wisdom “that will help us navigate the polysemic contingency of everyday life, where meanings transform and the next moment reconfigures all that has gone before” (Pearce and Pearce, 2011, p. 97). His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama talks about the importance of developing a genuine sense of universal responsibility and about love and compassion — saying they are necessities, not luxuries — that without them, humanity cannot survive. He offers that “When we are motivated by compassion and wisdom, the results of our actions benefit everyone, not just our individual selves or some immediate convenience” (14th Dalai Lama, 1991). Compassion, love, diversity and the practice of (re)constructing a sustainable environment for honouring and valuing different life-giving stories, lenses, perspectives are all part of my notion of well-being and I aspire for, and work to create, more of this in the world. It is these values, stories and orientations towards well-being that I am foregrounding and working with in this inquiry, and as much as my dissertation is *about* these, it also is a practice in co-enacting and calling these forth. In other words, the process by which I engaged in this dissertation was, in and of itself, a practice of manifesting these values.

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[23] See (Creede, 2008) for more on relational generativity and relational eloquence.

Social Constructionism, Relational Construction, and Relational Well-being

This is an implicitly and explicitly relational inquiry (if you can pardon the artificial separation of these for emphasis). I can name numerous orienting themes, conversation partners and communities I belong to and whose work resonates with me and helps orient or bring my inquiry alive. There are a few I'd like to highlight or give precedence to in particular. One is Social Constructionism. People have many different ways to describe what this means, and trying to entify or identify a single definition (in the tradition of operationalising terms in positivist, received view of science) is in many ways antithetical to a social constructionist orientation and something I am intentionally not doing. For this conversation, it may be useful to know that I locate the way I use this term as aligned with the Taos Institute community. Ken Gergen, in addressing the question of what it means to carry out work in a social constructionist frame, or to approach life from a social constructionist orientation, notes "this is a topic of broad discussion, and it is important to resist the temptation of a conclusion" ("Theoretical Background and Mission Statement," n.d.). At the same time he thought it would be useful for discussion to develop "some of the views that lie somewhere toward the center of what we do" (ibid). The list he came up with and invited people to "elaborate, amend, or question" includes:

> We live in worlds of meaning. We understand and value the world and ourselves in ways that emerge from our personal history and shared culture.
>
> Worlds of meaning are intimately related to action. We act largely in terms of what we interpret to be real, rational, satisfying, and good. Without meaning there would be little worth doing.
>
> Worlds of meaning are constructed within relationships. What we take to be real and rational is

> given birth in relationships. Without relationship there would be little of meaning.
>
> New worlds of meaning are possible. We are not possessed or determined by the past. We may abandon or dissolve dysfunctional ways of life, and together create alternatives.
>
> To sustain what is valuable, or to create new futures, requires participation in relationships. If we damage or destroy relations, we lose the capacity to sustain a way of life, and to create new futures.
>
> When worlds of meaning intersect, creative outcomes may occur. New forms of relating, new realities, and new possibilities may all emerge.
>
> When worlds of meaning conflict, they may lead to alienation and aggression, thus undermining relations and their creative potential.
>
> Through creative care for relationships, the destructive potentials of conflict may be reduced, or transformed.[24]

I'd also like to highlight an emerging way of naming this orientation — "relational construction." Sheila McNamee and Dian Marie Hosking have introduced this term and it has real resonance for me. In their book *Research and Social Change: A Relational Constructionist Approach* (McNamee & Hosking, 2012) they explain that they use the term for a few reasons. One is that there is a great deal of confusion about the term 'social construction' with different schools of thought about what it means. Another is that this new term "directs attention to *relational processes* as opposed to pre-existing (individual and social) structures and their influences on how we construe the world." (p.xiv) They foreground relational processes with the

[24] Ken Gergen has written extensively on this subject and I chose to highlight this particular offering of his partly because it is what the Taos Institute has chosen as a public turn on their website and I locate my dissertation within the Taos Institute community and also because of its accessibility and generality in terms of how he looked towards the centre of the conversations about this approach.

world emerging in these processes and emphasise the *how* of relating.[25] They offer that “relational construction is focused on how we make relational realities in relational processes, what these realities/processes constrain and potentiate, and how we might “go on together” (Wittgenstein, 1953) to ‘live a good life.’ (p.xv) These have a lot of resonance for this dissertation.

Part of what I mean when I say that I approach this dissertation from a social (or relational) constructionist orientation is that I am foregrounding and placing emphasis on relational processes and ways of being together, including language and communication, as creating our realities. I view these as substantive (rather than representational), formative and as processes of construction or of co-creating (rather than, pre-existing innately or as a means of transmission.) I take the view that we are all interconnected, not as separate beings moving together but existing only through each other — what Thich Nhat Hanh calls Inter-being (Hanh, 1998) Ken Gergen calls relational being (Gergen, 2009), and the great Vedic mantra सो ऽहम्

(transliterated from Sanskrit as so’hum or so’ham) and often translated as *I am that; That I am* (“that” referring to the universe[26]) as well as the vedic concepts of *Tat Tvam Asi* and *Aham Brahman Asmi*. I assume no one construction of “reality.” Rather, there are infinite realities (multiple-constructions) with new ones being manifested and (re)constructed all the time — in each moment, in each relational turn. I see this as holding great promise for possibility; since new constructions or

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[25] They also talk about using the term as a way of inviting people to not assume ahead of time that they know what the term means. This way of shifting the logical force in a situation by shifting language or how we use it is a technique I have used throughout my dissertation. More on that later.

[26] In So’hum meditation, we inhale life energy, the connection with the whole universe — beyond limitations of mind or body — and exhale ego and limited ideas of individuality. This mantra and concept is very old — seen in the Upanishads. It is also very complex and I’m only representing what is relevant for this discourse. It is such an important concept and practice in Āyurvedic medicine though that it is explained and referenced in a number of Vasant Lad’s publications, including *The Healing Power of Mantra* (2007.)

new meanings are possible, so are new worlds and qualitatively different experiences. The idea that we make our worlds through interaction, what we do, how we are together, our patterns and norms, and how we inter-act in relationships matters significantly. These inter-actions are substantive and consequential — they make our worlds. I approach this dissertation from the desire to attend to them mindfully so that we may hopefully inter-act in increasingly wiser ways and so increasingly co-enact more well-being in the world. I "explore the sorts of life that become possible through different inter-actions, including (but not limited to) different ways of talking" (McNamee & Hosking, 2012) or different speech acts and patterns of communication.[27]

I view all inquiry as constructed and constitutive and intentionally working with a social or relational constructionist academic frame provided form for thinking about responsiveness, reflexivity, influence of multiple communities and attention to action and practice in my inquiry. It also helped reinforce an orientation towards what McNamee and Hosking (2012) talk about as openness, making space for dissensus, complexity and multiplicity, reflections on the construction of the position of researcher and researched and a construction of knowing and influencing that is more balanced (or less distinct) than in some research paradigms. Many people

[27] There are many books which explore social constructionism in depth (I particularly enjoy Ken Gergen's *Relational Being*.) In describing social constructionism in this dissertation, I hope the turns I have taken have been helpful for orienting you as a reader. While providing this orientation, what I hope to avoid is unintentionally marginalising social or relational constructionist approaches to dissertations by engaging in a communication pattern of talking from the border rather than assuming "normalcy." I have often experienced a community (or approach) that has existed publicly for a long time, and who do not want to be marginalised, maintain a position at the margin. One (of many contributing factors) is that in having been labelled that way, they tend to work from that construction in a way that reinforces it. For example, when I talked extensively about or justified my use of action research, my attention to it and justification of it seemed to lead people to want additional justification. In contrast, when I assumed normalcy around it and did not provide the same background or reasoning, I found people were much more willing to construct it as "legitimate." Similarly, when I advocated for LGBT rights or *came out* to people, I faced a very different and more marginalizing experience than when I just *lived "out"* as if it were normal. In doing so, it very often *became* normal for people and led to more generative ways of being together including being more inclusive.

reminded me throughout the journey that there are big risks in putting this orientation into practice as I have chosen to do with my dissertation. People described academia as a tight system of gatekeepers where it can be problematic for the inquirer if those gatekeepers are uncomfortable with a social constructionist orientation or some of the ways it could potentially show up in practice. Also, if there is no one reality in the view of social construction, there may also be no one way to inquire and that can feel overwhelming. A social construction oriented dissertation lends itself to, for example, a different kind of relationship between researcher and those often thought of as the "researched"; new considerations for ethics reviews/ IRB; less economy of words or even modes of expression that don't contain words as the dominant way of engaging in conversation; differences in dissertation formatting, explanation, reporting; and, a conception of rigour to name a few. I can tell numerous stories where restrictions on how the inquiry looked or acceptance of the research into a particular community was based on taken-for-granted traditions rather than innovations. This presents an interesting set of challenges and opportunities — some of which we'll engage with in the body of this dissertation.[28]

Social/Relational Construction and CMM

I am talking about social and relational construction generally or as a meta-orientation. Some of the more specific scaffolding for this dissertation and how I have framed it is informed by "taking the Communication Perspective" and a social constructionist practical theory called "CMM" — the Coordinated Management of Meaning (Pearce, 2007). This has been very influential in this inquiry in facilitative,

[28] I often looked to action researchers, artists, poets and others who have experience which seemed in some ways resonant of my experiences, for guidance, grounding and community as I went through some challenging times. The more I did this the more equanimity I seemed to feel and the better the inquiry. The further I moved away from that or the smaller my world of academic reference, the more challenging it became to respond into situations in wise ways which helped call forth or create well-being.

reflexive and interpretive ways (Creede, Gallegos, & Fisher-Yoshida, 2012). CMM understands social worlds as polysemic and inherently meaningful: “meaning” is a constituent part of any social action, every saying and doing is meaningful; every saying and doing is multiply interpreted (not only by different people but by each person); and, every saying and doing is always open to re-interpretations (e.g., the answer to the question “what did you mean by that?” is a new “saying and doing” performed in a different context – being asked to reflect and comment – than the first).” (Pearce, 2006, p. 10) From a CMM orientation or communication perspective, communication is seen as not just a way of talking about things or a simple tool for exchanging information but as something substantive and generative, an on-going way of doing and making things (selves, relationships, organisations, institutions, nations, and cultures...) where every interaction is a series of invitations and responses located within specific stories. Many people working with CMM are not only working with making meaning and coordinating with others generally but also, are oriented towards “a proactive commitment to call into being those patterns of communication that make better social worlds.” (Pearce & Pearce, 2011, p. 6) “In recognising that the world currently faces challenges not likely to be met successfully within the same patterns of communication in which they were raised” ("CMM Institute - Vision, Mission and Goals," n.d.), “CMMers” (as we are often called) are often particularly interested in learning how to transform patterns of communication as means of promoting personal and social evolution, “increasing our collective abilities to discern and act wisely into critical moments” (Pearce, 2007, p. 4).

Very prominent in my inquiry is the CMM derived triplicate of questions: “what are we making together?; how are we making it?; and, how do we make better (social) worlds?” (Pearce, 2007), (Pearce, 2012) These questions are part of my

scaffolding for genuine inquiry throughout my dissertation as well as my personal mindfulness practice of my own social worlds. CMM invites us to be mindful of moments in which choices lead to something (and that a different choice may lead to something different) and then acting into moments wisely so that, through our choices we may make better social worlds. Kim Pearce (2012) has written about Mindfulness and the Communication Perspective, inviting us to consider:

- mindfulness of self (i.e. what *you* say and do matters, thoughts affect actions, actions make our social worlds, you become what you do, your heart and mind will grow as you practice compassion)

- mindfulness of making/managing meanings through the stories we tell (i.e. all stories are local, incomplete and unfinished, curiosity deepens appreciation for the complexity of stories, the manner of storytelling affects the willingness of others to stay open and curious)

- mindfulness of coordinating with others (i.e. all conversations have multiple turns and we bring in the history of what has come before, each turn is a response to something and elicits a response and every turn opens up or closes down possibilities), and

- mindfulness of making better social worlds (i.e. thinking in terms of patterns and relationships, recognising our part in making the patterns of which we are a part, developing habits and skills that foster mindfulness of various perspectives, curiosity and compassion.)

These considerations have been at the centre of the turns I have taken with this dissertation as has CMM more generally. I have also used CMM heuristics or models (Pearce, 2012, 2006, 2007) throughout my inquiry in many ways to, among other things, help understand immediate and larger contexts, make sense of these contexts, find openings in conversational patterns and choices, and increase the richness and compassion present in my inquiry. Barnett Pearce, in talking about research, explained that:

> The tools of CMM were designed to engage patterns of communication. Systematically applied, they enable description, interpretation, critique and practical action in order to improve patterns of communication. These functions presuppose an important

> assumption: that communication processes are usually “less” than they can/ should be. Instead of full stories, we get anecdotes or slogans; instead of mutually coordinated sequences of actions, we get truncated episodes frozen into dysfunctional patterns. One function of using CMM’s tools is to enable communicative patterns to realize more fully their potential richness (2008, p.15.)

This description articulates what happened when I used them. Some of the tools I found helpful include:

- The Daisy Model - This is a way of calling to mind or helping to see how any person, event, episode or context is made up of a variety of participants, conversations and contexts, is deeply textured and arises relationally. Visually, the model is shaped like a daisy flower with the person or event under consideration in the centre and each petal represents a context, organisation, culture, conversation or story related to that centre. This model can help us better understand the larger system that events, people etc. are a part of, help find or discern connections, relationships and the larger conversational webs they emerge out of, and to attend to petals that otherwise may not have been visible or that seem to be missing. This helped me identify, describe and work with the complexity and richness of what was happening with and in my inquiry, and the people who were part of it, in relationally generative, compassionate and innovative ways.

- The Hierarchy Model of Meaning/Stories - This model is based on being mindful that all conversations occur in contexts and we tell stories or respond to events out of multiple contexts, conversations and relationships. At any given moment, certain conversations can function as context for other episodes (the meaning of what is said or done differs, for example, if a story of “self” is the highest context than if “relationship” is.) Often when people tell a story about a situation differently they are acting out of different priorities for contexts/different higher levels of context. This model helped me in identifying and naming mine and other conversational partners highest levels of context in ways that helped with understanding the unfolding interactional patterns and often supported me in acting intentionally or more mindfully. One example is that there was a significant shift in the scope of my inquiry and how I felt about what I was doing when I identified well-being in the world as my highest level of context in thinking about Ph.D. Ecologies

- The Serpentine Model - This model directs attention to the relational back and forth of conversations or episodes — that each action or turn comes out of, or is in response to, something and calls forth or elicits something else. It helps highlight the co-creation of episodes and how a situation was made. It can be used during or after a conversation to work with turns or sequences

of events to help fill out the stories and discern logical forces[29], bifurcation points and possible choices or what is potentially a next best turn. I used it in these ways and in conjunction with the Hierarchy Model to help see and understand larger communication patterns and why they may be unfolding as they were as well as seeing bifurcation points and ways forward which could call forth different communication patterns (with those involved in my work, within my work on the page etc.)

- The LUUUUTT Model - The acronym stands for Stories Lived, Unknown Stories, Untold stories, Unheard Stories, Untellable Stories, Stories Told and Storytelling. It is based on the assumption that anything that happens in a social situation is part of a larger narrative — people aren't only responding to what is in front of them but other contexts and stories they bring with them. What stories we hear or are told are not representative of the complete context. As a heuristic, it is useful for exploring and developing the rich texture of a person, situation, episode etc. I used it to enrich stories, see new openings, to better understand possible episodes and be able to view them with compassion and to alter the alignment in a situation when things were not going well. I felt a great sense of responsibility to people who offered their stories to share them in responsible ways. The LUUUUTT model added complexity and depth to that feeling of responsibility in different ways. It was not only to the stories they shared but what was in-between them as well which they also shared, sometimes in less direct but very important ways. [30]

Researchers are engaged in and orchestrating numerous relationships and conversations "each with its own vocabulary, narrative structure, and implicit moralities." (Pearce, 2009, p. 8). Taking "the communication perspective" and working with CMM has helped direct my attention, shape my turns, interpret and reflect on Ph.D. Ecologies in ways which have helped me create deeper understandings and more generative patterns and practices and co-enact better worlds while inquiring into them.

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[29] CMM assumes we live within webs of "ought ness." When we find ourselves in situations in which others are acting in particular ways, we often feel we "ought" to act in certain ways ("Coordinated Management of Meaning: Extensions and Applications," 2004)

[30] See W.Barnett Pearce 2006a, 2006b, 2007 and 2008, Beth Fisher-Yoshida, Catherine Creede, Placida Gallegos Pearce, 2012 and Kim Pearce 2012 for more on these models and some of the many ways they have been and can be used, including perspectives on CMM approaches and heuristics for scholar-practitioners and academic research.

Social/Relational Construction and My Personal Practices

As I mentioned before, early on in my inquiry, I realised that my social constructionist orientation, my orientation towards CMM and taking the communication perspective, and my doctoral inquiry were becoming inseparable from my daily Buddhist and Āyurvedic Medicine practices in beautiful ways. Though the scope of this inquiry does not include exploring Buddhist and Āyurvedic practices or literature in overt ways, those practices do make up part of my context and consequently inform my dissertation in ways that enhanced my experience and my ability to apply, perform or put into practice a social constructionist orientation in highly generative ways (even when that orientation when practiced is counter-cultural and often uncomfortable). Throughout this inquiry I have been practicing with, among other things, impermanence, non-attachment (also referred to as no-clinging), no-self, the middle-way and moderation, comfort with discomfort, balancing my Āyurvedic doṣas, the 14 Mindfulness trainings of Thich Nhat Hanh (Plum Village, n.d.), Inter-being, and the relational way through which everything arises, and awareness of what is going on whole-body-mindfully - as a whole embodied person, not just a brain or intellectual person.[31] Social constructionist theory and practice, CMM, my Buddhist/Mindful Living practice, my Āyurvedic Medicine practice and my inquiry were all intertwined and emerged in relationship with each other not only at my desk and on the page but throughout every activity I was engaged in.

Many people referenced misalignment or conflict between how they were looking to live in the world and what they needed to do, and habituate themselves to, to be perceived as legitimate in Ph. D. ecologies. The integration I often, but not

[31] Though I am fortunate to have learned from many people/teachers, I primarily practice in the traditions of Thich Nhat Hahn and Vasant Lad. ("Vasant Lad's Biographical Data and A Compendium of Vasant Lad's Published Works ," n.d.)

always, experienced was wonderfully generative, life giving and a contributor to my well-being. I resonate with the way Judi Marshall talks about “Living Life as Inquiry” (1999) and the way Sheila McNamee and Dian Marie Hosking frame inquiry in Research and Change: A Relational Constructionist Approach (2012.) The latter talk about inquiry as an everyday activity oriented towards openness, complexity, multiplicity, paying attention to and considering “what our practices might mean for how we (always in relation) live our lives and how we might live ‘a good life’’ (p.xiv), not distinguishing between research and social change (referred to as the Simultaneity Principle in Appreciative Inquiry.)[32] In resonant ways, Judi Marshall points out that her paper is an example of her topic. She talks about maintaining curiosity, seeing what emerges, attempting continually to be open to bringing things into question including the match between what she does and what she espouses and being mindful of the stories she tells. She offers:

> Living life as inquiry means that I hold open the boundary between research and my life generally...Often, therefore, I am aware that a theme I am pursuing in research is also relevant to some other area of my life, and I will seek to work with, rather than suppress, that realisation. This can be highly enriching for both my personal and professional lives, and it can be demanding...Living life as inquiry is a continuing unfolding process. As one theme becomes emptied of energy or develops more of a habitual format of inquiry...other waves emerge to take its place as fresh edges of questioning. Sometimes engaging with them precedes an appropriate labelling and it takes a while to recognise what is at heart in the inquiry. Sometimes an appropriate phrase acts as an organising schema that then directs attention (1999, p. 4 and 13).

[32] Though I don’t call this inquiry an Appreciative Inquiry, principles of Appreciative Inquiry — The Constructionist Principle, the Simultaneity Principle, the Poetic Principle, the Anticipatory Principle, the Positive Principle ("The Center For Appreciative Inquiry: Principles of Appreciative Inquiry," n.d.) - are very much present in and resonate with my framing and approach.

One implication of this for me is that there are many potential chapters, experienced episodes and phases of this inquiry which are not explained on the page but rather informed what is foregrounded and what choices I made.

In talking about social and relational construction, CMM and taking the communication perspective and in mentioning my Buddhist and Āyurvedic Medicine practices, I have foregrounded a few of the important communities, orientations, cultural traditions or interpretive repertoires that inform this work. I also highlighted that my work over the years with innovating in organisations and helping to create shifts from a feeling of stuckness to one where things are working well for people — including the communities the organisations serve had an impact on this work. I bring those experiences of large-scale change through small shifts — and my emergent theory of change as informed by those experiences — into this inquiry. As I also said earlier, having lived in many different cultures with different ways of being in relationship, contributes to my knowing that there are many ways to approach any situation — many ways of going on together. These experiences have provided practice spaces for engaging in different ways of being together and have been valuable in my inquiry for discerning choice points and imagining the many choices available at those moments. My early academic training and first university degree was in sociology with an emphasis on health/illness studies, including stress research and disease (notably cancer.) That field of study, my work in health and human services, coupled with so many people I love being diagnosed with cancer, have undoubtedly increased my attainment to and concern for how our organisational cultures and our ways of being together impact our health and well-being as individuals and as a society. These are a few examples of my “geography.”

Though exceedingly incomplete [33], I offer these examples in the way people often name their field, a particular school of thought or a particular person as being a grounding or orienting force in their inquiries or the community to which they speak.

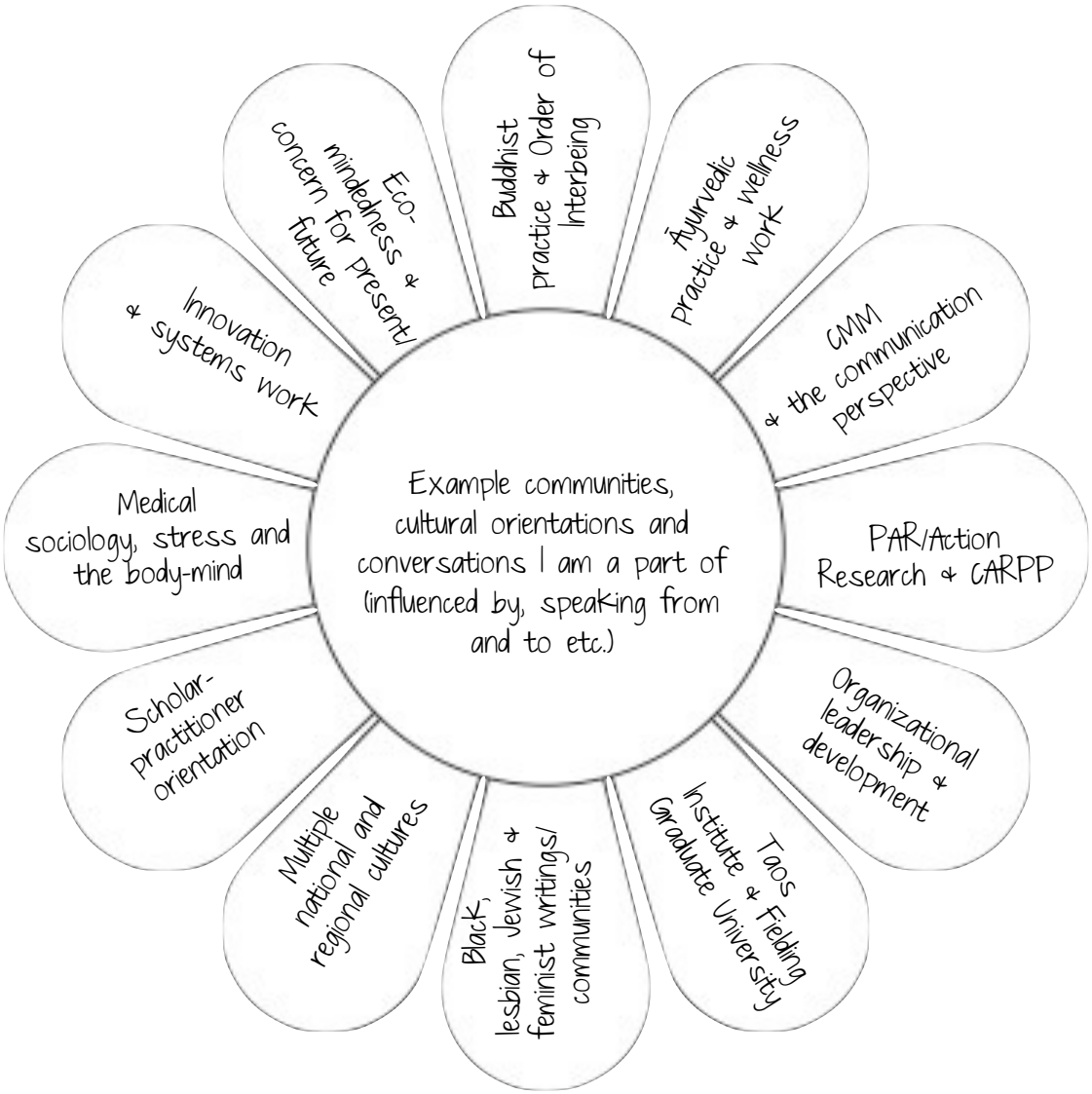


Figure 4: Use of CMM's Daisy Model to highlight how many conversations and communities inform this dissertation

[33] I'd like to honour the myriad other people, communities and cultural traditions to which I belong or act in and out of who have informed this inquiry and the turns I took with it while knowing I won't be able to name them all.

One choice I made was to not position myself within one community but to honour and speak from the rich diversity of traditions and experiences which inform this work and whose borders I fall within or straddle. Though this approach can have challenges which I will go into later in my dissertation, it is a part of my life outside my dissertation and so I wanted it to be within my dissertation. Stories and relationships from one area of my life or particular communities often serve as context in others and it is through weaving them together that my life and learning are so rich. There are, however, some communities which are more foregrounded than others in my dissertation and this introduction aims, in part, to introduce and highlight these. Speaking from and to many communities means that not all that I do or how I name things will resonate with everyone all the time. In my experience, in reaching more people than a traditional dissertation might, I also might not be reaching each of those people as comprehensively or comfortably as if they were my one "target audience" as many people name their potential readers. There is richness that this polyvocal ambiguity or new-to-you framings can offer!

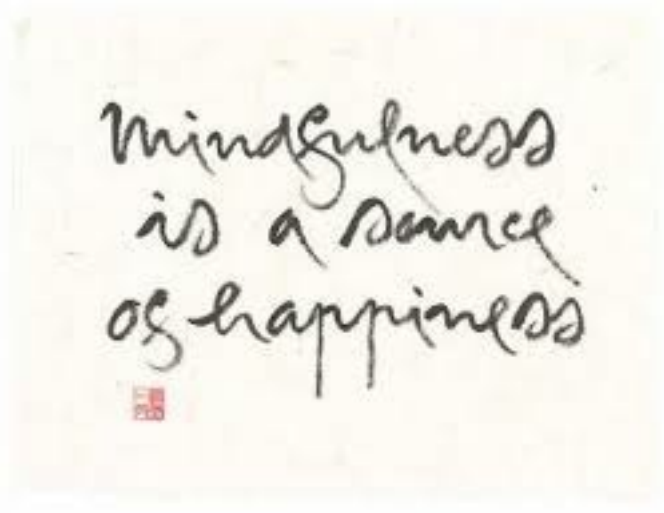


Figure 5: Mindfulness is a source of happiness by Thich Nhat Hanh

This Dissertation as a Verb

Ken Gergen has offered some thoughts on the use of nouns and how they might set us up to believe in a world of separation, separate things (Gergen, 2009, p. 30). I think of this dissertation as a verb — it is create-ive, something we're making together. It is the punctuation[34] of a series of relational (en)actions — some might say performances — and is full of countless decisions, choices, bifurcation points and critical moments. As I have said earlier, there are years and years of stories or discourse on what a dissertation is and isn't, about how we "ought to" make choices and what those choices "ought to be." Though the logical force of how to do a dissertation was/is strong, being oriented towards and practicing living into the beautiful concinnity of social or relational construction, CMM, Buddhist practice and Āyurvedic Medicine and being mindful of what I'd like to be making in our Ph.D. Ecologies and in our world more generally has helped me make choices which feel generative. It has helped me habituate to practices or, said another way, to co-create patterns which might support the co-enactment of better worlds.

> If relational realities arise out of relational engagement (conversations, performances, dialogues), then we must pause and reflect, we must ask in what other ways we might talk about or perform this topic, this issue, this problem. We do not have to inquire or write as if the world is, or should be, just one way. Rather, our inquiries could open up new possible ways of being human and new possible ways of "going on together" (Wittgenstein, 1953)...
>
> -In (McNamee & Hosking, 2012, p. 42)

[34] There are countless possible identifications of "beginnings" and "ends" of episodes or situations. Taking a relational orientation, you could say that nothing ever begins or ends — it is all a continuation. I value CMM's use of the term "punctuation" (Pearce, 2007) as a functional way of creating a frame around episodes — in this case to make describing and working with this dissertation manageable in it's binding. Changing the way an episode is punctuated can also help create new understandings of an episode as well as seem to reveal different resources and possibilities for engaging with it.

In thinking about choices and how I made them in this dissertation, I am reminded of a conversation I was a part of last year. Over dinner, someone close to my partner Jan explained that her son was signing up for English Literature classes at University. This baffled her and was something she was advising him not to do. She said that he was not strong in reading and that he had failed out of every English class in High School. Why then would he set himself up for similar failure at University? The son felt he had a very clear reason for pursuing English Literature: “Isn’t that what University is about — to learn something I don’t already know, that I’m not already good at?”[35] Like this young man, I have chosen to approach this dissertation in ways that not only works from my strengths, skills and what Appreciative Leadership might call my core leadership value (Whitney, Trosten-Bloom, & Rader, 2010) but also have made choices that I felt would help me learn new skills, practices and habits — attending to my evolution. Expressing myself visually is one example of that.

Much of what I have been talking about in this prefatory turn, is that I am centring our on-going relational processes in our community/our Ph.D. ecology, asking the questions: “what kind of world do we want to co-create and what kind of Ph.D. ecologies may co-enact that?”; “What would Ph.D. ecologies be like if they were a reflection of that world we want to co-create?” I am interested in how our communication patterns, relational activities, inter-actions and ways of becoming (re)create/(re)construct our world and, as such, can change the trajectory we’re currently on in our Ph.D. Ecology in a way that also changes the larger ecology. What we do matters — and much of this inquiry is about creating mindfulness

[35] This same son, two years later, works at a library and reads books for fun.

around that — discerning choice points/critical moments, imagining and practicing with alternative habits and patterns so we get something different.

I would like to offer a note on writing style (content and tone). How I imagine you makes a difference in 'how we go on together,' including choices I've made around writing. I have intentionally chosen to construct you as a colleague — someone with whom I can be in valuable conversation, someone who will listen and share, influence and be influenced by this dissertation as we engage in thoughtful dialogue, someone I respect and am respected by. I choose to "give you an A grade" a practice from Ben and Roz Zander focusing on believing in the best of people (Zander & Zander, 2002). This has all made a difference in how I work with contexts and requirements and in the approach I take to the presentation of this dissertation, including this opening chapter. I see this inquiry as cycles of dialogue, practice and reflection and you are a part of these. In the body of my dissertation, I weave together stories told by people in various asynchronous parts of our ecology, from diverse fields, countries, relationships to academia and periods of time, into a seemingly synchronous dialogue about our Ph.D. Ecology. I created this as an invitation into one of many conversations and practice spaces throughout the world which centre around several concepts: a) what we make through how we are together; b) discerning and becoming increasingly mindful of choice points, (critical moments or bifurcation points) in our inter-actions; and, c) acting into those choices with increased phronesis, more and more frequently being able to make choices or to act with a kind of wisdom and relational integrity that is grounded in commitment to others and in what some people call "the good of the whole" (Whitney et al., 2010), "putting our world back into balance" (Jacobs, 2008), creating peace in every

step (Nhat Hanh, 1991), every breath (Nhat Hanh, 2011), and liberation of all beings or becoming an ally of all beings everywhere.

The format of the body is unconventional in some ways. I am exploring a form that matches the theories I am drawing from. With my tone, my stance, and the style of this inquiry I attempt to call attention to meaning-made-in-interaction. However, Barnett Pearce reminds us that what sometimes seems new has deep, rich history:

> Questions focusing on good judgment and practical wisdom have a long history in the western intellectual tradition. They have been involved in rhetoric; the "human sciences" in the tradition of Vico; hermeneutics in the tradition of Dilthey, some aspects of phenomenology in the tradition of Heidegger and Husserl; the dialogics of Gadamer; the philosophical therapeutic intervention of Wittgenstein; and the cluster of approaches based on the American pragmatists (James, Dewey, Mead, Cooley), symbolic interactionists, ethnomethodology, and social constructionism. (Pearce, 2006, p. 4)

What I am extending to all of you today, is an invitation to engage with me and others in this space in relational inter-actions (conversation, reflection, exploration, practice, storytelling, play...) so that we may generate meaning, creatively construct *new* possibilities and practices and in doing so, co-enact well-being. Each of us may encounter familiar concepts and people (including ones with significant resonance) and others that are unfamiliar, unexpected, innovative or may take some openness to be with. There are concepts and tensions to be "worked with" or massaged and ones to be held, open questions that are fascinating to explore in conversation, ones to be lived and held in other ways and ones which co-exist in tension with one another. I trust we can all be with these questions and tensions in generative ways. This is part of the practice that is this inquiry.

In *Research as Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (2008), Shawn Wilson offers in his Forward:

> Through anticipating and responding to concerns of academics accustomed to the dominant system's method of research presentation, I hope in this forward to make the book more readable and more understandable. Research is all about unanswered questions, but it also reveals our unquestioned answers. It is my hope that readers of this book will begin to question some of their own beliefs about the way research needs to be conducted and presented, so that they can recognize the importance of developing alternative ways of answering questions (p.6).

Some of the reasons I wrote this preface, and in this form, resonate with what Shawn Wilson wrote in his Forward. I might add language that I offer this chapter as a way of developing some "shared-enough meaning" (Creede et al., 2012), and as an opportunity for creating coherence in our relationship. I hope that the communication patterns I have used in this introduction are familiar enough to help those of you who may find it more challenging to be with something less familiar (like the visual, conversational format I use in the body), to build a conversational partnership despite your discomfort. For those of you who have really wanted an unconventional and meaning-ful dissertation presentation that says things that are not conducive to a more traditional format, I hope you also find this valuable in your own domain of scholarship and practice. What follows is a space to practice with what I have been talking about in this preface, a place to reflect on and attend to what we're making together in our Ph.D. ecologies, how we're making it and how we might co-enact well-being. What I have made is just one of a plethora of possible ways of inquiring and it is not an endorsement of a single way things "ought to be done." I appreciate how many people have said that the format of dialogue and visual representation used in the body really delighted and engaged them and I hope that you have fun with it, too. I am inviting you to play in this space — to experiment, explore, and become a part of the conversation and practices. I hope this leads to

the “making” of something generative together that enriches the inquiry and enriches you, me and others who may engage with this. I appreciate your generosity, openness, curiosity and excitement as we engage in this dialogue together — it is through our engagement that we create our worlds and I am excited, honoured and blessed to have you all in mine!

Thank you and enjoy!

- Erin

MINDFULNESS OF WHAT WE'RE MAKING IN OUR PH.D. ECOLOGIES

Dissertation by Erin Kreeger for Taos Institute/Tilburg University 2014

Coda

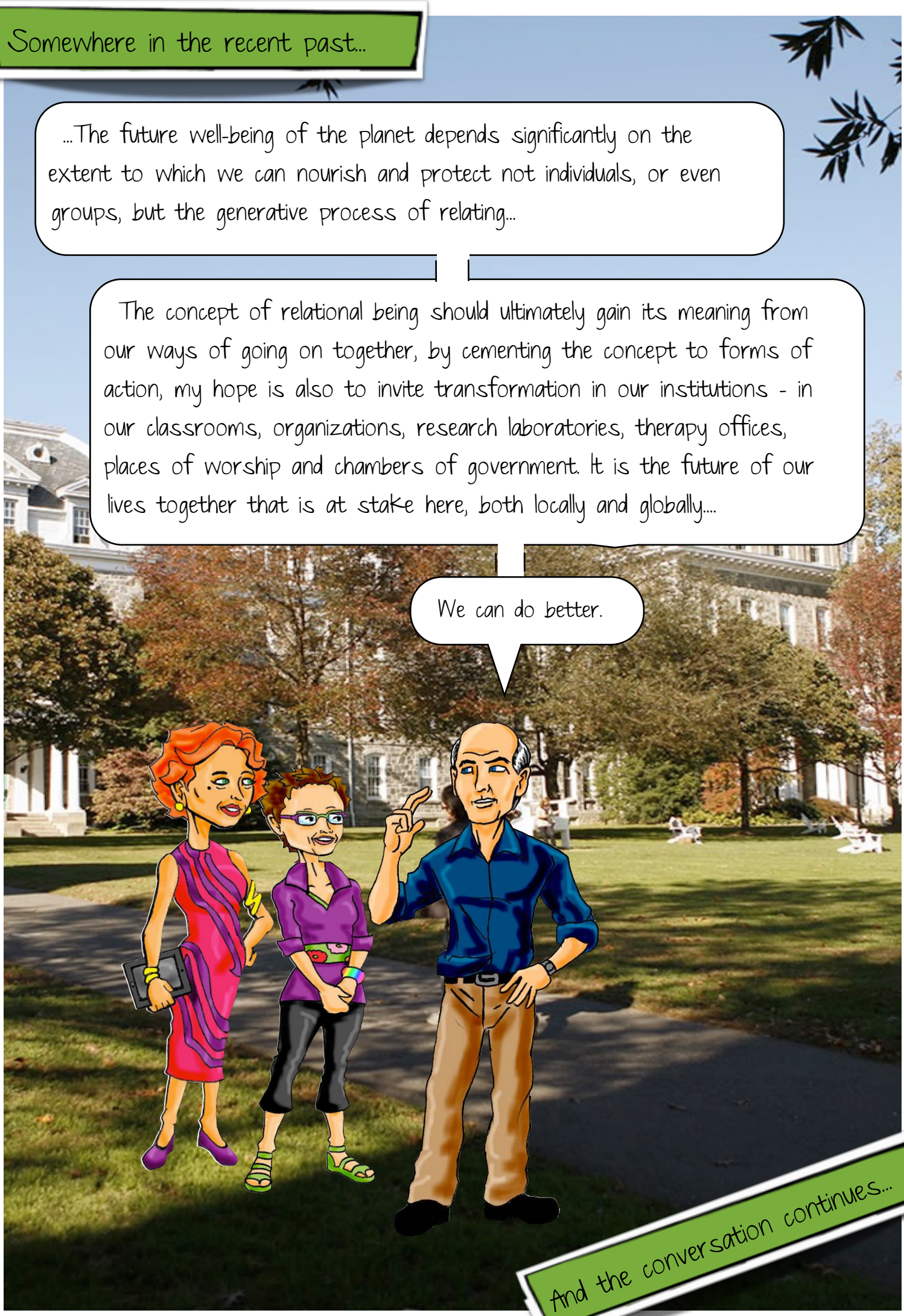
Every act counts.
Every thought and emotion counts too.
This is all the path we have.
This is where we apply the teachings.
- Pema Chödrön

Another Turn Together

Thank you for meeting me here in this Coda! It is with great humility that I near what can be punctuated as the end of this dissertation. As I mentioned in the Preface, though, this dissertation is intended to be more of a comma than a full-stop, more of an ongoing conversation and practice space than a closed book and that is how I approach this chapter. I have constructed it as an opening as much as a closing with room for questions, dialogue and future turns. What we make here together is not just about the inquiry, but part of it.

Part of my intent with this chapter is to talk about what you just read - to share and reflect on some of the patterns and stories I lived, choices I made and patterns of communication I intended to call into being as I constructed this dissertation as well as some of the intended or unintended consequences or afterlives (Pearce, 2007) of these choices. I'm calling this section of the coda "How this was made."[36] I'm offering these examples in the hopes of helping to create additional coherence and meaning for my inquiry and to foreground the complexity, multiplicity and

[36] The choices I made had many motivating or contributing factors (experiences, relationships, aspirations etc.) and at each choice point or bifurcation point, I found CMM inspired questions such as 'what do I want to be making?', 'what is my highest level of context', or what would I like to invite or call forth?' helpful in choosing what kind of communicative turn to try (Pearce, 2007).

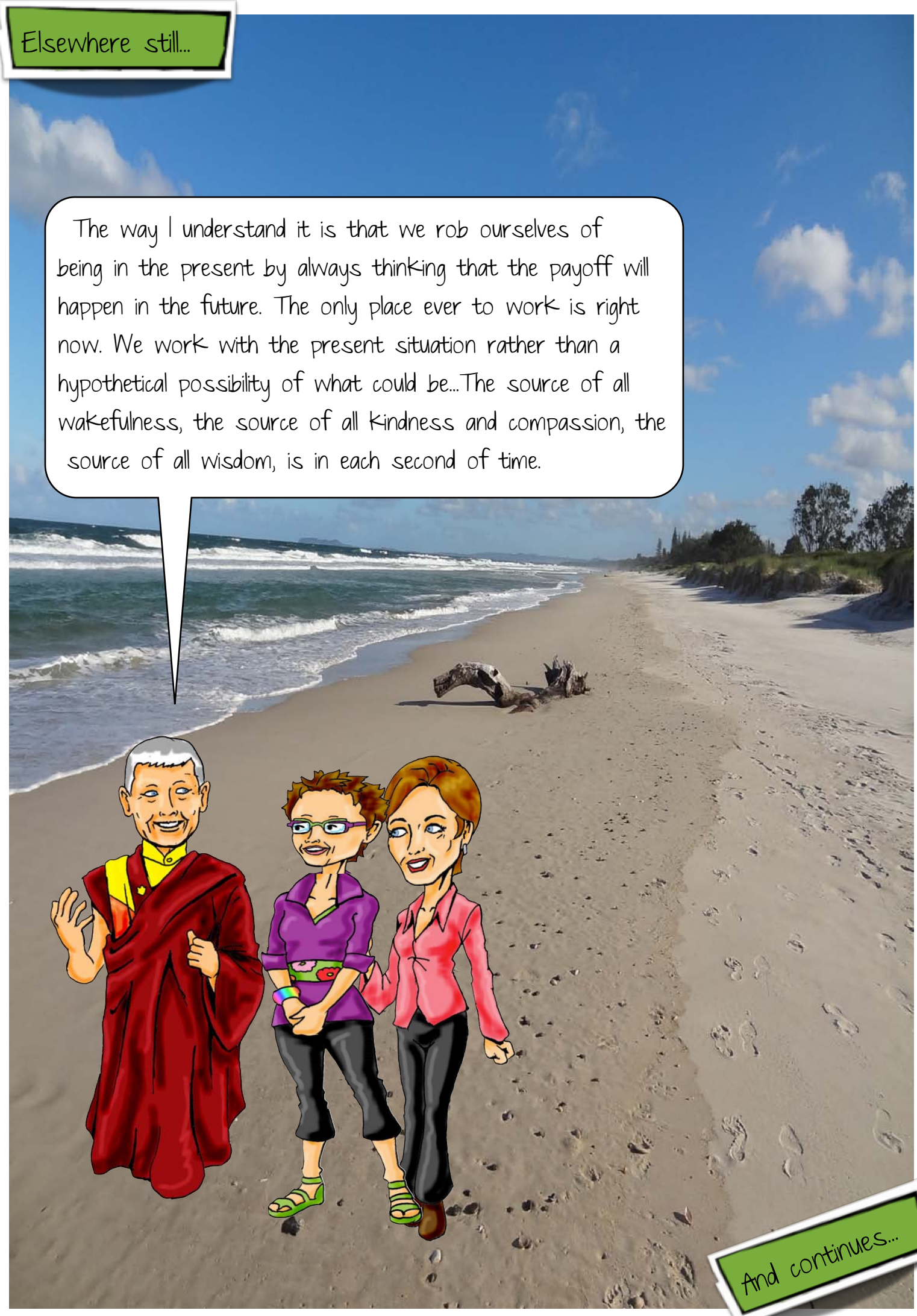

Somewhere in the recent past...
...The future well-being of the planet depends significantly on the extent to which we can nourish and protect not individuals, or even groups, but the generative process of relating...
The concept of relational being should ultimately gain its meaning from our ways of going on together, by cementing the concept to forms of action, my hope is also to invite transformation in our institutions - in our classrooms, organizations, research laboratories, therapy offices, places of worship and chambers of government. It is the future of our lives together that is at stake here, both locally and globally....
We can do better.
And the conversation continues...

Elsewhere...

Many of us feel that we are living in a critical moment of history. The social institutions and practices formed in generations before the development of passenger jet planes, affordable computers and the internet do not necessarily fit the challenges of the present period. There was a time when there were far fewer of us and our tools barely scratched the surface of the planet, now we have experienced a discontinuous development in that relationship. The very earth on which we live is being altered by the way we live in it, and we need to develop new ways of thinking about ourselves and about our relationship to the world around us. Similarly, there was a time when mountains, oceans and deserts separated us from those who are not like us and who don't like us, but now we've experienced a discontinuous development in our relationships with other people.

Research is the primary driver of these discontinuous developments. By studying first the natural world and then the human condition itself, research has given human beings new capacities. But "progress" has come with certain costs... Can research help us develop new ways of relating to each other and to the world around us that are commensurate with the new capacities it has conferred?

And the conversation continues...

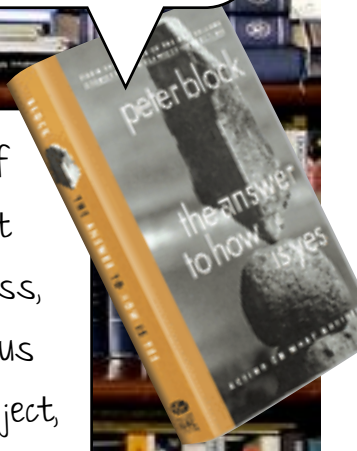

Elsewhere still...
The way I understand it is that we rob ourselves of being in the present by always thinking that the payoff will happen in the future. The only place ever to work is right now. We work with the present situation rather than a hypothetical possibility of what could be...The source of all wakefulness, the source of all kindness and compassion, the source of all wisdom, is in each second of time.
And continues...

And continues...

The real problem is not these crises per se but the likelihood that our responses will be completely inadequate... Ages do not end abruptly. Everyone does not just wake up one day and say "This isn't working. We must change." Quite the contrary. When faced with challenges of this magnitude, the vast majority of people and institutions try harder to maintain the status quo... Fortunately more and more people are beginning to sense that the mounting sustainability crises are interconnected - symptoms of a larger global system out of balance. As soon as people understand this, their view of the problem shifts. They start to see the extraordinary opportunities for innovation that can occur...People and organizations around the world are already planting the seeds for new ways of living and working together.

The intent of this book is not to try to convince you about the substance of what matters. It is primarily a discussion of what is required of us if we are to act on what we care about. It helps to differentiate between our beliefs about what makes for effective people and organizations, and the way we approach the realization of those beliefs. This book is about the means of acting on our beliefs...

When I began, years ago now, to focus on the power of love as a healing force, no one really disagreed with me. Yet what they continue to accept in their daily life is lovelessness, because doing the work of love requires resisting the status quo. In Thich Nhat Hanh's most recent treatise on the subject, True Love: A Practice for Awakening the Heart, he reminds us that "to love, in the context of Buddhism, is above all to be there." He then raises the question of whether or not we have time for love. Right now there is such a profound collective cultural awareness that we need to practice love if we are to heal ourselves and the planet. The task awaiting us is to move from awareness to action. The practice of love requires that we make time, that we embrace change.

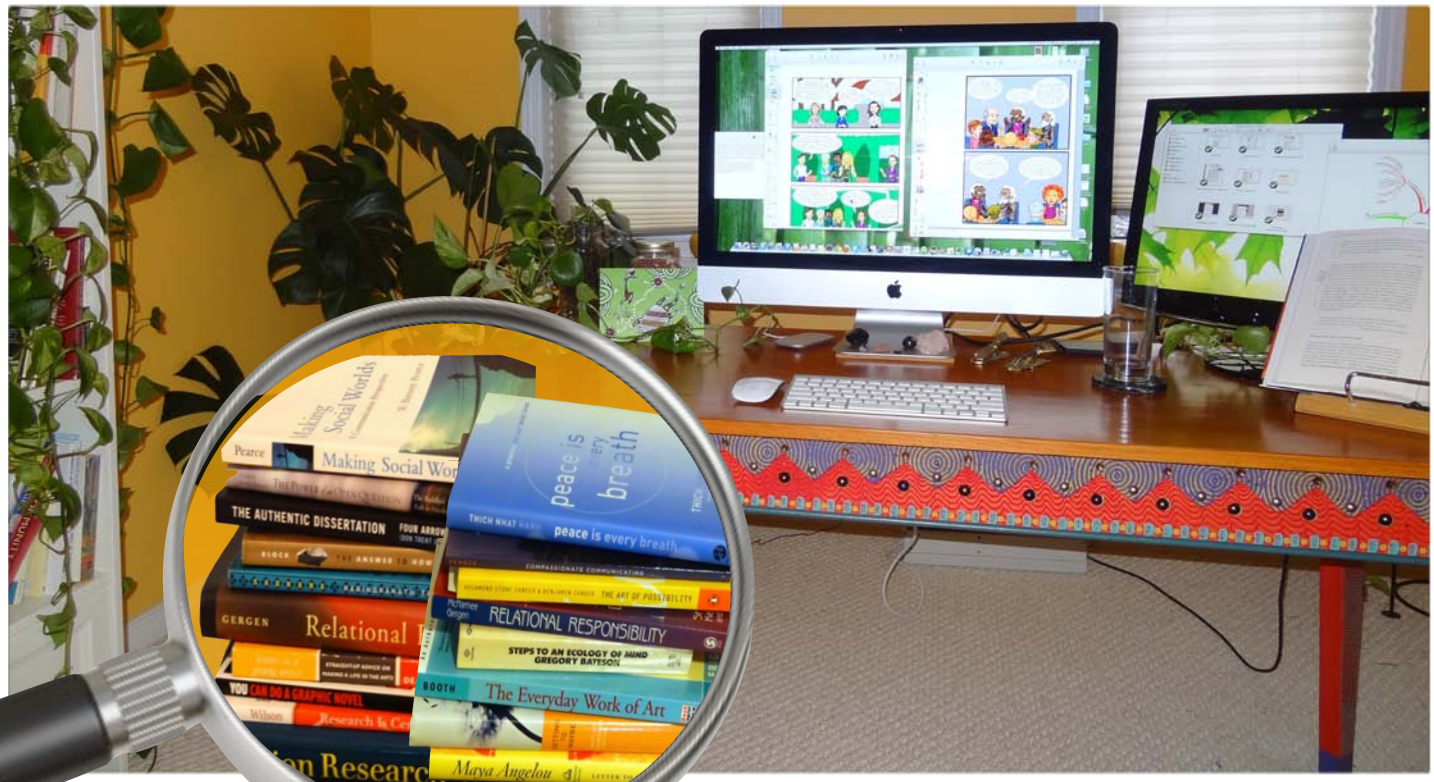


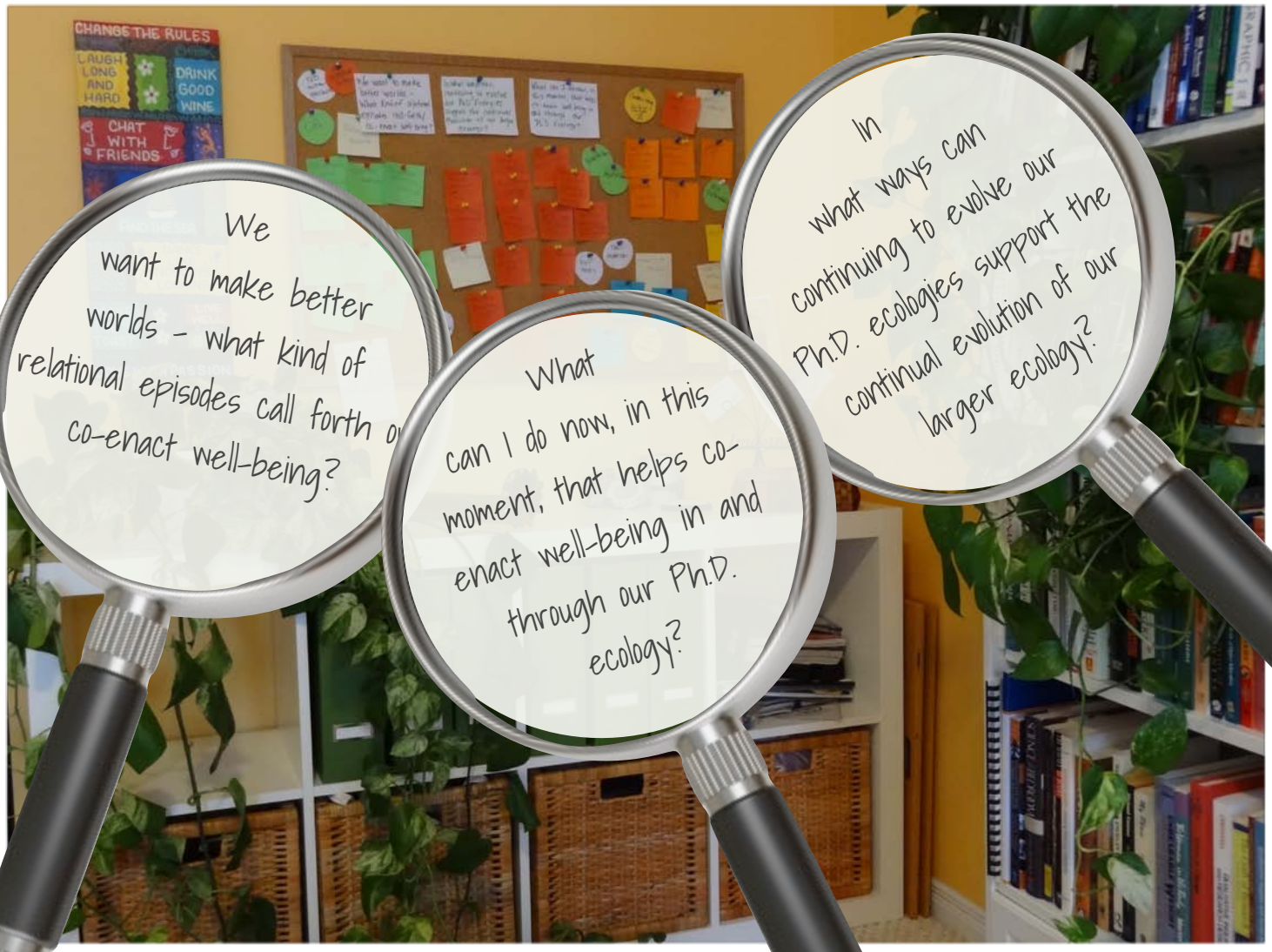
And continues...

There are examples of some of the many ways of constructing or framing the times we're living in right now. These snip-its of conversations represent some of the stories I'm listening to. One of the ways I understand the world, and a thread through these stories, is what Ken Gergen describes as 'existing in a world of co-constitution' and Thich Nhat Hahn calls Interbeing (there is no independent self/we are all interconnected.) What we do (our relational acts, communication patterns, daily practices) matters - it's how we make our world. Amongst many people right now, there is a felt need to change our patterns/how we are doing things so what we're making together co-creates more well-being in the world.

In concurrent (and frequently concomitant) conversations there is a pattern emerging of people talking about their work/how they go about it as a kind of spiritual practice or connected to something larger than themselves. In addition, many people are asking whether Ph.D. programs are still valuable or how they need to change to be relevant in this unique time in our history. This doctoral inquiry arises at the nexus of, and is a turn in, all of these conversations. I've constructed it as a place/space where we can explore and practice with what we're making together and how we can co-enact well-being (co-create more compassionate, peaceful, loving, sustainable, health-full, mindful, relationally generative...worlds) in and through our Ph.D. ecologies.

There are a lot of ways you could describe this dissertation. One is that it is performative. You could also say it is a multi-turn, flexibly punctuated, polysemic, dialogic, relationally constructionist, CMMish, action-oriented, counter-habitual, permeable, curiosity filled relational act. However you choose to name it, I am very excited you are a part of it! I have made form and design choices I hope will help invite generative conversation and practices - and those choices have been practices themselves. At the Taos Institute, we say 'it is through relational processes that we create the world in which we most want to live and work - as we generate meaning together, we create the future.' I've invited you all into this space for this reason - I believe in the wisdom we bring and in what we can make together. I'm so happy you're here and happy to host you in any way I can! Thank you for participating and welcome to this inquiry!!!


Making Social Worlds
THE AUTHENTIC DISSERTATION
peace is every breath
RELATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY
STEPS TO AN ECOLOGY OF MIND
GREGORY BATESON
The Everyday Work of Art
Maya Angelou


CHANGE THE RULES
LAUGH LONG AND HARD
DRINK GOOD WINE
CHAT WITH FRIENDS
We want to make better worlds - what kind of relational episodes call forth o co-enact well-being?
What can I do now, in this moment, that helps co-enact well-being in and through our Ph.D. ecology?
In what ways can continuing to evolve our Ph.D. ecologies support the continual evolution of our larger ecology?

Thank you for inviting me into this exciting conversation!
Yes, thanks!
Yes, thank you for the invitation. This is a very unusual format for me and I am both hesitant and curious to see how it unfolds. Thank you for including me in the conversation even though I have been a bit of a critic.
I think it is brilliant to invite us together for a conversation. You're not just reporting to us but involving us in the creation.
I agree. Thank you for inviting us, Erin! It's an honor to be here with this great community. What you're exploring is a valuable and interesting topic. Though I couldn't imagine it at first, I now really like the ecological mindset. If I have a question about something, should I hold it until a particular time? I don't want to take you off topic by interrupting.

Thanks Alex. I'm glad you asked. I have designed this as a conversation rather than a presentation or Q and A so please take a turn or jump in with questions, comments, stories etc. anytime you'd like. In terms of getting off topic, the turns we each take may change what I was planning to address next but that's where some of the beauty of this comes in - this is not just "my" conversation but all of ours. New turns and changes lead to new insights and meaning making. We won't be able to cover everything that we might want to but ll trust in the wisdom of this group that where we go with the conversations will be valuable and what's important to us will likely rise. I'll also do some facilitating if it's helpful for balancing emergence with talk about specific topics/ experiences.
Perfect.
Great. Thanks for that invitation. And by the way. I really like that term - Ph.D. ecologies, too.
Me, too. Did you make it up or is that a phrase someone else has used? I can imagine what it means and I'd love to hear how you would talk about why you use it or what it means to you.

I haven't heard anyone use it in this way before though people are using the term ecology in a lot of other contexts (Knowledge management, computers and software...)

I use the term for a constellation of reasons, really. One is as a reminder of the larger world we're all a part of - what happens in academia (our relational acts) has ripples/afterlives in other relationships or other parts of our world (imagine looking at what we do in Ph.D. related activities and then imagine that you are standing back to see more of the scene or a larger frame/seeing a larger ecology - that's how I experience what we're doing as being part of and situated in something larger.

Another reason is that each turn we act into in Ph.D. ecologies is complex, richly textured, impacts numerous relationships (seen, unseen, imagined, unimagined) and creates this world we live in. I see relational acts/ speech acts and patterns of communication/our practices and social worlds as interconnected as some people might see geologic or biological ecologies.

Also, this dissertation is grounded in a historical time of urgency around care for the environment/the planet with an emphasis on how our actions anywhere impact the whole. (What we eat, how we dispose of or reuse products, whether we feel connected to our community etc. has an impact on our planet and global well-being.) This inquiry is part of those conversations in many ways and this ecological awareness emphasis on how important or how much of a difference our day to day practices make in the world, is what this conversation is grounded in.

For some of us the term "ecology" may bring to mind Gregory Bateson, too! If you think of this dissertation as being a turn in a multi-turned conversation that began well before me and will continue well after, Bateson has contributed to that conversation and I tip my hat to honor him as I will others throughout this conversation.

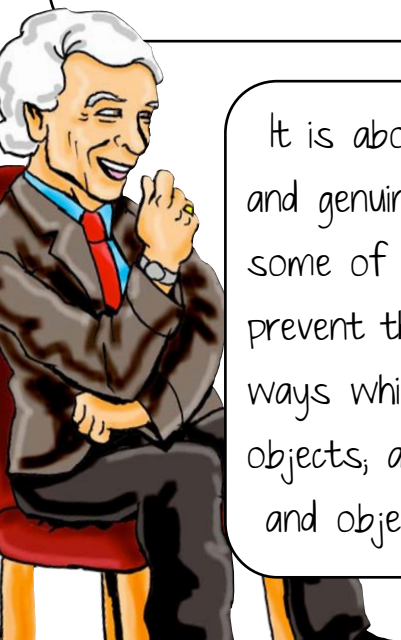
This reminds me of a Ph.D. committee that I served on several years ago. A Psych student asked me to serve on her committee. I asked what her topic was and she told me she wanted to explore attachment theory but instead of looking at mothers and children, she wanted to explore the implications of attachment between teenaged best friends. I asked why and she told me that her feelings of competence, self worth, etc had been strongly influenced by the status of her relationship with her best friend when she was a teen. She proceeded to design and execute her study which consisted of the typical psychological scales, etc.....on recruited best friends and mothers too. When she was in the final stages of writing up her dissertation, she phoned me to ask for my assistance. She had promised all those who had participated in her research that she would send them a letter indicating what the study was about and what she had discovered. Her problem: she couldn't figure out how to let them know the findings of her research in a way that they would understand. Why, I asked. She said because she was largely reporting the results of complicated statistical analyses and using complex psychological construct ...

At her defence, all her committee members asked questions about the power of the statistical tests she had performed, their integrity, etc. When it was my turn to ask a question I posed the following situation: The local high school principal is concerned. He has called you offering a consulting position because he has heard of your research. It seems that there is an extraordinary level of truancy in the high school and he has found out that it is largely due to friendship groups and best friends fighting. They skip school to avoid contact. What would you say to the principal?

Her answer: "Nothing. I would not consult to him. I am a researcher, not a consultant!"

Your idea of Ph.D. ecologies (and the implication that there could be others beyond the traditional one that seems to be summarized in that Ph.D. student's response) is critical to generating scholarship that is transformational. Also, in using the term, "Ph.D. ecology," you direct attention to the processes, patterns, and structures that have been constructed and that we continue to perpetuate showing simultaneously that we act into and out of realities that we often don't question and therefore don't realize our own participation in recreating...

Gosh, thanks Sheila - that's a great story. You just reminded me of something, Barnett, you said in the early 1990s - how "culture" is interpersonal communication frozen; interpersonal communication is culture "in process." I've lived in a lot of different places/spaces/countries where the patterns, structures and processes are very different from each other and each time I'm in one that's new to me, I'm reminded about how many, many different ways of engaging in the world/communication patterns there are. However, a prominent story I hear is that the way we do things in academia is so old, entrenched and reified that it can never change - it can't be "unfrozen." Like you said, what we often don't realize is how we're participating in the making of it, perpetuating it, re-making it in our ongoing process of social construction and that, having been made, that in turn makes something else. It can change - we're making and remaking it every day. Part of this dissertation is about developing a heightened sensitivity to/ awareness of the choices we can make. How am I going to respond into this situation? What do I choose?



It is about noticing and discerning our choice points and having the desire and genuine curiosity to learn about/live into or practice with (if I can borrow some of your words, Barnett) the questions how can I/we act in ways which prevent the occurrence of undesirable events and objects; how can I/we act in ways which intervene in and improve already existing undesirable events and objects; and how can I/we act into ways which call into being preferred events and objects (well-being in the world)?

Fabulous topic. I echo what others said in thanking you for the invitation.

Thanks, Katharina! I'm excited you all are participating in this and I appreciate how easy it has been to just jump in and get started! As the host, I'd also like to take a minute to help familiarize you all with the environment so that you all can make yourself at home if you're not already/feel oriented enough to participate with ease.

I would appreciate that.

For example, it may be helpful to hear that I am working within a socially-relationally constructionist realm of abundant possibility. I take the invitation to innovate/generate new meaning/new constructions and reconstructions through collaborative, relational activities/communication patterns that I hope will call forth ways of being that make better worlds. I'm not suggesting one answer to anything, rather, working with expansiveness around what we value, questioning assumptions and habits and staying present to emergent choices. You could say I'm helping create something new/some shifts in the ecology as well as cultivating capacity for other shifts.

I talk about this inquiry as multi-turned and dynamic and this book (this dissertation) as part of the inquiry itself, not just a re-presentation of it. (It is a series of turns where I am exploring and working with "data" and continuing to engage in asynchronous conversational turns with people whose thoughts, comments, questions, stories are part of this dissertation.)

So this dissertation is both a space and data. It is formative and constitutive.

I'm loving this but I wonder how many people will actually get that this isn't just ABOUT something but it IS something and what kind of problems it might cause Erin if people don't get it!

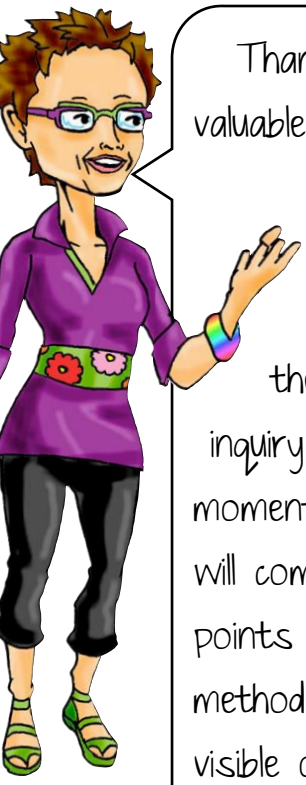
Yes, well-said. And being multi-turned, what people read or see in the dissertation emerges/changes/expands as people participate with it - every version someone has read included the conversations I had with the last people who read it - conversations which often profoundly impacted the "document". Also, I have taken some published conversations from other contexts and woven them together in these conversations as someone else might use quotations. For example, nobel prize winning physicist Richard Feynman has said things I thought would be interesting to consider in these conversations so he appears on the page. It's fascinating what emerges when different conversations across time and space come together! Out of respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander guests of this inquiry, I want to advise that this dissertation contains images and voices of deceased persons.

In addition to published turns and asynchronous unpublished turns, I have created some characters to re-present the spirit of relationships and conversations with people who wish to remain unidentifiable or where it was useful to combine stories and relationships or in cases where breaking my own dialogic voices into different characters was useful. Four Arrows, I know in The Authentic Dissertation you introduced fictional characters into the dialogue, too, to help stimulate meaningful dialogue and help readers assess the merits and challenges surrounding the various topics. Your style immediately resonated with me. Thank you!

I think it's brilliant and I love it!

Still reserving judgement

Me, too. It really is terrific and it must also be really hard! I once wrote a paper with a colleague and we designed it as asynchronous turns. It was just the two of us and it was extremely hard - and we weren't working with nearly the complexity that you are here!



Thanks! I appreciate that! It has been hard and also really valuable - it was great practice in staying present with whatever I encountered. What some people might call content and methodology were (are) inseparable in this inquiry - playing with form/design opened up a lot! They were speech acts themselves, informing my thinking and practice. This whole inquiry has been full of choices in every turn. Some critical moments/bifurcations points and why I chose them/meta-reflections will come through in performance and/or conversation at various points rather than all at once like you may find in a traditional methodology chapter and some choice points probably won't be visible or felt explicitly except on the cutting room floor or in minutes and days gone by/life lived. It's not all recorded/recordable.

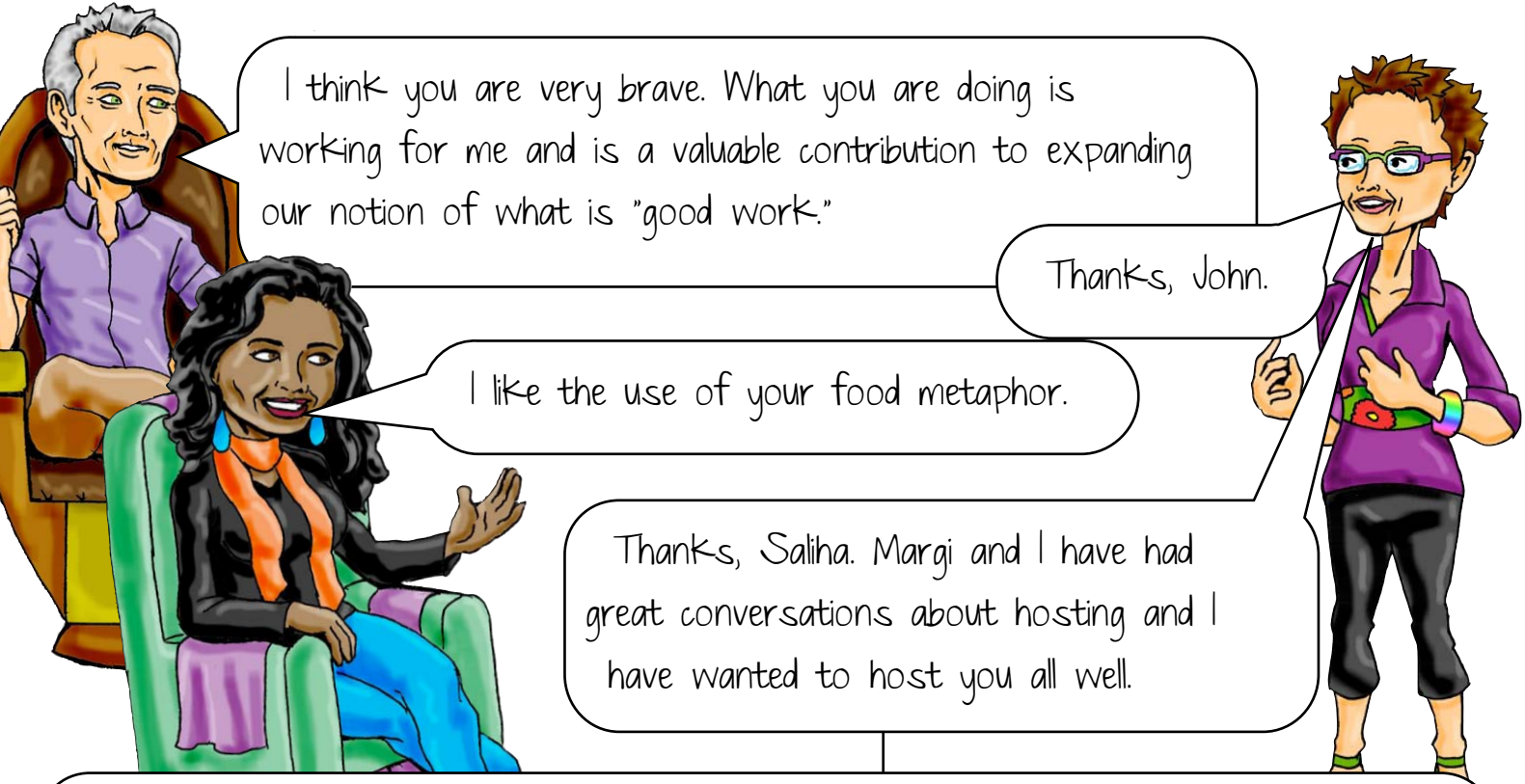
One thing I'll say now is that this inquiry is for/comes from/is about our whole ecology and I would really like it to be useful for people no matter where they/we locate themselves in our ecology (practitioners, students, scholars, community members...) and I have made choices I hope help with that. For example, people often tell the story that academic writing is boring, dry, unreadable or just a chore to engage with. I want to keep the writing accessible, interesting and hopefully enjoyable.

It is not the metaphor of a "well wrought urn" that guides academic writing, but something more akin to the perfectly appointed gunboat - powerful in resources, flawless in operation, insistent on purpose, and beyond defeat by anyone.

Yes, well put. And what kind of an orientation is that? Not one that speaks to me of creating a better world. Quite the opposite. It can be counter-productive.

Those are the kind of feelings I heard, too. Writing can be a way of creating relationship, like you have suggested, Ken. We make our world in the process of communication and so the communication patterns we're engaged in have great potential for creating better worlds. I tried to choose tone and style that would create a different story than the gunboat. And that can be a loaded choice, eh? I'm aware that, as you have said, Ken, to step outside the accepted practices of writing is to risk being labeled "a second rate mind." To create something easy for many people to read and engage with can be storied that it's not sophisticated enough to have value or that it came together by accident rather than intention or any number of other dismissive stories. I suppose that's part of the purpose of this orientation - to be in conversation about some of the thinking that went into this. I had to choose over and over to not work from a place of fear of being dismissed because it didn't feel like it invited or was a reflection of well-being for me. I turned to artists and my Buddhist practice for help in learning how to stay grounded and it was also really helpful hearing from people that they loved it - when I had been coached to expect that people won't get it or like it!

But I couldn't be attached to people loving it. People like different things, eh? I wondered 'how do I write in a way that is accessible, interesting and enjoyable when we all have different experiences of what that is and I don't even know who will show up!?' *laugh* I thought about it from the perspective of hosting and asked what I would do if I was inviting you all over for dinner. It would be important to me that you have food you can enjoy and which supports your health but how do I know what that is? Are you looking for me as a host to expose you to something that's unique to my cooking - something different than what you eat - or to provide you with something familiar? *laugh* It was easy to get too serious about it! I found it was useful to relax, to trust in all of you and what we could make together and to be responsive to the feedback I was getting.



And to do that, I try to stay grounded in this being a relational inquiry where I take "the communication perspective." It is dialogic. It's about creating something together in conversation and that co-creation involves the notion of relational responsibility - it would be more generative to involve you in these questions about what will serve us well and how to create that in mindful intentional ways than to try to imagine and cater to all possible unknowns.) That's one of the reasons I constructed this dissertation in a way that incorporated turns where readers/participants could pose questions, ask for clarification, include their (your) own stories and experiences on the page - so we could co-create something valuable together.

To try to have this episode feel like conversations (rather than interpretations of them or conversations about them) as much as I could with the resources I had available, I chose a conversational style of writing and images/talk bubbles, working with the idea of logical force and how we engage in dialogue. This may be different than what many people are used to from a traditional dissertation and the conversational flow may also be more fluid than traditional dissertation chapters often invite - in this dialogue the topics of conversation flow from one topic into another and often back again based on what comes up for people - the questions any of us have, the connections we make etc. The inquiry was not a linear process and neither is the dialogue about it/that is part of it/which comes from it so please bare with me!

I'm conscious I'm taking a very long turn in providing all this background. How is this feeling?

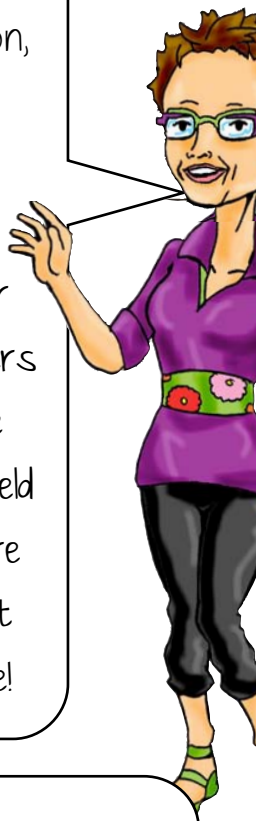
It's helpful!

Yes, please continue, this is important for helping us orient.

Alright. Thanks. Just a couple more points then. One is that I want to be explicit that I sometimes use the language of "I" in this dissertation as a way of respecting the context in which this dissertation has been constructed and will be awarded - that it is "my dissertation" from conception through presentation. However every part of it from before I named it as a dissertation topic to after I "complete" this doctoral turn has or will have occurred in relationship. A few of those relationships you'll see explicitly re-presented on the page and there will be others who you may not see but were part of the work. I'll introduce you to some of these relationships at the end of this book in the Cast of Characters. I'll link conversational turns from published work there as well.

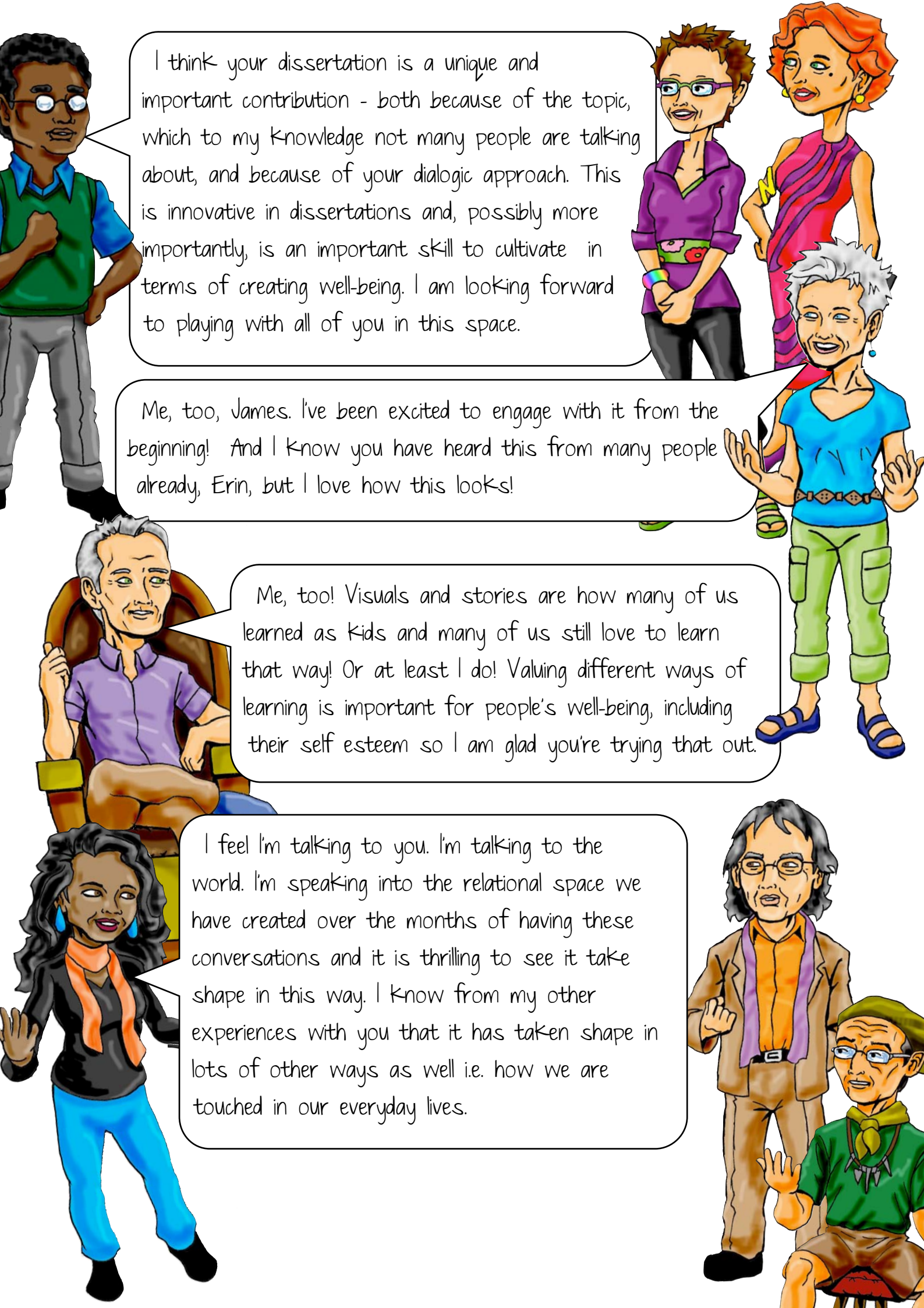
Another is, if I haven't already said it explicitly, this dissertation has been/is a lived inquiry in something of the way you have written about living life as inquiry, Judi - curiosity, sense-making, self-reflection, action - trying out/practicing/creating new communication patterns, speech acts/relationships, noticing what we're making, how we're making it, what the next most generative turn might be...I have applied notions/theories/practices/processes in this inquiry to all kinds of episodes/relationships/contexts in my life and all of those have informed notions/theories/processes/practices for this inquiry. Like you have said, Barnett - every research project occurs at the nexus of many conversations. Everything, including this book (a cycle of inquiry), has been emergent, constantly created in/of/through life - which has been a great practice in impermanence! And this interconnectedness/living this inquiry has been really generative. (Keep an eye out for the border crossing story for an example of that!)

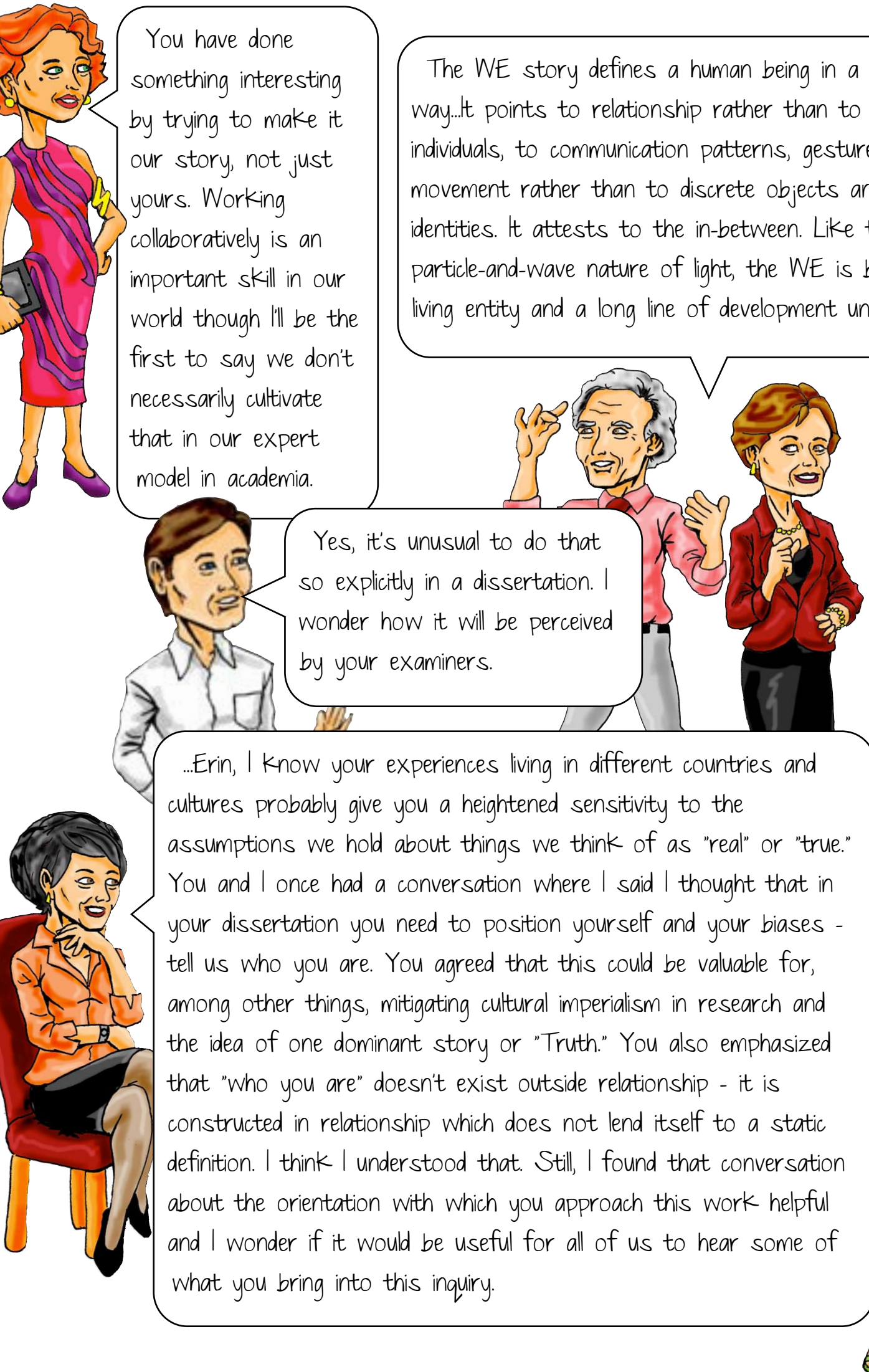
My invitation to all of you (those reading right now and those of you showing up on the page) is to engage in relational acts (conversation, reflection, exploration, practice, storytelling, play...) together so that we may generate meaning, creatively construct new possibilities and practices and in doing so, create and grow our future - one which co-enacts well-being in the different ways we define it. In offering this invitation, I know you/me/we may encounter some familiar concepts and people including ones with real resonance and others which may be unfamiliar, unexpected, innovative or take some openness to be with. There are concepts and tensions to be worked with and ones to be held without explicitly working them, open questions that are fascinating to explore in conversation and ones to be lived and held in other ways or which co-exist in tension with one another. I trust we can all be with that. We already have!



Like this sign says, please walk on the grass! Through being here, participating in open, generous, compassionate ways that come out of a sense of inquiry and care, we're building relationships, building capacity, adding to the collective wisdom in the room, strengthening our community, sparking and incubating ideas, putting our living theories into practice and making/calling forth/ bringing better worlds into being. And that's a movement towards well-being!

Thanks for that orientation. You're working with a lot of concepts and giving us that background has helped me better understand and situate your work so I may follow the thread.
Thanks, Dorte. I'm glad it was helpful. Please speak up at any time if what I say isn't a clear thread. You know, I initially put that orientation together in my first draft (conversations I started on the page so that other people could join in) and what I found as more and more people took turns in the conversation, was that the orientating part got pushed further away from the first pages - people just jumped in without it. So I wasn't sure if it would add value to include it at all. I did decided to keep it, as you just heard, and to move it closer to the beginning again. I am aware that my decision was informed by people's expressed expectations of a dissertation and what people need at the beginning to engage rather than as a turn that came from being present with how we were being together. Then, of course, it changed and got better I think with all of these/our conversational turns. It's helpful for me to hear that it was valuable.
I love the way you have invited people into your dissertation and spoken already about style and choice points...I think you have done an excellent job in speaking to a number of internal voices that might be popping up for people by now.
I didn't feel like I "needed" the orientation you gave - I was ready to jump right in! But I see why it may be valuable.
For me, it was a pleasure to hear how you articulate "what you're making" and "how you're making it" and to get a glimpse into what you envision as ways of being or enablers which may contribute to making a better world - being in dialogue for instance and being open and curious.

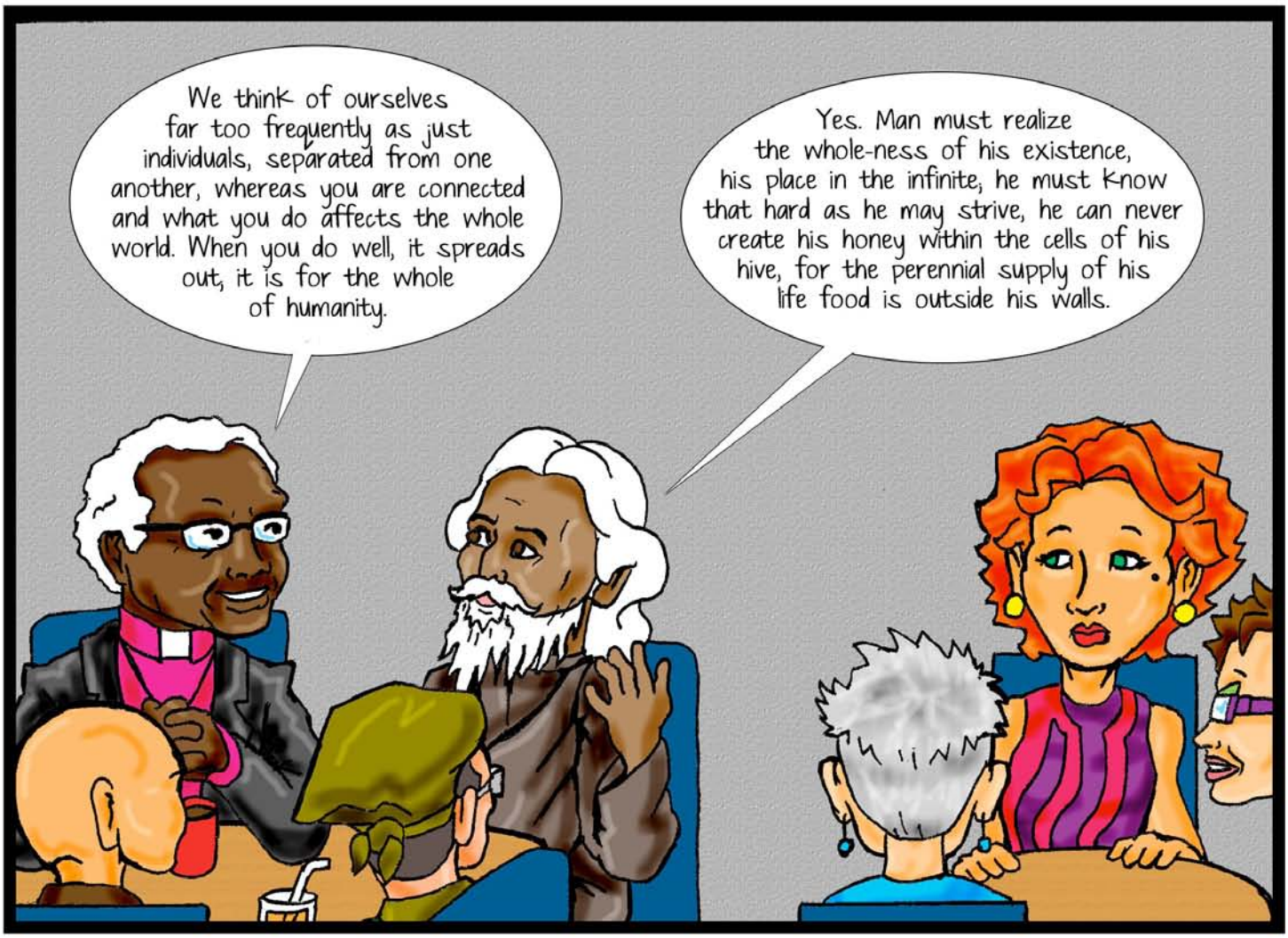

I think your dissertation is a unique and important contribution - both because of the topic, which to my knowledge not many people are talking about, and because of your dialogic approach. This is innovative in dissertations and, possibly more importantly, is an important skill to cultivate in terms of creating well-being. I am looking forward to playing with all of you in this space.
Me, too, James. I've been excited to engage with it from the beginning! And I know you have heard this from many people already, Erin, but I love how this looks!
Me, too! Visuals and stories are how many of us learned as kids and many of us still love to learn that way! Or at least I do! Valuing different ways of learning is important for people's well-being, including their self esteem so I am glad you're trying that out.
I feel I'm talking to you. I'm talking to the world. I'm speaking into the relational space we have created over the months of having these conversations and it is thrilling to see it take shape in this way. I know from my other experiences with you that it has taken shape in lots of other ways as well i.e. how we are touched in our everyday lives.

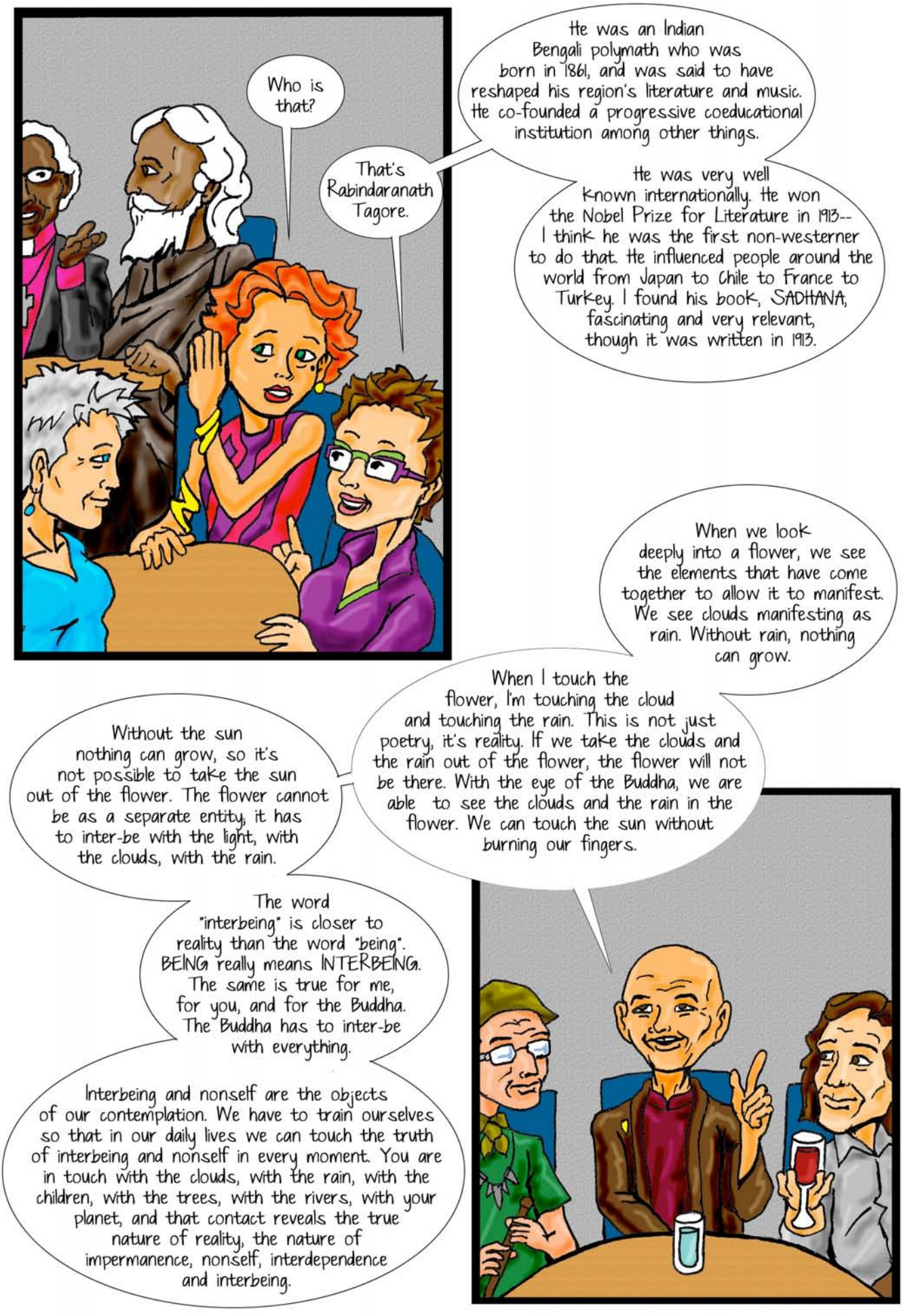

You have done something interesting by trying to make it our story, not just yours. Working collaboratively is an important skill in our world though I'll be the first to say we don't necessarily cultivate that in our expert model in academia.
The WE story defines a human being in a specific way...It points to relationship rather than to individuals, to communication patterns, gestures and movement rather than to discrete objects and identities. It attests to the in-between. Like the particle-and-wave nature of light, the WE is both a living entity and a long line of development unfolding.
Yes, it's unusual to do that so explicitly in a dissertation. I wonder how it will be perceived by your examiners.
...Erin, I know your experiences living in different countries and cultures probably give you a heightened sensitivity to the assumptions we hold about things we think of as "real" or "true." You and I once had a conversation where I said I thought that in your dissertation you need to position yourself and your biases - tell us who you are. You agreed that this could be valuable for, among other things, mitigating cultural imperialism in research and the idea of one dominant story or "Truth." You also emphasized that "who you are" doesn't exist outside relationship - it is constructed in relationship which does not lend itself to a static definition. I think I understood that. Still, I found that conversation about the orientation with which you approach this work helpful and I wonder if it would be useful for all of us to hear some of what you bring into this inquiry.

Sure, Dorte, I'd be happy to share some of what I bring with me into this inquiry. In the conversation Dorte's referring to, we talked about how people often live into situations without being aware that what we're operating with/taking as unchangeable or innate is a construction, a cultural tradition, and that other constructions/possibilities exist. I think recognizing and being mindful of our constructions as constructions plays an important role in creating change. So, let me share some of my constructions (I'll give a brief overview before we talk about them more extensively...)

One is what Ken Gergen calls Relational Being. Many people/cultures have talked about how everything is connected or doesn't exist separate from anything else - Ubuntu, dependent co-arising/dependent origination, interbeing (Tiếp Hiện in Vietnamese), Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम in Sanskrit). Throughout my dissertation I have considered in what ways am I breathing life into this orientation and what that might open up for us in terms of creating well-being. I also foreground communication in this inquiry - I take "the communication perspective" seeing communication as morphogenic, that we make and understand experiences/our worlds through communication which I tie into the notion of practice/the role of (daily) practice and mindful communication in creating change. I also bring with me a sense of possibility - that our ecology doesn't just exist in one way or need to be one way. It is (we are) full of possibility/full of different turns/relational acts/meaning making created through our collaborative/relational activities which can call forth different kinds of outcomes than we have been experiencing. There's the oft quoted observation of Einstein's that we can't solve problems using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them and similarly, the CMM Institute for Personal and Social Evolution offers that the world currently faces challenges and opportunities not likely to be met in generative, life-giving ways with the same ways of thinking, patterns of communication, ways of being in relationship and practices in which our current context was created. We need to change some things and with this sense of possibility I assume that we have the wisdom/skills/capabilities to do that - to do things differently, get different stories, co-enact well-being, create better worlds. Many of us are already doing this. That's a brief overview. What is coming up for you as I talk about those?

In my book, RELATIONAL BEING, I talk about how independent persons do not come together to form a relationship; from relationships the very possibility of independent persons emerges.
One of the sayings in my country is UBUNTU. Ubuntu--the essence of being human.
Ubuntu speaks particularly about the fact that you can't exist as a human being in isolation. It speaks about our interconnectedness. You can't be human all by yourself, and when you have this quality--Ubuntu--you are known for your generosity.


We think of ourselves far too frequently as just individuals, separated from one another, whereas you are connected and what you do affects the whole world. When you do well, it spreads out, it is for the whole of humanity.
Yes. Man must realize the whole-ness of his existence, his place in the infinite; he must know that hard as he may strive, he can never create his honey within the cells of his hive, for the perennial supply of his life food is outside his walls.


Who is that?
That's Rabindaranath Tagore.
He was an Indian Bengali polymath who was born in 1861, and was said to have reshaped his region's literature and music. He co-founded a progressive coeducational institution among other things.
He was very well known internationally. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913-- I think he was the first non-westerner to do that. He influenced people around the world from Japan to Chile to France to Turkey. I found his book, SADHANA, fascinating and very relevant, though it was written in 1913.
When we look deeply into a flower, we see the elements that have come together to allow it to manifest. We see clouds manifesting as rain. Without rain, nothing can grow.
When I touch the flower, I'm touching the cloud and touching the rain. This is not just poetry, it's reality. If we take the clouds and the rain out of the flower, the flower will not be there. With the eye of the Buddha, we are able to see the clouds and the rain in the flower. We can touch the sun without burning our fingers.
Without the sun nothing can grow, so it's not possible to take the sun out of the flower. The flower cannot be as a separate entity, it has to inter-be with the light, with the clouds, with the rain.
The word "interbeing" is closer to reality than the word "being". BEING really means INTERBEING. The same is true for me, for you, and for the Buddha. The Buddha has to inter-be with everything.
Interbeing and nonself are the objects of our contemplation. We have to train ourselves so that in our daily lives we can touch the truth of interbeing and nonself in every moment. You are in touch with the clouds, with the rain, with the children, with the trees, with the rivers, with your planet, and that contact reveals the true nature of reality, the nature of impermanence, nonself, interdependence and interbeing.

Yes, a poet once said, "The whole universe is in a glass of wine."

We will probably never know in what sense he meant that, for poets do not write to be understood.

But it is true that if we look at a glass of wine closely enough, we see the entire universe.

There are the things of physics: the twisting liquid which evaporates depending on the wind and weather, the reflections in the glass, and our imagination adds the atoms.

The glass is a distillation of the Earth's rocks, and in its composition we see the secrets of the universe's age, and the evolution of stars.

What strange arrays of chemicals are in the wine? How did they come to be?

There are the ferments, the enzymes, the substrates, and the products. There in wine is found the great generalization: all life is fermentation.

Nobody can discover the chemistry of wine without discovering, as Louis Pasteur did, the cause of much disease.

How vivid is the claret, pressing its existence into the consciousness that watches it!

If our small minds, for some convenience, divide this glass of wine, this universe into parts--
physics,
biology,
geology,
astronomy,
psychology, and so on--
remember that Nature does not know it!
So let us put it all back together, not forgetting untimely what it is for.
Let it give us one more, final pleasure:
Drink it and forget it all!
And the conversation continues...

Later ...

What a gift to hear so many perspectives on the same concept coming from different domains. Beautiful! Bateson probably would have had some interesting things to add, too. So might Dr. Vasant Lad. I've been giving thought to when I first came to understanding the world in this way. It was when I was a kid - before I had read anything or been in conversation with anyone about it. It came to me in dreams/visions and became a deep part of my understanding about the world and how I engage in it.

How can something "come to you" without language and therefore without discursive communities and traditions?

That's a great question, Sheila.....My first thought is that I can't explain it (I'm working in this dissertation on embracing stories as incomplete, inconsistent, complex and valid and welcoming/relaxing into wonderment, paradox, acknowledging mystery etc. and this may be an example of needing to do that!) That's my first thought but as I think about it more...

I think how dreams/visions can be a form of communication/a kind of language and that the notion of relational beings or interbeing leaves room for knowing in ways that don't come from a direct/bounded conversation - that the wisdom and knowledge we have in some part of that relational web may be inseparable from other areas. This orientation exists in some of the countries/cultures I have lived in...Buddhism and some indigenous cultures talk about it - Four Arrows, I think you may have talked about this as meta consciousness and in CMM this might fall under Mystery. And maybe because of those discursive communities and traditions I can begin to articulate it? I don't know. It's new for me to talk about this public and I'm a bit uncomfortable doing it to be honest but I'd be interested in being in further conversation about it.

Vision is considered to be a legitimate source for new knowledge in Indigenous cultures and a vision was the centerpiece of my own dissertation. "Brilliant or Bullshit" were the words that my dissertation committee chair wrote on the bottom of my cover page after he finished reading it. Although disappointed and a bit confused about what would happen next, I was not really surprised. I was fifty-four years of age and pursuing my second doctoral degree, the first obtained more than twenty years previously. I was not a stranger to the "ivory tower." I would have been the first to admit that my dissertation might have been difficult for a Western academic to accept right off.

Ultimately, I successfully defended my research in front of a formidable audience. The next year my dissertation was published in book form and I have collected many letters from people who say it has impacted their lives in good ways. I continue to grow and learn form the work and I was invited to present on it more than ten years after it's publication. I hope my story will give new doctoral students the confidence to use their own dreams and visions as a "valid" source of knowledge. Conclusions can still be triangulated for validity with more traditional research of course, but until scholars are allowed to give credibility to their dreams and visions, the academy will continue to stifle possible solutions to the many problems that face our world.

Thanks for sharing that story, Four Arrows. Your work has helped me include this conversation on the page, even with my discomfort around doing it. And my tentativeness may be partly an example of how the way we label something determines how we experience it/what kinds of responses are available to us. For example...

I'm thinking of the stereotype of the hard scientist with his (it usually is a "he" in these stories) Eureka moments - flashes of understanding that seem to come all of the sudden though have probably been informed by many things. Seeing you there, Richard, I wonder how similar those moments to what we're talking about?

In my Zen tradition, we call those openings "Kenshō."

There is no break in unity.

I come from a Sufi tradition, where love, compassion and interconnectedness are valued. And so are visions and alternate ways of knowing. From my constructionist practice, it is the process of making meaning that is in the language and the traditions we habituate. To name something as being or knowing is to be in language. So to say I had a vision, is to use my community's language. To recognize it as a vision is the language practice of the communities that we belong in. And it is in that sense that I see Sheila's point of how can something be without discursive communities and traditions.

The Dreaming in Australia...

And the conversation continues...

I said earlier that I'm taking "the communication perspective" - treating communication the way that you, Barnett and Kim Pearce, talk about it and the way it is viewed in CMM (The Coordinated Management of Meaning.) Barnett and Kim can I invite you to share saying something about this?

When we talk about the communication perspective, we mean treating communication as substantive (an object in itself, not just a means of transmitting information about other things) and constitutive (its characteristics generate the social worlds in which we live.) "Speech acts" is one way of naming those moments when coordination and meaning making/management come together. CMM is a way of seeing and a set of tools for understanding how social worlds are (re)made through coordinated actions and making/managing meaning.

The other night I watched a fascinating program about a man who swims unimpeded with great white sharks. He talked about how he has learned to understand them through observation; his conclusion-we need not fear them. And to prove his point, he swims with them! As I was watching the underwater dance between this man and the sharks, I imagined the sharks being quite aware of their surroundings-the man, the camera he was holding in front of him, the other fish, the boat above them....I also imagined the sharks being unaware of the water that they were swimming in because of its ubiquitous nature. I flashed to human communication; from birth to death we are swimming in patterns of communication. And for us, these patterns are ubiquitous and mostly out of awareness because we are never not engaged in them. We feel the consequences of our communicating, just as sharks experience the consequences of polluted or healthy oceanic waters, but we don't "see" the patterns themselves.

I know I'm conscious of the power of communication in theory but I think there are a lot of days that can go by when I'm not conscious of it in practice - in the moment. And I get sloppy about it or caught up in the flow of work or life in general and don't give communication the time it deserves. But why do you think it is that we are so unskilled at seeing and attending to it in general?

One answer is that we have been raised and trained not to see it. About 400 years ago, two extremely influential philosophers, John Locke and David Hume, asserted that communication is a tool for the transmission of pure ideas: the ideas themselves were what mattered and not the vehicle for expressing and exchanging them. That view of communicating took hold and, metaphorically, "went viral" because 400 years later, it is still how we understand and know communication. And because it is the lens through which we see and understand our communicating, we have developed a "learned incapacity" to see differently. It's time to expand our vision and to take up a new lens. To go back to my previous metaphor, we need to become aware of "what we're swimming in" and how the water is affecting every aspect of our lives. To do this requires an "unlearning" and a "new learning" of what's happening every time we're communicating.

Sometimes we find ourselves tripping over (reflecting on) the complexity, unable to act. Honoring complexity and connectedness is a practice that invites embracing uncertainty and messiness. It's not just the practice of presence or connectedness but the practice to lean into the unknown and the mess of creating with.

I agree with you, Saliha and I think Erin is practicing that. This dialogic dissertation (instead of an expert driven model) is messy and full of unknowns - both of which are common in creating new possibilities like systems that promote well-being. Meaning and change are created through this kind of action. If we want something different, we need this practice.

Thanks, Nong. There are a lot of conversations about action in/and research that I think are interesting. One conversational turn that caught my attention years ago was a 2001 article that Peter, you and Bill Torbert wrote called "The Action Turn: Toward a Transformational Social Science." It's about increasing what you call the validity, the practical significance and the transformational potential of social science and the need for an action turn which will complement "the linguistic turn" in the social sciences. One of things I appreciated about it is how you talk about that as a "turn" - something like growth and evolution in what we value or how we approach research.

Acting with mindfulness of what we're creating/mindful action is something I see as a practice - an ongoing practice with continual choices. Not something we master once but something that happens in ongoing ways. Katharina, that may connects with what you were saying about sometimes not paying attention to it or feeling sloppy. Practice is a way of living into, ripening, nurturing, cultivating, bringing out and co-enacting theories or ways of being so that we're more likely to act in wise or mindful ways with more and more frequency or in more and more turns. I find that as very important in co-enacting well-being and better worlds. So you could say that in this dissertation I'm expanding on your suggestion, Peter, of an action turn and inviting us into a - "practice turn." We can practice mindfulness of what we're making in our Ph.D. ecologies all the time - in any turn so that what we're doing may contribute to well-being.

I really like that way of thinking about it!!!! As a practice turn!!!!

If we're really serious about our personal and social evolution, we need to commit to daily practices that grow our heart and expand our minds. Practice... and support from others!

Thanks! Yes, I haven't emphasized support and community very much yet and it's important!

The history of transformational phenomena - the Internet, for example, or paradigm shifts in science, or the spread of a new religion - suggests that transformation happens less by arguing cogently for something new than by generating active, ongoing practices that shift a culture's experience of the basis for reality.

In our book The Art of Possibility, we offer practices that are transformational - ones that may "feel" illogical or counterintuitive to our normal understanding of how things operate. Their purpose is to initiate a new approach to current conditions, based on uncommon assumptions about the nature of the world. The practices in our book are geared towards causing a total shift in posture, perceptions, beliefs and thought processes.

Akin to what Erin's dissertation is asking us to do - to make shifts in our Ph.D. ecologies in a way that you could say is, for some of us, a total shift in posture, perceptions, beliefs and thought processes.

And practices - even if they are simple, aren't always easy. They take time and commitment.

I remember a dispiriting moment in a cello lesson with my teacher, Mr. Hebert Withers. He was eighty-three years old, and I was eleven. I had tried to play a passage, but I couldn't make it work. I tried again, and it didn't work, and a third time, and I was no more successful. I remember making a frustrated grimace and putting down my bow. The elderly Mr. Withers leaned over me and whispered, "What? You've been practicing it for three minutes, and you STILL can't play it?"

laugh

Practices take a good deal more than three minutes to master. Additionally, everything you think and feel and see around you will argue against them. It takes dedication, a leap of faith and yes, practicing!

It's been a fascinating experience for me to work with this dissertation AS a practice - not just ABOUT practice. Like you just talked about, there was a lot that "argued against" or made it challenging to do this as a practice but it's really been so generative - in all parts of my life. A lot of people have shared stories with me about how this dissertation has helped remind them that they have choices - has helped them re-ground in what they know or to begin to practice in a different kind of way - one that has helped them step out of the day to day flow of things to think about their choices with their kids, other family members, friends and colleagues.

We have more possibilities available in each moment than we realize.

I really like those questions about what we're making, how and how to create a better world. I have started asking myself those questions as a parent about what I'm doing, what I can do differently.

I think about a conversation you and I had a while ago about the relational acts of compassion, empathy, joy (all of which I see as being critical to a world full of well-being.) You invited me into a conversation with Kim Pearce about the co-enactment of compassion - a terrific referral. I'm bringing it up here because these words are not often used in scholarly conversations without people cringing except when the conversation is about spiritual domains, or maybe in the world of therapy. I don't know. But they are very important ways of being to cultivate in the world. Since these conversations, I have been thinking about ways I can cultivate them in my work and with my family. Far from just being in the domain of spirituality or therapy, I see it as related to being intentional about my business practices and what kind of a leader I am...what kind of environment I help create.

...Love, empathy, compassion etc. are things which we perform (communication is performative, of course.), but our ability to perform them depends on the situations in which we are acting. So the questions that present themselves include: how can we call into being the episodes which express and enable the development of preferred states of mind and what states of mind call into being and express preferred social worlds?

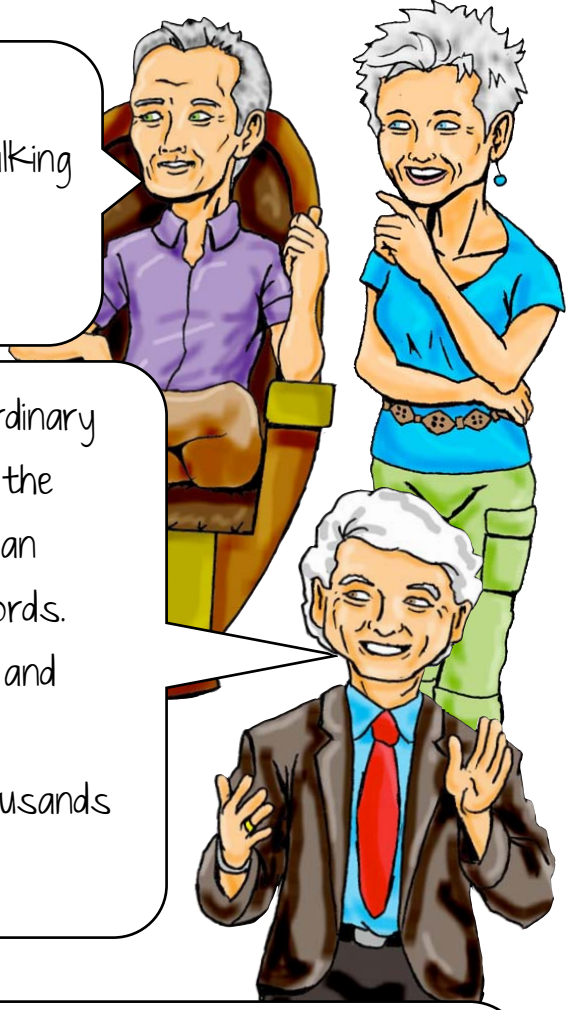
My mother had a wonderful sense of humor, and I learned from her that the highest forms of understanding we can achieve are laughter and human compassion.

You mentioned, Alex about these not being words we usually use. Words are powerful. And we often don't agree on what words to use...Naming can be at the center of many stalled dialogues. I wonder if there have been tensions for you, Erin in how to name things or what words to use - particularly since all of us here come from such a diversity of traditions and disciplines - each with our own jargon?

Oh gosh yes!!! There has been all kinds of tension around words and only some of that was because of differences in our vocabularies! More on that soon but specifically to your question...

We have a lot of diversity in the experiences, entry-points, communities, histories etc. that we bring into this conversation - including diversity of language and framing. I'd really like to invite you to engage with any of the language I am using as something like a placeholder for an experience or as signposts to help us orient or look towards something (often something ineffable!) or as being reminders of a kind of lived experience rather than seeing the words as having one rigid meaning - something reify-able or objective or being the experience itself rather than helping remember or orient towards it. And if you have other language which you find valuable and can share with us, please do! That diversity is welcome here! Goodness knows, I often had a hard time finding words that I felt could serve as the reminders or signposts or invitations I'd like them to be so I'm particularly excited to hear other ideas. And I hope this open or spacious relationship with the words will be generative for our conversation and the communication patterns/ worlds we're making as we engage together.

I can appreciate how hard it can be to find words that are a good fit for what you are talking about. We work in a arena where words mean specific things and they matter a great deal.



It is hard to fit any new ideas into ordinary language. The language we use today is the product of previous generations of human struggles to fit their experience into words. That's why languages change over time and successive editions of dictionaries include thousands of new words and drop thousands of words that have fallen out of use.

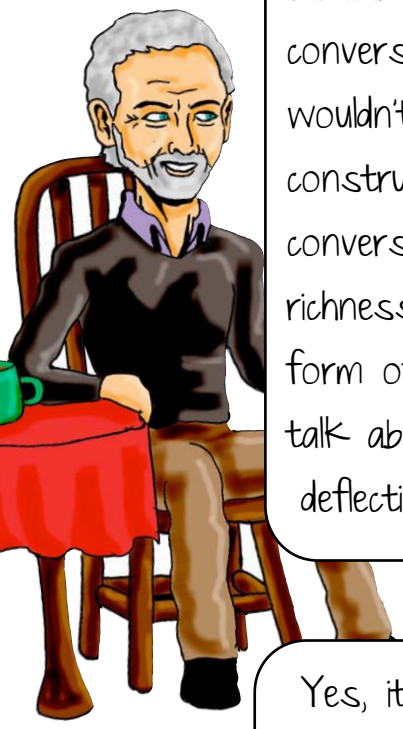
Yes - some of the language we are currently using to name things is a reflection of and in some ways reinforces colonized ideas about what is valuable, good or even real. Sometimes naming is equated with making something "True." It's known, it's named, it is "Reality" as if their cultural standpoint is the only (valid) cultural standpoint.

I learned very early the difference between knowing the name of something and knowing something. You can know the name of a bird in all the languages of the world, but when you're finished, you'll know absolutely nothing whatever about the bird... So let's look at the bird and see what it's doing – that's what counts.

If we think about it, life resists definition. How can we truly know things that continuously change, are impossible to pin down, and are always open to interpretation?

Saliha, you said in an early draft of this that you couldn't quite name some of what I was doing but you were experiencing it. It was performative. I appreciated that you could be with that without feeling like you needed to define it.

It has been interesting for me as a host/author to consider the different cultures/communities/traditions around words we all bring into the conversation and what I want to invite - Knowing terminology plays a part in that. And I love hearing other people suggest naming for things - so many of you are much more poetic, playful, skillful and artistic with words than I am. And we use different terms in different communities, eh? Some of you would suggest that a word or term needed to be defined because no one will know what it means while others of you felt you were very familiar with that term and defining them takes away from the conversational flow. Also, a couple of times I heard certain language wouldn't be "academic enough" for people and I wondered what constructions we were reinforcing with that. On occasion, conversations about language felt less like suggestions to add richness or because someone needed clarification and more like a form of resistance (the gunboat metaphor, Ken?) like the kind you talk about in The Answer To How Is Yes", Peter. Almost as a deflection from other questions or other engagement.



Interesting

Yes, it was fascinating. All of these experiences helped remind me again and again about the powerful role of language in how we make, manage, coordinate, reinforce and alter meaning... Words are actions and inform actions.

Hum...
Words are actions and inform actions...

One Song

Every war and every conflict
Between human beings has happened
Because of some disagreement about names.
It is such an unnecessary foolishness,
Because just beyond the arguing
There is a long table of companionship
Set and waiting for us to sit down.
What is praised is one, so the the praise is one, too,
Many jugs being poured into a huge basin.
All religions, all this singing, one song.
The differences are just illusion and vanity.
Sunlight looks a little different
On this wall than it does on that one,
But it is still one light.
We have borrowed these clothes,
These time-and-space personalities,
From a light, and when we praise,
We are pouring the, back in.
...Rumi

Now
I understand
what she means

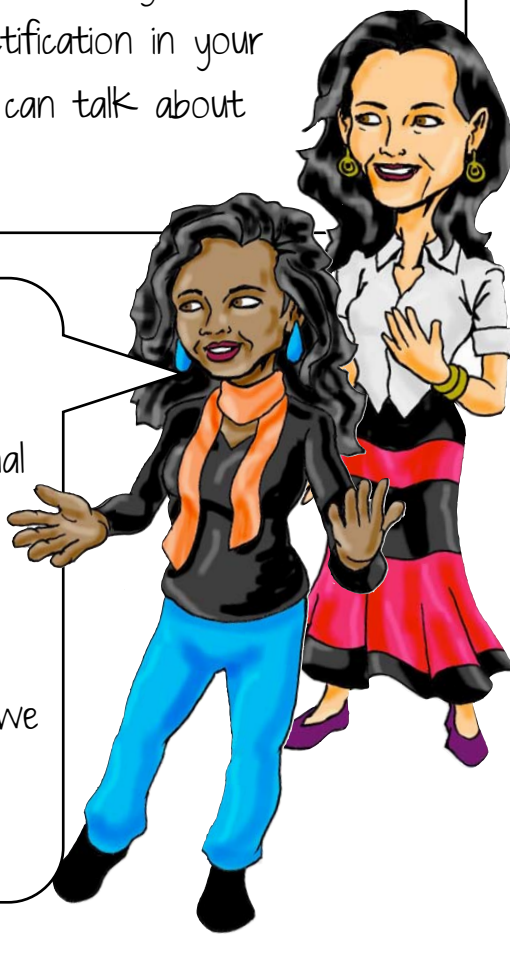
Mmmmm. Thank you for that.

You all are so wonderful!! I knew you'd all add such richness to this conversation! Thank you.

In this dissertation, I want us to have enough shared understanding and enough spaciousness that we can have a generative conversation together. And I trust that we can work with the language we're each using and ask questions when clarification is helpful.

A couple of the linguistic choices I have made have been...how can I say this...have been *around* a word or phrase rather then *of* it. Take the adjective "better" as an example as in "better futures and worlds." I haven't tried to operationalize the adjective in a way which hems us in but have put descriptors in parentheses which are shimmers of ideas that may help invite a concept we can work with. Similarly, I will often combine phrases with a slash (/) to help invoke or orient us towards/direct us to look to a concept or experience that we could name in a variety of ways rather than putting the attention on one word/one particular way of naming it. Also, I know that for me as well as some others of us trying to articulate and name profound insights/experiences (for example interbeing/relational being/oneness...) can be challenging given that the language we have available often comes out of other constructions! And, I suspect the ineffability of certain experiences may be or can be an important part of learning and practice - it certainly has been for me. If I can add one more layer here, I have found that trying to language an (intimately) profound experience often takes me further from the experience rather than bringing it alive which is fascinating in a practice-led inquiry - this dissertation - undertaken within a system that has been constructed as often having written words/a written document of some length at it's center. (Elizabeth, you have talked about language and objectification in your book The Power of an Open Question. Maybe we can talk about that later if people are interested...)

I see you make another language choice which is the graphic narrative style. It engages us visually as well as creating visual metaphors, just like the words do. This unsettles the traditional academic writing style which is central to what I see you doing here. This style is a tangible way to question that which we take for granted. By performing as a graphic narrative writer, I see you as NOT living into what Sheila states are the ways "we act into and out of realities that we often don't question and therefore don't realize our own participation in recreating"

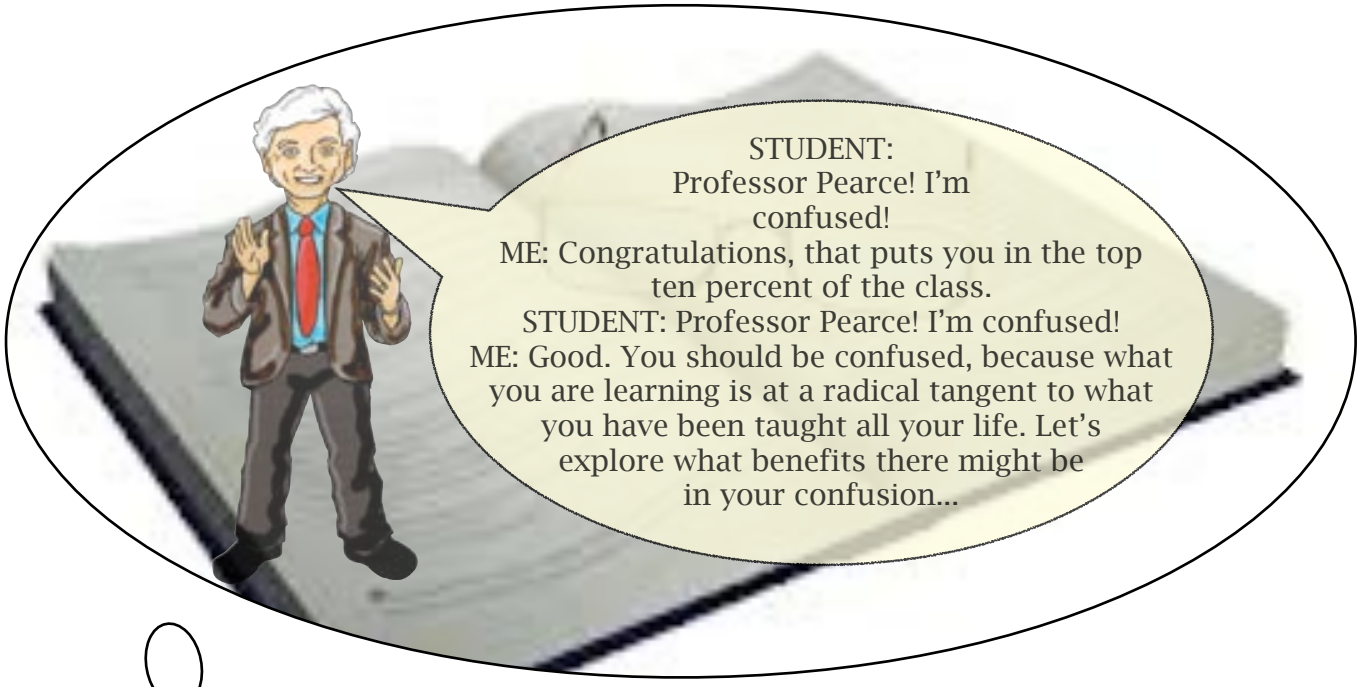


I see this space as making multiple worlds or realities; as playing into and producing multiple discourses. Being in conversation with so many different people is inherently situating you to be in multiple discourse communities. And your mindfulness about them and who you attend to/how are all choice points. This is a space, a conversation, a written document and a practice. It is performative and a performance. Creating that which you are in conversation with (performative) and creating a thing (performance). It is a practice and mindfulness of practice. It is an invitation to the practice and production of the practice

I'd agree with all of that, Saliha and I think the concept is marvellous. And it also sounds like a huge project (with all those choices there is so much to pay attention to - especially when everyone has different ideas about what makes for a "good" dissertation or a "good performance" or "a good conversation" or "a good written document."...) and this, being a dissertation is potentially a really scary project to be "unsettling" academic traditions! I think what you doing is great, Erin and also really hard. Like I said before, I think you are brave to be able to do something that you believe in - to be able to innovate and try something out when many people may reject because it IS "unsettling" to them and those same people have power over you in terms of sanctioning your work. It seems that sometimes in academia we don't want to allow space for something new, for innovative ideas and ways of doing things, even though our whole business, really, is about discovery. Or maybe we allow for new ideas but only ones we can be absolutely sure about, "prove" to be worthwhile, not ones we're trying out or playing with especially not when they unsettle other people's ideas or ways of doing things. It's like we bias towards the science instead of the art of discovery.

The scientist has a lot of experience with ignorance and doubt and uncertainty, and this experience is of very great importance, I think. When a scientist doesn't know the answer to a problem, he is ignorant. When he has a hunch as to what the result is, he is uncertain. And when he is pretty damn sure of what the result is going to be, he is still in some doubt. We have found it of paramount importance that in order to progress, we must recognize our ignorance and leave room for doubt. Scientific knowledge is a body of statements of varying degrees of certainty – some most unsure, some nearly sure, but none absolutely certain...Our freedom to doubt was born out of a struggle against authority in the early days of science. It was a very deep and strong struggle: permit us to question – to doubt – to not be sure. I think that it is important that we do not forget this struggle and thus perhaps lose what we have gained...

This is not a new idea; this is the idea of the age of reason. This is the philosophy that guided the men who made the democracy that we live under. The idea that no one really knew how to run a government led to the idea that we should arrange a system by which new ideas could be developed, tried out, tossed out, more new ideas brought in; a trial and error system. This method was a result of the fact that science was already showing itself to be a successful venture at the end of the 18th century. Even then it was clear to socially minded people that the openness of the possibilities was an opportunity, and that doubt and discussion were essential to progress into the unknown. If we want to solve a problem that we have never solved before, we must leave the door to the unknown ajar.


STUDENT:
Professor Pearce! I'm confused!
ME: Congratulations, that puts you in the top ten percent of the class.
STUDENT: Professor Pearce! I'm confused!
ME: Good. You should be confused, because what you are learning is at a radical tangent to what you have been taught all your life. Let's explore what benefits there might be in your confusion...

I hadn't thought about it that way! And maybe we need to remember that more than we do. I think we have created a system where students re-produce what we as faculty, advisors, supervisors etc. think is "good" and what we think is "good" is sometimes based on what will get published and acknowledged" which is based on what people already think is "good." Not much room for innovation.
When I was working on my dissertation, I was always trying to guess what people would be looking for and how they would want it presented. Sometimes my focus on what the examiners would approve became what was MOST important.
Erin, can you say more about how worked with that pressure when you make your choices?

Well, let's see... I think how much/in what ways I focused on what people might want, accept or expect made a difference in my stress level, how I was engaging and how much I was learning/how generative this inquiry was - especially at the beginning of my writing. Saliha, do you remember me feeling stressed or held back about "can't"s when we first met in NYC? I drew this storyline when I got home.

You may not be able to see the details, but it basically reads that I was engaged with this great inquiry with all kinds of possibilities and resources (including who came before me) and then I started to really be impacted by people's negative stories about our Ph.D. ecologies and their sense of being stifled until I too started to feel stifled myself (and constrained and small and frustrated and stuck.) Then I went to a great conference about CMM at Colombia University and just after that, Saliha, you told me to go ahead and open up - trust in our relationship. I appreciated that. And I did reorient to possibility - not easily but with intention because I believed choices matter.

This inquiry matters. Because we make our worlds.

I'm glad you could do that. A lot of people are really passionate about their research and then loose that passion as they jump through hoops and try to fit what they are doing into an acceptable form. And many people don't regain their passion or they still have passion for the subject but no longer associate that passion with their research, their dissertation.

That was a theme in the narratives I heard, too.

Having structure and knowing what you need to do can often feel liberating for people although feeling like you have no choices or that a structure is imposed on you can feel disempowering...frustrating... negatively impact creativity or transformational learning and breakthroughs which benefit the field.

So choice and spaciousness or flexibility are important and one question we may need to consider, or at least "I" may need to consider, is how to help create that sense of choice and possibility without it feeling overwhelming like everything is a choice point you have to consider.

There are people who work better in a structured space and many who want the openness and spaciousness and the current system doesn't often allow for that. And whether we realize it or not, are conscious or intentional or not, we're always making choices.

Like the body-mind perspective of breathing. It happens whether we attend to it or not.

Though quality of breath can change when attending to it and that can be a transformative practice.

I like those ideas - that choices re like breathing, they happen whether we attend to them or not and attending to them can impact quality in transformative ways.

People in our ecology often talk about overwhelm and trying to find a kind of stable ground from which to organize the world or at least their data, experiences, literature, committees, the system and many people alter these (choose what to leave out, add in, pay particular attention to) to suit their inquiry. That has interesting implications including sometimes what kinds of policies and protocol are created based on that research. I wonder what difference feeling you have choices you can make (you'll be supported in making choices) and practicing with presence or mindfulness to notice/discern choice points and to be able to respond into those choices wisely or with intention might make?

I have a good friend whose husband was working on his doctorate in biochemistry/cancer research. He experienced a lot of pressure for his experiments to produce particular results and his advisor was going to keep him in the program until he felt the results were satisfactory - the results were what they were hoping for. He felt quite a lot of pressure after a few years to ignore certain things he was seeing and instead focus on or enhance findings which didn't actually seem as significant. That choice can have ramifications for many of us in our ecology because it's research like that which leads to medical protocol. That's always bothered me. And what bothers me more, of course, is how common this seems to be in the bio sciences.

Um-hum...Yes, I agree.

I'm continually asking questions about how I'd like to act into this relationship, what kind of a world I'm contributing to with this/that choice and for me, this practice has good for my inquiry and for well-being. I do understand how it can feel overwhelming for people. A lot in our ecology does, actually. In case it's useful for anyone you know, one (of many) things that can make a difference is how we hold our choices - I'm inspired by your teachings here, Pema, on holding things lightly. Those were great guidance when I had to make choices when many options seemed like good ones. You also offer that "the journey of awakening happens just at the place where we can't get comfortable" and that was wisdom I kept coming back to again and again. What stories/context we're privileging/foregrounding is another. For example, if the highest level of context/the most important story for choices is about the "right/correct answer" from the position that there IS one right choice, that may invite a different experience than if the context is one that is about innovation, learning or being present to what is unfolding in each turn.

And like we talked about earlier, not every choice will call forth the same things for everyone, eh? For example, I'm conscious about not wanting to take long turns in this conversation. I can explain why later but know it would be easy for me to - there are many angles, scenarios, experiences, stories I could share. Some of you may appreciated me sharing a lot of those in long turns - would love the breadth and may expect that as evidence of doctoral level thinking as informed by your culture, community or experiences... For others it would feel disengaging, overwhelming or like your head is going to explode. I have been given both those kinds of feedback in drafts where I took long turns. I tried to move forward with this relational mindfulness (or what Barnett has called interactional mindfulness or communication literacy.) It's been a great practice. And it IS a practice! One that takes practice...

Interactional mindfulness. I like that. If I can go back to what you were saying about not everyone responding to turns in the same way, that's something important to remember. Trying to please everyone (as we often try to do with examiners and peer reviewers - as diverse as they may be) never works well! Especially not for innovation. Though I think you want to please people ENOUGH that they see your work as valid and so give you space to do it.

I was thinking of it as wanting to have enough of a shared meaning that we could be in dialogue and I did make choices that I thought would help eliminate "noise" so that we could engage in dialogue. And, you know what? I wanted to do that in a way that was respectful and didn't claim or reinforce an idea of superiority of one way of doing things over any others. But which opened up possibilities and invited valuing of different traditions and ways of engaging.

Constructivist ideas invite a radical pluralism, that is, an openness to many ways of naming and valuing. Because there is no foundation for claiming superiority of one's own tradition, one is invited into a posture or curiosity and respect for others. What do other traditions offer that are not contained in one's own, what can be shared of our own that may be of value to others?...The challenge is not to locate "the one best way" but to create the kinds of relationships in which we can collaboratively build our future.

That's my orientation as well. And in the stories I hear, people say academia has "A" tradition which needs to be conformed to - if you don't like it, don't opt into the system. People often said that to me. To me, this is not one size fits all. It's local and choices need to be made locally. The story of one tradition you agree to follow (or get out) creates some invisibility of the vast diversity of practices people are engaging in and also does us a disservice in terms of building a great future.

I've heard that story before, too and it's really frustrating and demotivating. Who does it benefit to think there is only one choice or category of choices and you need to conform or get out? I'm reminded of a quote by bell hooks that "being oppressed means the absence of choices." Our way or the highway is oppressive.

Most of "our way" was created and defined by white, Eurocentric men from the global North.

I believe bell hooks also said something about how the academy is not paradise but learning is a place where paradise can be created and that she entered the classroom with the conviction that it was crucial for her and every other student to be an active participant, not a passive consumer... education as the practice of freedom.... education that connects the will to know with the will to become. I think that's part of what Erin's dissertation and this conversation is about - what practices in academia are keeping us from or connecting us to (and perhaps becoming) paradise.

Thanks everyone. The idea of trying to please everyone comes up a lot. As I spoke to a bit before, in this conversation, instead of thinking I can guess or trying to guess what you (and you, and you, and you, and you...) each might respond well to (and thinking that it would be a good idea to give each of you that even if I could!) I think we set ourselves up for more learning opportunities by all participating in ways that help shape this into something engaging and relationally generative. Sheila and Ken, like I said, the notion/language "relational responsibility" that you've offered us is something I think about. What happens if we see dissertations as relational responsibilities?

I was just talking with a woman over the weekend who is in the final phases of her doctoral work. She said that the hardest, most frustrating, alienating part of the whole process has been working with her committee chair. She said he doesn't want to see anything until she's finished the whole dissertation, that he's really hard to get ahold of - he never returns calls or emails and that she feels like she's been left alone in a process that's about, in her words, joining a community - a community of scholars. Her work has a relational orientation - her whole program does - and yet she felt from her chair's perspective, that she was in this solo. And this experience is contrary to what her research into creativity has demonstrated is important for breakthroughs.

Creativity is very relational.

I wonder how often we think of dissertations themselves as creative work rather than report outs on "findings."

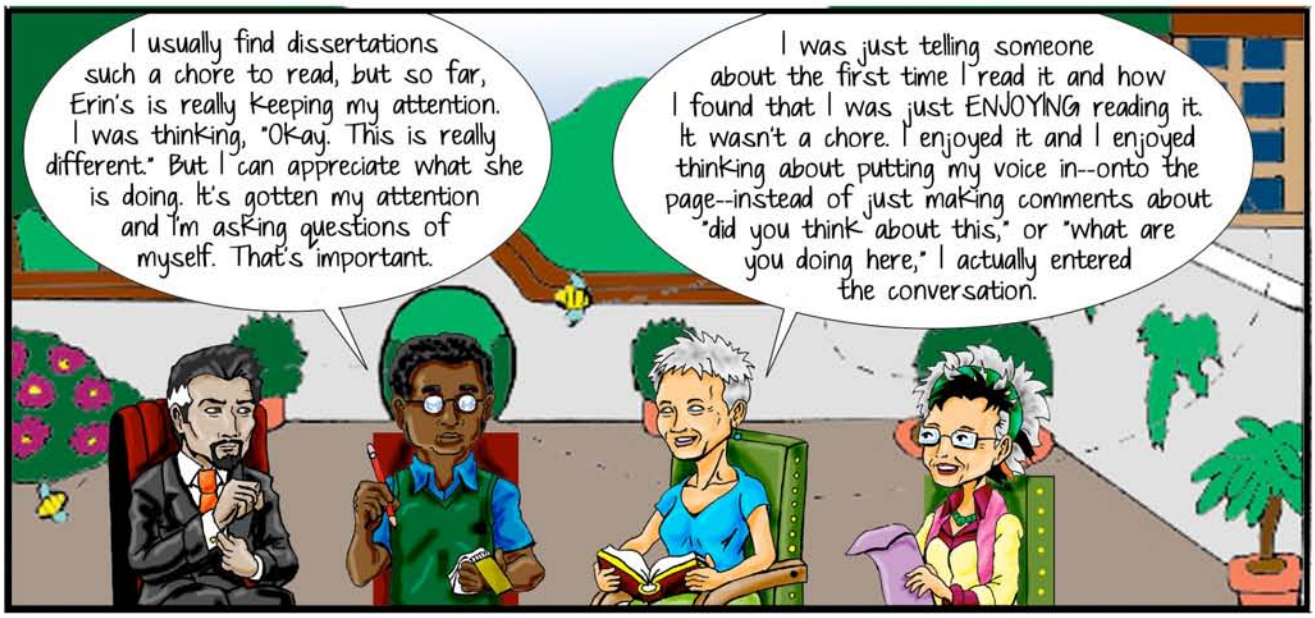
I think many of us see it as creative work. My question is whether we act in ways and create policies or procedures - norms - that support creativity. The head of graduate research at our university made policies to ensure a standard look and approach to doctoral research - not just the dissertation but also for things like how often students and advisors world meet. Although many of us were appalled at the idea of that kind of standardization, many of us were unintentionally expecting standardization even before standardization was made into policy. We're not only very busy but also ultimately want to graduate or have our students graduate and to do that we expect to see what others (examiners, accreditation committees and publishers...) have done and so they expected to see and advise accordingly. That perpetuates the idea that there is a certain way you have to do things rather it being a creative process with choices. And those choices are important for generating "new knowledge" as we like to think of it, which can help mitigate or work towards shifting our toughest societal problems.

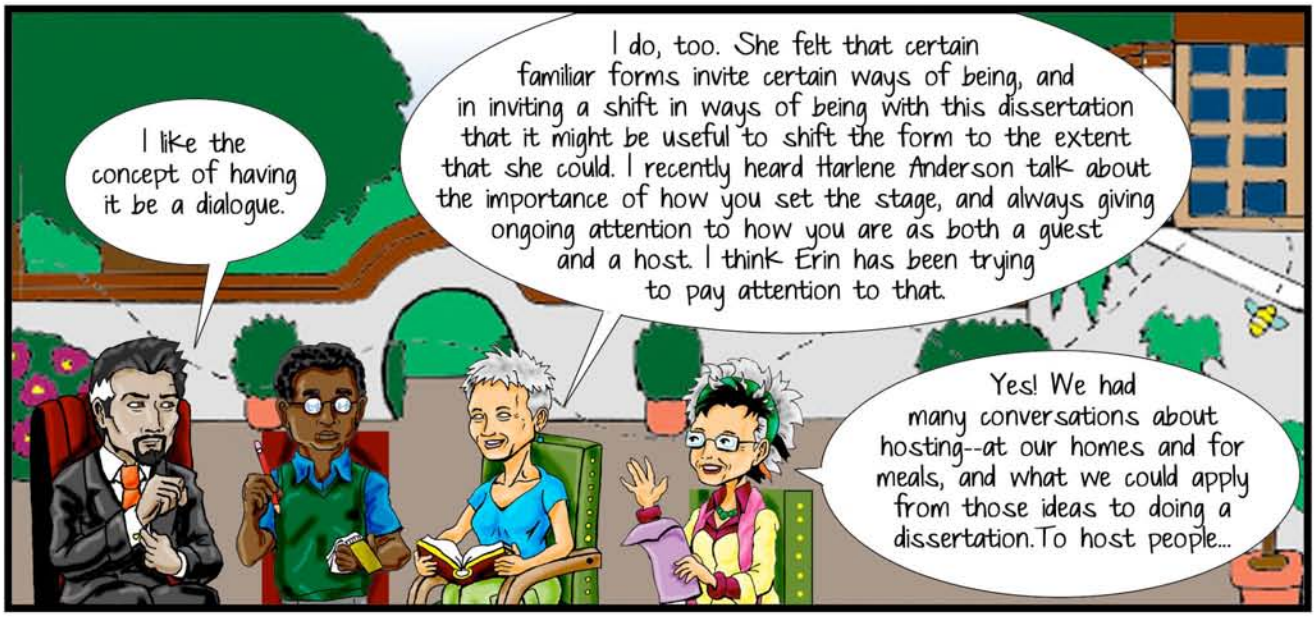
I agree, Nong. I'm seeing more and more clearly how often we are - or I am - making choices in our Ph.D. ecologies that I don't even think about or realize I'm making - and the impacts of those choices. I'm starting to think about choices I make in my role as a leader, and one who will be retiring soon, and I'm also thinking about how I am with my kids - including a conversation I had with one of my son's this morning that I'm now thinking about differently. This is a phenomena you have already talked about, Erin in saying that what we're talking about in Ph.D. ecologies isn't disconnected from what we do other places.

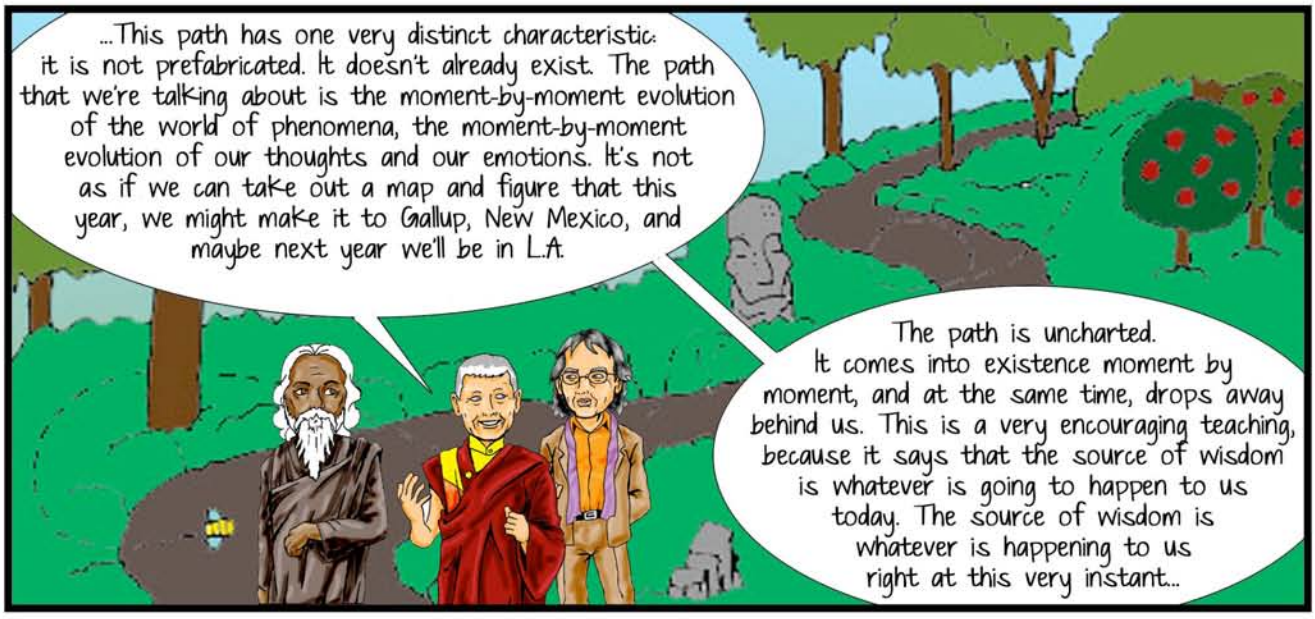
The way I am at work DOES influence the way I am at home. What is the phrase - how you do anything is how you do everything? This is part of your intent with your dissertation, I presume. Actually, I shouldn't assume that.....

And the conversation continues...

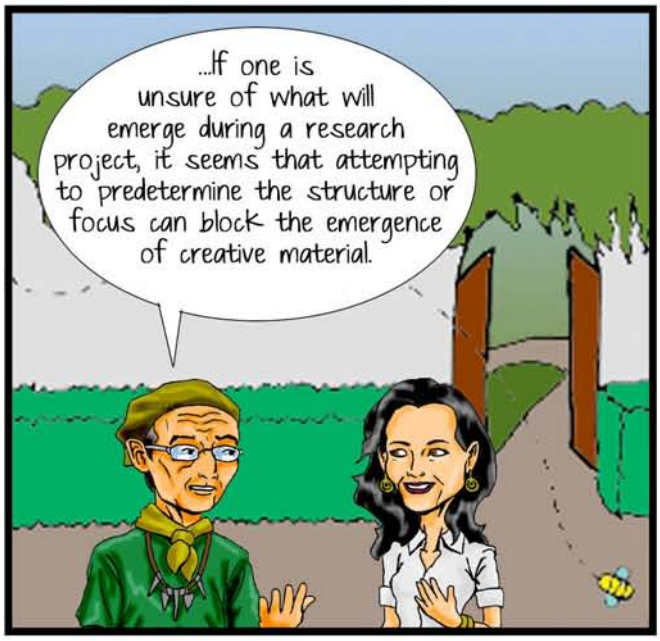
Later ...
These are important conversations. I'm really excited we are having them! And I know there there are some threads that some of you want to follow-up on in pairs or groupings and that there are a few of you who haven't had a chance to meet and chat with each other yet. I'd love you to have that opportunity to do those things. What do you say we take a break before we continue together? Maybe a stretch and some food out in the courtyard? Attend to our well-being? :)
Good idea
Sounds great!
I could use a stretch.
Thanks - I could use a bite to eat.
Wonderful!


I usually find dissertations such a chore to read, but so far, Erin's is really keeping my attention. I was thinking, "Okay. This is really different." But I can appreciate what she is doing. It's gotten my attention and I'm asking questions of myself. That's important.
I was just telling someone about the first time I read it and how I found that I was just ENJOYING reading it. It wasn't a chore. I enjoyed it and I enjoyed thinking about putting my voice in--onto the page--instead of just making comments about "did you think about this," or "what are you doing here," I actually entered the conversation.

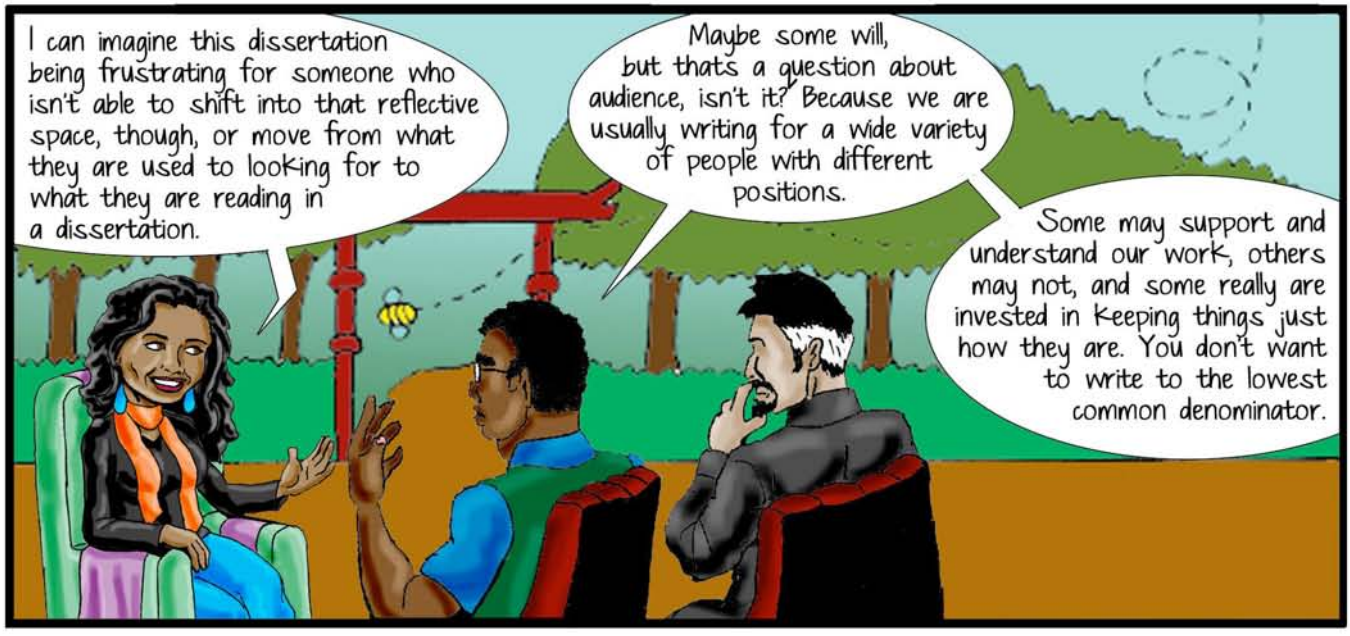

I like the concept of having it be a dialogue.
I do, too. She felt that certain familiar forms invite certain ways of being, and in inviting a shift in ways of being with this dissertation that it might be useful to shift the form to the extent that she could. I recently heard Harlene Anderson talk about the importance of how you set the stage, and always giving ongoing attention to how you are as both a guest and a host. I think Erin has been trying to pay attention to that.
Yes! We had many conversations about hosting--at our homes and for meals, and what we could apply from those ideas to doing a dissertation. To host people...


...This path has one very distinct characteristic: it is not prefabricated. It doesn't already exist. The path that we're talking about is the moment-by-moment evolution of the world of phenomena, the moment-by-moment evolution of our thoughts and our emotions. It's not as if we can take out a map and figure that this year, we might make it to Gallup, New Mexico, and maybe next year we'll be in L.A.
The path is uncharted. It comes into existence moment by moment, and at the same time, drops away behind us. This is a very encouraging teaching, because it says that the source of wisdom is whatever is going to happen to us today. The source of wisdom is whatever is happening to us right at this very instant...

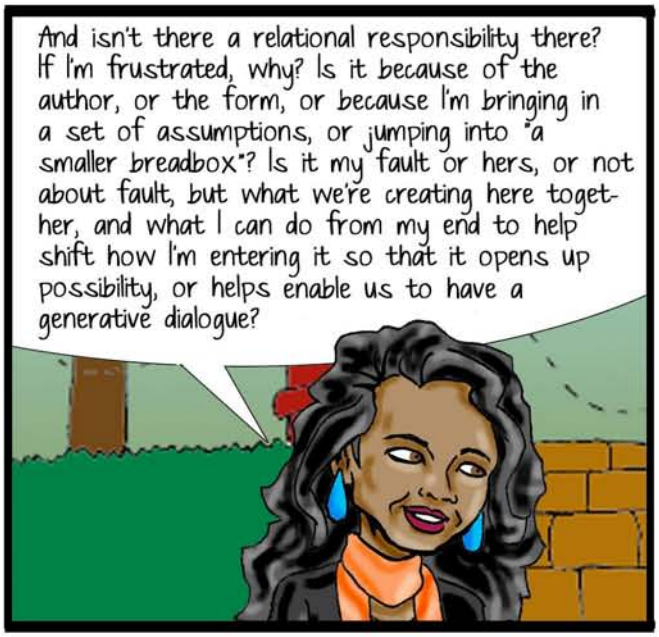
...Which of course leads us to the question of what is a dissertation or why do we do them? Or why would someone who doesn't fit the system want to do one?
Makes me think of other times people have entered a system where they didn't feel wanted. Like women in men-only occupations. Systems evolve and that's often a really good thing.
Can there be an "essence" or is that something that is made in relationship, and therefore always changing as the relationships change...?
Yes. Good point. It also makes me think about what the essence of doctoral work is--what would have to always be there for us to feel it was a dissertation? There's lots of great arts-based dissertations now that vary considerably from scholarly writing of the 1600s. It's such a different socio-historical context now and it seems we need to evolve within it.

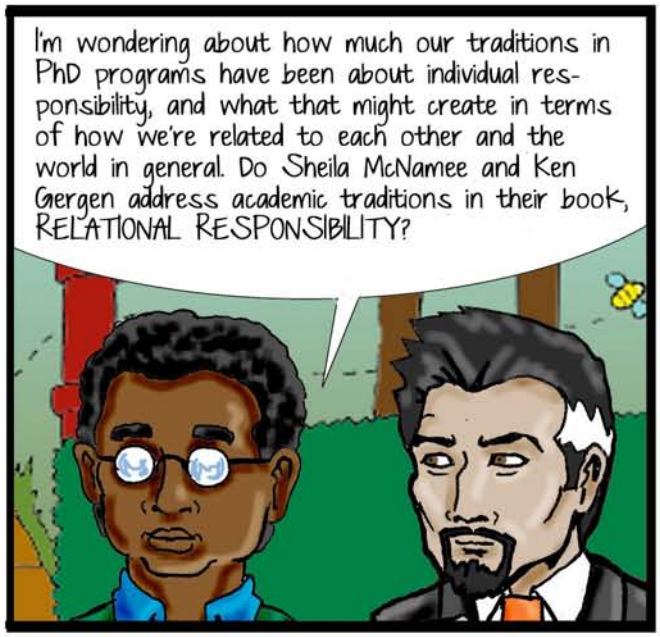

...If one is unsure of what will emerge during a research project, it seems that attempting to predetermine the structure or focus can block the emergence of creative material.

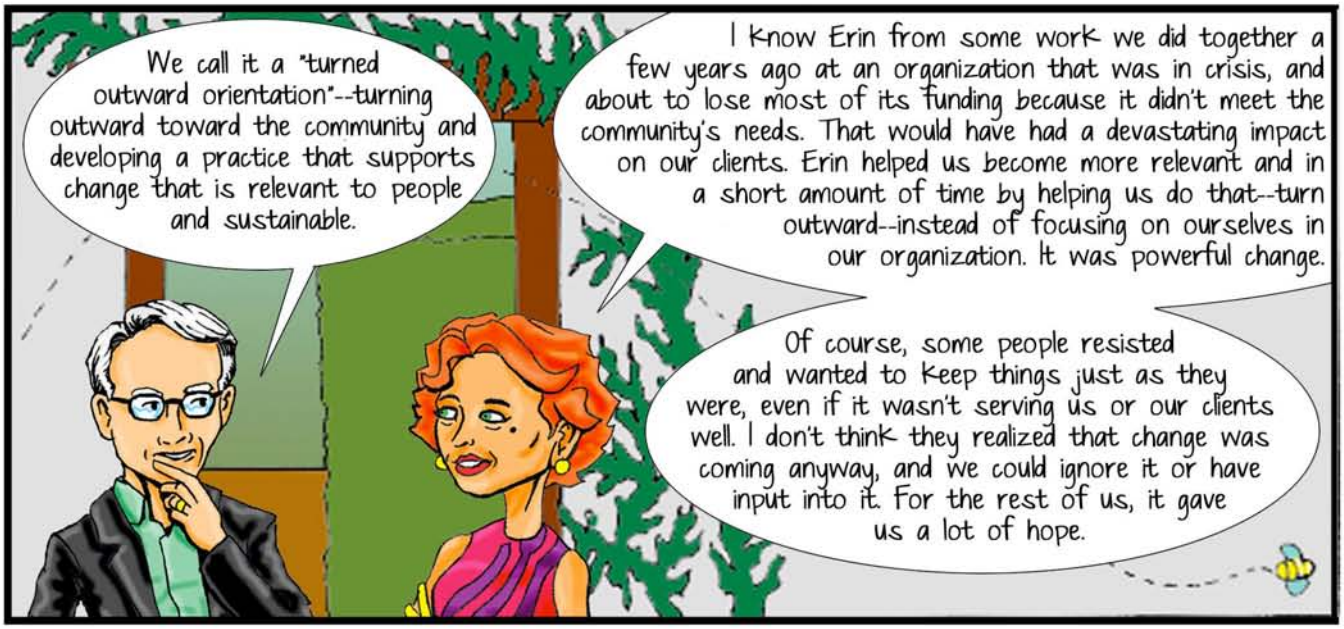
So far I have experienced Erin doing what she says she was trying to do--she helped me shift out of the space I would usually be in when reading a dissertation and what I'd usually be looking for and into...something else. I was definitely thinking. It evoked a lot of questions in me and had a lot of internal dialogue happening--and that's a good thing, a compliment. I felt like it was more a practice of "withness" than "aboutness." I'm excited about the possibilities in what I see here.

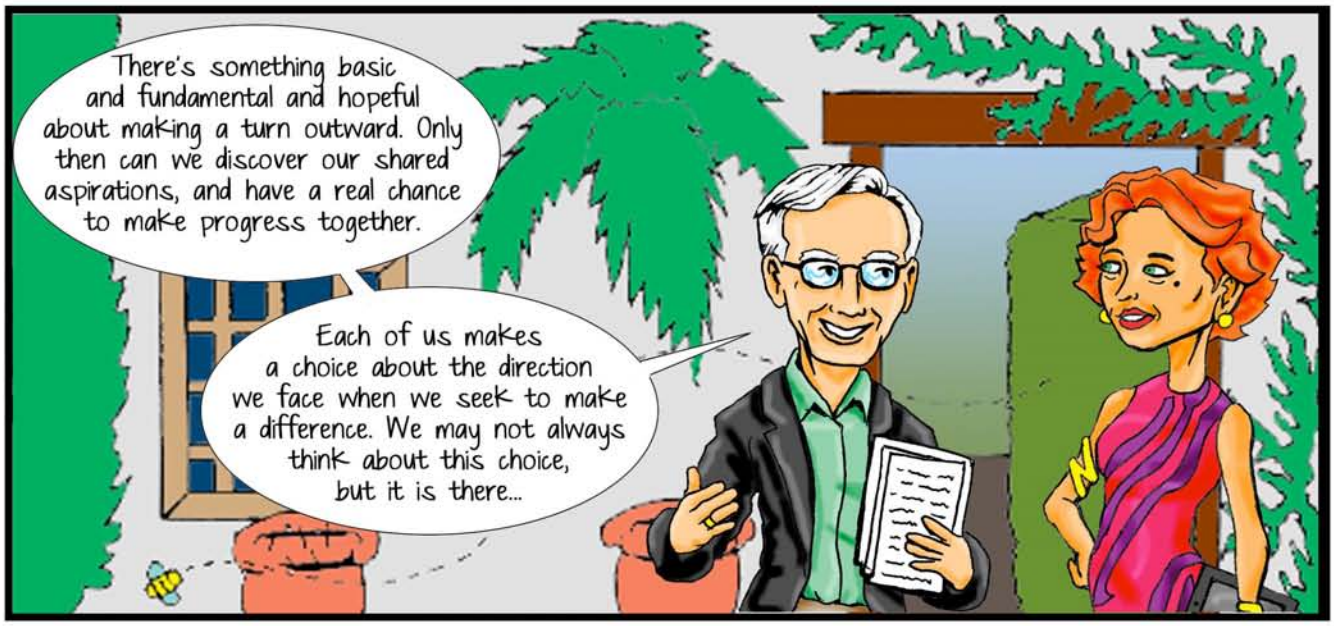

I can imagine this dissertation being frustrating for someone who isn't able to shift into that reflective space, though, or move from what they are used to looking for to what they are reading in a dissertation.
Maybe some will, but that's a question about audience, isn't it? Because we are usually writing for a wide variety of people with different positions.
Some may support and understand our work, others may not, and some really are invested in keeping things just how they are. You don't want to write to the lowest common denominator.

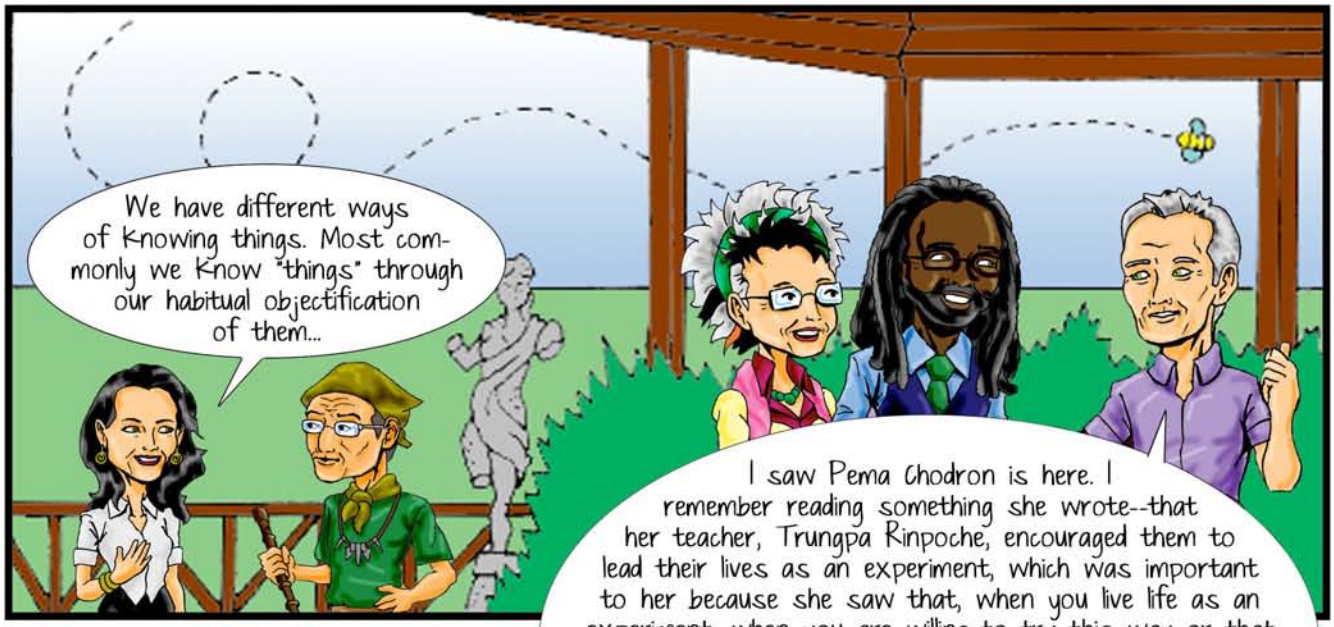
We know what happens to that in classrooms when people teach to that. Or what happens when business leaders want things to match their current thinking instead of letting their thinking evolve. It doesn't usually turn out well for anybody in either case.
What's that quote from Bill Cosby? I think it's "I don't know the key to success, but the key to failure is trying to please everybody."

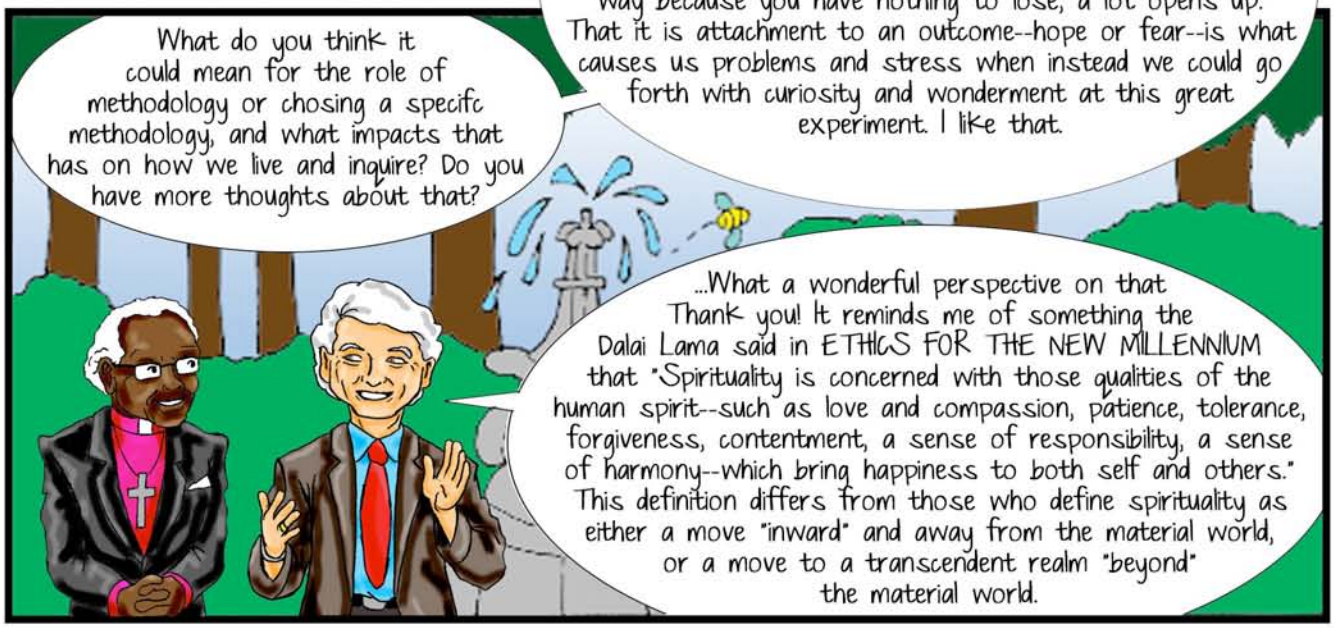

And isn't there a relational responsibility there? If I'm frustrated, why? Is it because of the author, or the form, or because I'm bringing in a set of assumptions, or jumping into "a smaller breadbox"? Is it my fault or hers, or not about fault, but what we're creating here together, and what I can do from my end to help shift how I'm entering it so that it opens up possibility, or helps enable us to have a generative dialogue?

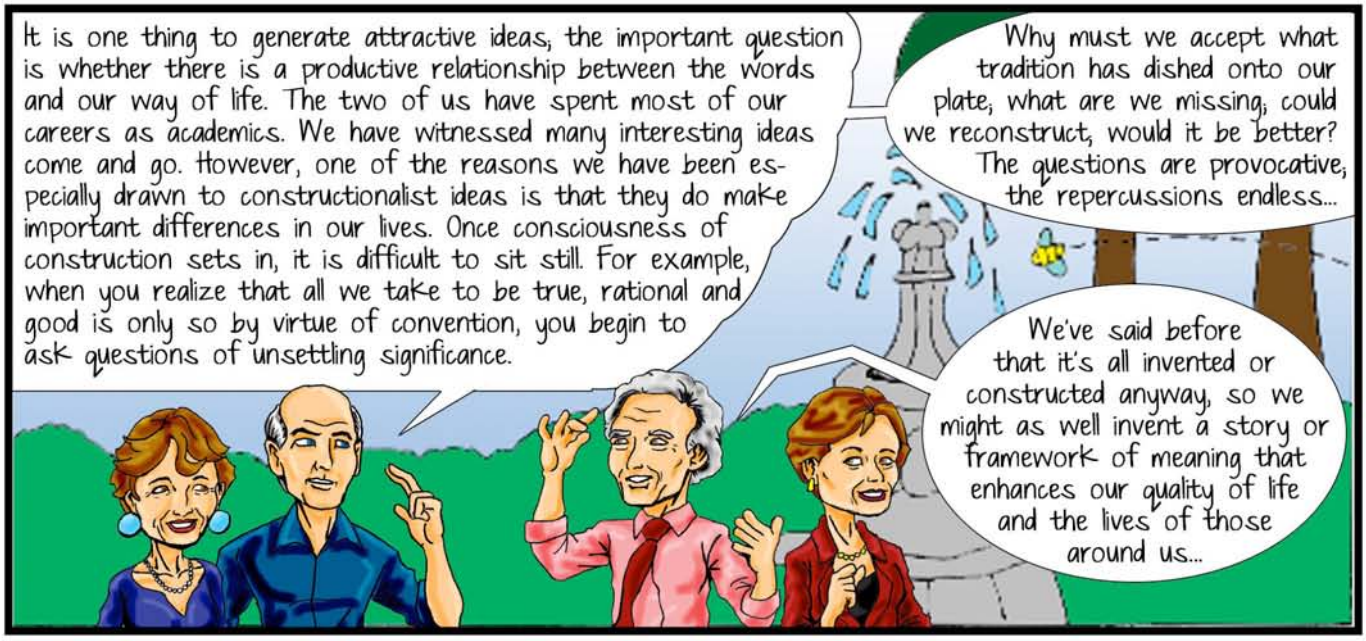

I'm wondering about how much our traditions in PhD programs have been about individual responsibility, and what that might create in terms of how we're related to each other and the world in general. Do Sheila McNamee and Ken Gergen address academic traditions in their book, RELATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY?

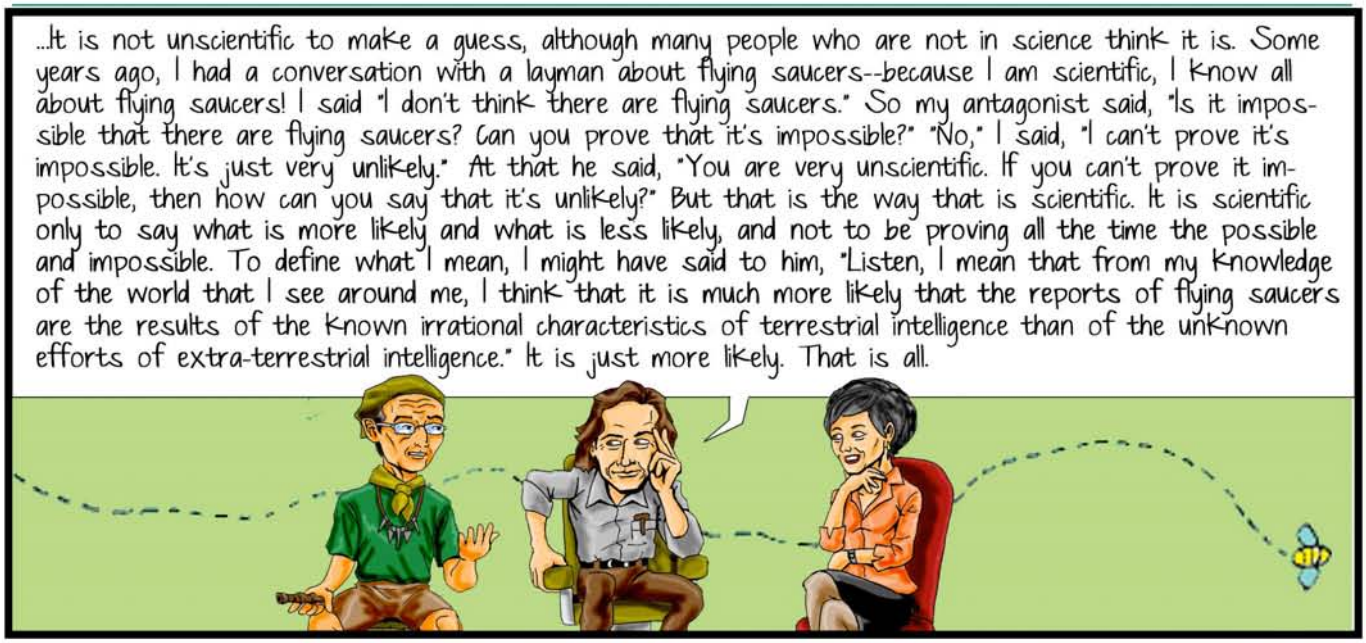

We call it a "turned outward orientation"--turning outward toward the community and developing a practice that supports change that is relevant to people and sustainable.
I know Erin from some work we did together a few years ago at an organization that was in crisis, and about to lose most of its funding because it didn't meet the community's needs. That would have had a devastating impact on our clients. Erin helped us become more relevant and in a short amount of time by helping us do that--turn outward--instead of focusing on ourselves in our organization. It was powerful change.
Of course, some people resisted and wanted to keep things just as they were, even if it wasn't serving us or our clients well. I don't think they realized that change was coming anyway, and we could ignore it or have input into it. For the rest of us, it gave us a lot of hope.

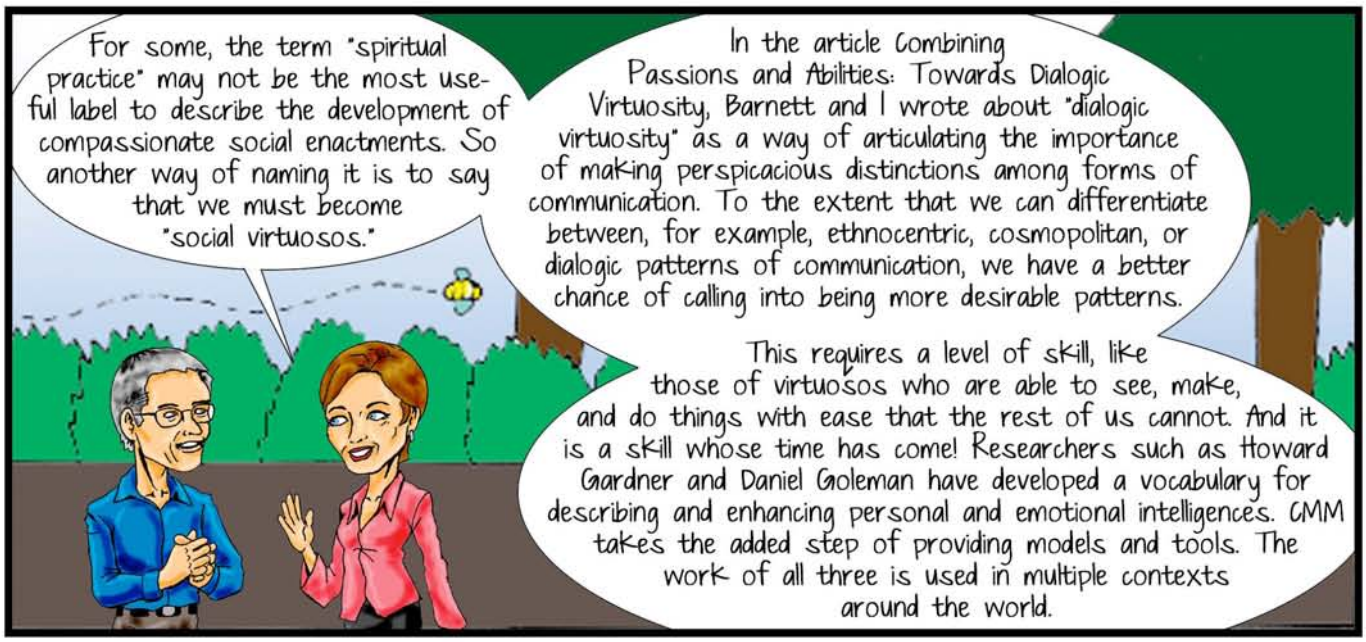

There's something basic and fundamental and hopeful about making a turn outward. Only then can we discover our shared aspirations, and have a real chance to make progress together.
Each of us makes a choice about the direction we face when we seek to make a difference. We may not always think about this choice, but it is there...


We have different ways of knowing things. Most commonly we know "things" through our habitual objectification of them...
I saw Pema Chodron is here. I remember reading something she wrote--that her teacher, Trungpa Rinpoche, encouraged them to lead their lives as an experiment, which was important to her because she saw that, when you live life as an experiment, when you are willing to try this way or that way because you have nothing to lose, a lot opens up. That it is attachment to an outcome--hope or fear--is what causes us problems and stress when instead we could go forth with curiosity and wonderment at this great experiment. I like that.


What do you think it could mean for the role of methodology or chosing a specifc methodology, and what impacts that has on how we live and inquire? Do you have more thoughts about that?
...What a wonderful perspective on that Thank you! It reminds me of something the Dalai Lama said in ETHICS FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM that "Spirituality is concerned with those qualities of the human spirit--such as love and compassion, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, contentment, a sense of responsibility, a sense of harmony--which bring happiness to both self and others." This definition differs from those who define spirituality as either a move "inward" and away from the material world, or a move to a transcendent realm "beyond" the material world.


It is one thing to generate attractive ideas, the important question is whether there is a productive relationship between the words and our way of life. The two of us have spent most of our careers as academics. We have witnessed many interesting ideas come and go. However, one of the reasons we have been especially drawn to constructionalist ideas is that they do make important differences in our lives. Once consciousness of construction sets in, it is difficult to sit still. For example, when you realize that all we take to be true, rational and good is only so by virtue of convention, you begin to ask questions of unsettling significance.
Why must we accept what tradition has dished onto our plate, what are we missing, could we reconstruct, would it be better? The questions are provocative, the repercussions endless...
We've said before that it's all invented or constructed anyway, so we might as well invent a story or framework of meaning that enhances our quality of life and the lives of those around us...

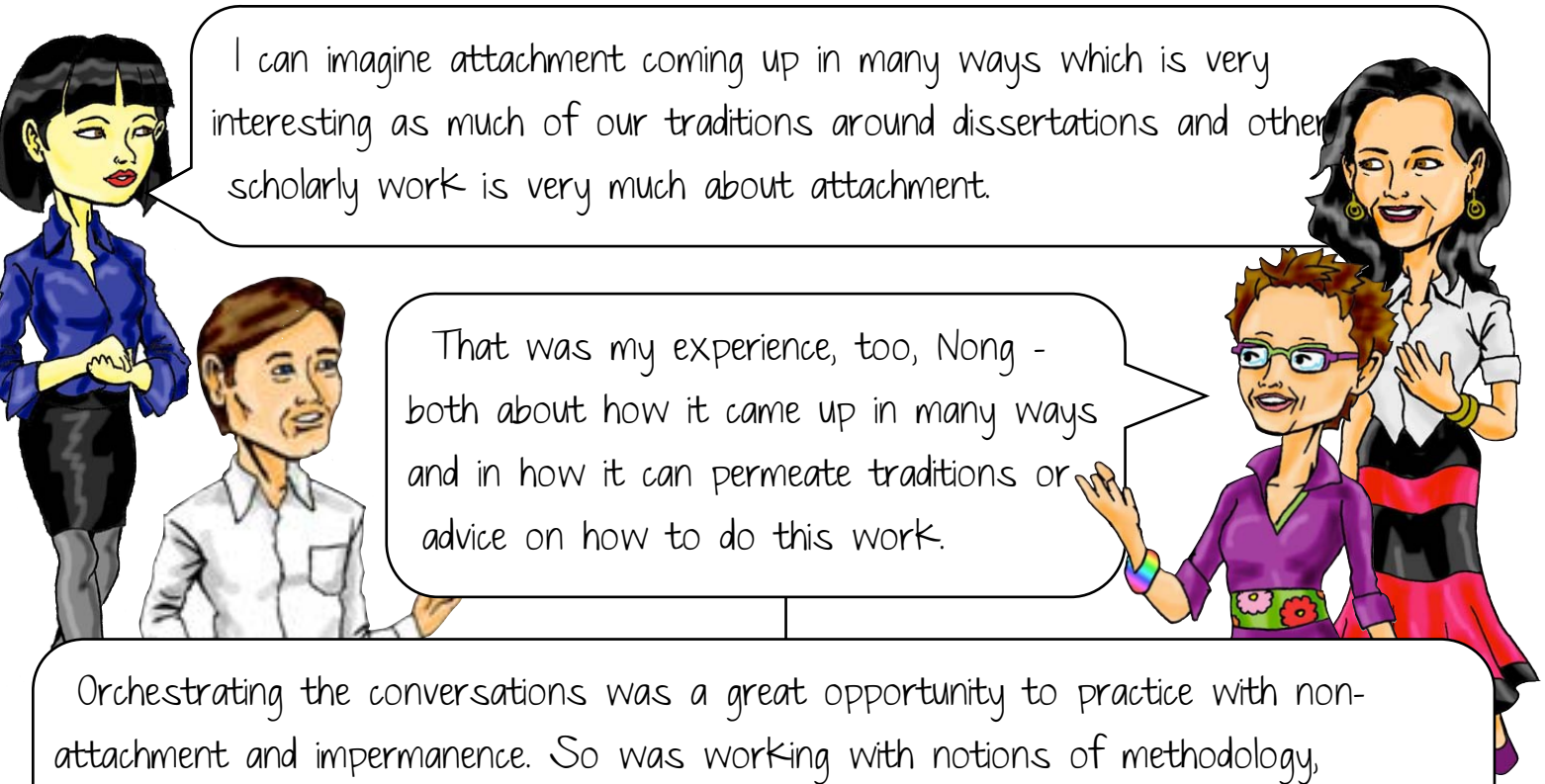

...It is not unscientific to make a guess, although many people who are not in science think it is. Some years ago, I had a conversation with a layman about flying saucers--because I am scientific, I know all about flying saucers! I said "I don't think there are flying saucers." So my antagonist said, "Is it impossible that there are flying saucers? Can you prove that it's impossible?" "No," I said, "I can't prove it's impossible. It's just very unlikely." At that he said, "You are very unscientific. If you can't prove it impossible, then how can you say that it's unlikely?" But that is the way that is scientific. It is scientific only to say what is more likely and what is less likely, and not to be proving all the time the possible and impossible. To define what I mean, I might have said to him, "Listen, I mean that from my knowledge of the world that I see around me, I think that it is much more likely that the reports of flying saucers are the results of the known irrational characteristics of terrestrial intelligence than of the unknown efforts of extra-terrestrial intelligence." It is just more likely. That is all.


For some, the term "spiritual practice" may not be the most useful label to describe the development of compassionate social enactments. So another way of naming it is to say that we must become "social virtuosos."
In the article Combining Passions and Abilities: Towards Dialogic Virtuosity, Barnett and I wrote about "dialogic virtuosity" as a way of articulating the importance of making perspicacious distinctions among forms of communication. To the extent that we can differentiate between, for example, ethnocentric, cosmopolitan, or dialogic patterns of communication, we have a better chance of calling into being more desirable patterns.
This requires a level of skill, like those of virtuosos who are able to see, make, and do things with ease that the rest of us cannot. And it is a skill whose time has come! Researchers such as Howard Gardner and Daniel Goleman have developed a vocabulary for describing and enhancing personal and emotional intelligences. CMM takes the added step of providing models and tools. The work of all three is used in multiple contexts around the world.

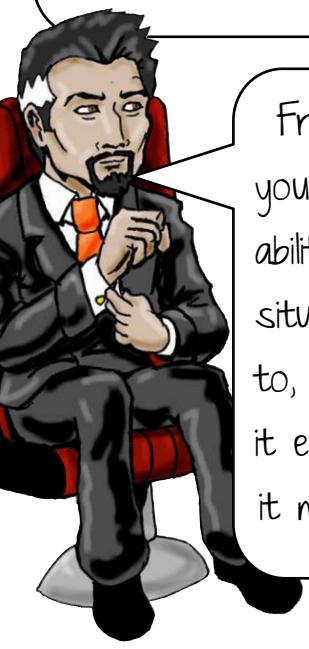
And the conversation continues...

It was. In many ways. There was balancing what I thought was important to bring up (and when) with where the conversations actually took us. And there are many conversations not on the page (when I say "and the conversation continues - I mean it!) This isn't about answers, proof, being comprehensive but even if it was, I couldn't have tried to "capture" everything if I had tried - the observations, reflections, conversations, ah-has were often very organic and came all day each day as I was living life/living this inquiry. It was a great practice to challenge habits and norms of "data collection and recording." Getting stuck in that would have really limited the potential of this inquiry. It was one of the times when habits of punctuation in dissertations came up frequently - where you stand when you are binding starts and ends.

In my experience, people often don't think about or articulate how they are choosing to punctuate. I had a fascinating time trying to fill out an ethics review/IRB form when the expected punctuation was different than how I saw the inquiry. For example, the committee had to approve my plan before I began talking with participants. How do you do that when it was from the conversations with "participants" that the inquiry came about? How do you co-create preferences and understanding around things like privacy before you are in conversation? If this is about "protecting" them, how do I do that without them? It was great fun! Well, it was when I let it be. That took practice, too - around attachment amongst other things.



Orchestrating the conversations was a great opportunity to practice with non-attachment and impermanence. So was working with notions of methodology, positionally, chapters etc. People say I need chapters. Do people need something like chapters or a road map? What does that invite? Are those things what I what I want to create? Do i organize this in a way that is easiest to read or keep with the general zeitgeist or feel of how it all unfolded through your actual participation or something else? Am I feeling like I need to please everyone? What else is informing my choices? Am I honouring people's participation? If someone's question seems redundant, is there something I can change from earlier on to make it more clear or accessible? Is there still value in putting it in the conversation at the point it came to them? Does it feel like I'm honouring people's published work, especially if it comes out of a traditionally academic way of writing when other people are speaking into this in a conversational style?? Lots to reflect on and work with so hard, yes and all of this is part of what made this inquiry so rich for me and so applicable to my whole life.



From knowing you, I'd say it also honors some of the uniqueness you bring to your work, some of your gifts - one of which is the ability to see many possibilities, choices and the patterns present in any situation. I'm really glad you didn't edit that out. I know it was tempting to, you could have conformed to what was familiar for people to make it easier for us but you bring a gift to the world by bringing you even if it makes us really need to think.

I know some people find it helpful to have questions to reflect on as we're participating. Do you have any suggestions for those, Erin?

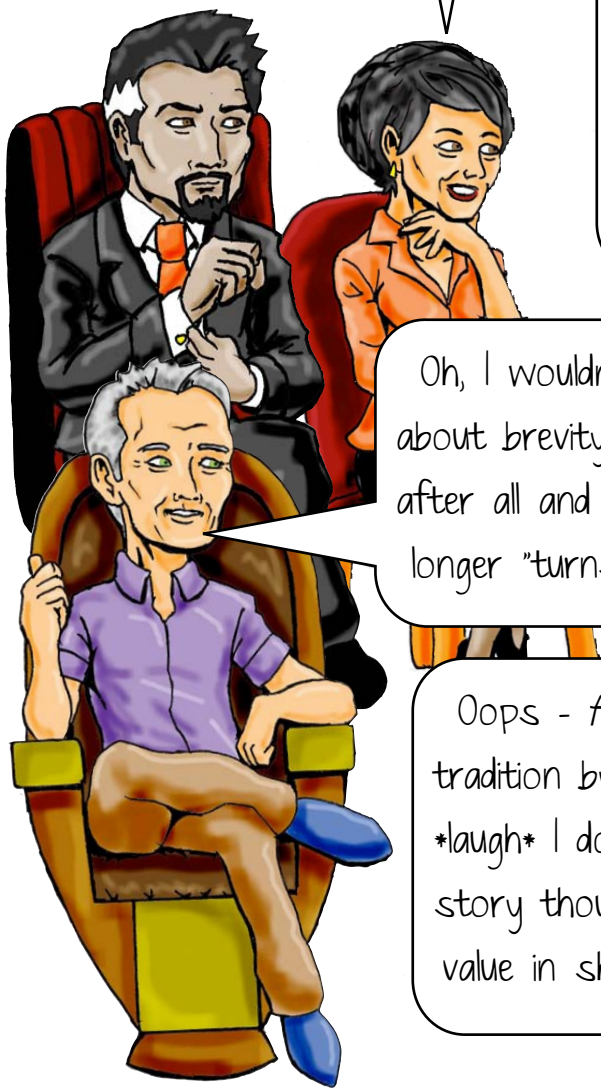
Thank you, Alex. And sure, Saliha! How about these? And feel free to add to them if you'd like!

- What is the impact of doing our work in a particular kind of way - i.e. What's the impact on the world/what we're making together?
- What might these topics/explorations/dialogues/this conversation mean for me or my practices/our team or institution?
- What am I doing - my actions, thoughts, feelings, practices - to maintain patterns as they are? To open up new possibilities?
- What am I experiencing as I am participating in this conversation and when else have I experienced something similar or noticed a similar response?
- What do I notice is my highest level of context when I'm engaging in these conversations? What might happen if I shift the highest level of context to well-being or making better worlds (or compassion, loving-kindness, curiosity etc.?)
- What new openings am I seeing or what excites me?
- What's emerging or taking shape that I'm interested in and want more robustness or further conversation around?
- What or who is missing that I'd like to bring into the conversation? What might an invitation around that or to them look like?
- What are we making together here and what's my role or contribution to its co-creation?

Those are very useful questions. Thank you. Which gets me wondering, you did you start this inquiry with a specific research question, Erin? Or maybe a better question is what drew you to this inquiry? Or even what drew you to focus on this particular context? I know you have done some great work with organizations and helping them shift how they are thinking about, approaching and doing things so that they are more able to do more of what they set out to do, or do it more generatively (if I can borrow that word.) What drew you to focus on Ph.D. ecologies or academia instead of other organizations or social institutions?

I am interested in that, too. We don't often get a lot of background of how inquiries get formed and it can be important context or at the very least can be interesting from the perspective of doctoral processes and what your process was like and what others may experience.

I'd be happy to share that. It's a story (like any story) that can be punctuated in many different places. I'm wondering, since I have been taking a couple of very long turns, if I should give a brief summary of the story or...



Oh, I wouldn't worry too much about brevity. This is a dissertation after all and we're used to much longer "turns" than these!!!

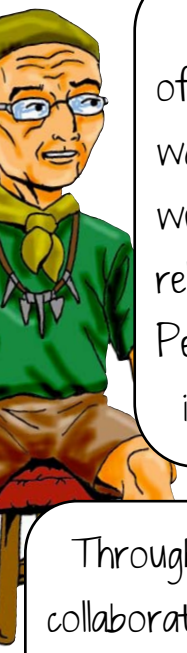
chuckle

Oops - Am I perpetuating that tradition by making light of it? *laugh* I do know some of this story though and I think there's value in sharing it.

John, it's beautiful that you noticed how the turn you just took is making something and to pay attention to whether it's what you want to be making! That's wonderful! And thank you for your encouragement to tell this story.

I enrolled in a Ph.D. program with a different topic in mind, actually. It was in Australia and I was enquiring into the cross-cultural nature of online collaborative work (specifically for people engaged in what they would identify as change work - dialogue, deliberation, education, community engagement, health promotion, coaching etc.) With rapid changes in technology, trends towards working remotely, concerns about carbon footprints, generations growing up with numerous technological tools, more and more colleagues were finding themselves collaborating online with increased frequency and, frankly, many didn't like it, didn't feel they knew how to do it well or that it could support their work. They felt it was out of sync with what they valued in face-to-face interactions. I saw similarities in people's stories about working online to stories people tell when living in a new culture and thought we could learn something from cross-national experiences that would support us in online collaborative work focused on making better worlds. This topic was a great topic by many measurements: It brought together some of my unique perspectives and experience, the research would address a specific need in the community and add something "new" to the literature, many people were interested in participating - they felt it was a timely, relevant topic for what they were encountering with their work and that my scholarship could inform their practices. I was happy to be able to support people this way.

I knew it would be an emergent enquiry (it was an action research project working with people real time) and I was very comfortable with that emergence but I had no idea just how emergent it would become - that it would turn into this topic that we're talking about now! There are lessons in here about mindfulness and presence as well as non-attachment or what some Buddhists refer to as not clinging. What happened was...



I was spending a lot of time/energy attending to the relational "how" of the enquiry. For example, I wanted it to be collaborative (their work was collaborative), to take place in/use the tools of the environments we were working in (located online) and be completed in time to remain useful/relevant for people even with the rapid pace of shifts in technology. People said that was all important but impossible in academia. That was interesting! And reinforced the attention I was giving to the "how."

Through exploring that, I realized this enquiry wasn't necessarily about online collaboration per se, that was just one context/example/place to practice with possibilities of how we engage together in service to creating better worlds. For me that realization of what was at the centre for me reinforced how important the attention to "how" was. In order to attend to that well I explored a lot of conversations about innovation, creativity, organizational change work, dialogue, complex systems, the communication perspective and more. Simultaneously...

I was very aware that many people (students, faculty including supervisors, practitioners, enquiry participants/communities...) held aspirations for scholarly research which were often in conflict with some of the stories/constructions (requirements, expectations, assumptions...) universities and departments held about how dissertations had to be done/what it is/isn't. These constructions frustrated many people who said they felt constricted - that in following the requirements they weren't doing as good of work as they knew they could do or the requirements/expectations were actually inconsistent with the work they were trying to do/antithetical to the aspirations of the enquiry. People were saying that the letters "Ph.D." after their name were important, but the learned behaviors and the lived experiences of doing a doctorate or being on faculty was something to "survive" not something enriching. It was a fascinating culture to be a part of. I noticed again how our ways of working/being together, what's possible and how what we do (re)creates the worlds we're living in was really important to attend to and also where my passion really was. These stories of misalignment were so common and reminded me of many organizations I had worked with and led where alignment turned out to be an important key to doing the work they were trying to do.

Now if I changed the punctuation of this story to a number of years earlier, similar questions about how we inquire in ways that serve the work we're trying to do/the world, a passion around noticing what we're doing and how aligned it is or not, identifying and practicing with alternative choices came up when I was working on my master's thesis. Back then as well, grounded in interconnectedness, I was noticing tensions between what many of us were looking to do with/through our work (espoused values) and stories about requirements etc. for methodologies, writing styles, relationships to/with participants, peer review etc. (our lived practices) in academia. And I knew there must be other ways. Why were we perpetuating what so many people said wasn't working? In what ways are our work practices/systems supporting or getting in the way of what we define as our work? If, as many of us said we were, we're trying to create more conditions conducive to well-being in our communities and we are engaged in cultural/organizational practices NOT conducive to well-being, what are we creating? And what could I do that would support the work?

If I shift the punctuation again or broaden the size of the frame of this story, all of this is happening in a historical context where people are calling for large-scale systems changes/changes in our practices and what is normative or what we determine is okay (for our economies and banking procedures, our planet and environmental sustainability, our government and governance etc.) AND where people (some who identify as academics and some who considered themselves very separate from Academia) are wondering if academia can survive - telling stories where the prevailing narrative is one where research is too narrowly focused, university degrees are no longer relevant, universities are out of touch, elitist, pressure filled to the point where it encourages competition over collaboration, mis-re-presentation of results, bullying and putting each other down. This is a time where some people are calling for change in how many things are being done and people say academic culture is so old and entrenched/so reified that it can never change.... Fascinating!

Would it be okay to just pause you for a sec here? I have a question about that context and the narrative you were hearing. I know some of us have had very positive experiences in our Ph.D. ecologies. I did. (Although there were more than a few moments when I wondered why I was doing it!!) And I also know that many people haven't. There are stories I have heard and there's a general narrative or a pattern you have identified that is prominent enough. So I am glad that you're looking at how we can alter it by expanding on what we value and how we're contributing to well-being.

I'm interested in hearing more about what that current narrative pattern is that you're hearing and seeing. Though with that said, I'm conscious that in asking you to talk about it, we may be spending energy on something that isn't very appreciative and I'm aware of what that might create. At the same time, it may help us understand why this approach to creating a dissertation/ doctoral inquiry really matters. I'll leave it up to you to decide if that's where we want to be spending our energy.

Great question, Jan. I'm glad you jumped in and and I appreciate your observations about where we spend our energy. Like you, I'm mindful of the effects that telling stories and how we tell them can have on us and I wondered what value it would add and what it might create to share prevailing narrative stories here and, if I was going to, then how. This decision was an interesting bifurcation point in my dissertation, actually and a choice I considered from many angles as I reflected on what I wanted to be co-creating or calling forth. If you are interested, I can talk more about those questions or that choice point later on. In the meantime let me share a summary of what what people were expressing. The stories sounded like this:

...Unfortunately this mass-production university model has led to separation where there ought to be collaboration and to ever-increasing specialization. In my own religion department, for example, we have 10 faculty members, working in eight subfields, with little overlap. And as departments fragment, research and publication become more and more about less and less. Each academic becomes the trustee not of a branch of the sciences, but of limited knowledge that all too often is irrelevant for genuinely important problems...

...But seriously, academia isn't the real world. You have no idea what it's like. Theory and actual experience are very different.

...If I'd known what would have been required of me, how much I would have had to give up, I would have chosen a different path.

You're kidding! I always thought you had it so figured out - how to play the game we need to play but still stay true to your values and be passionate about what you do. To hear you say you were just keeping your head above water all these years is shocking!

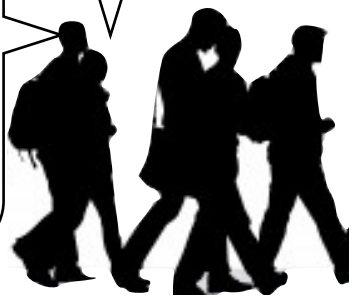
I've been flirting with the idea of a Ph.D. for sometime but I don't want to enter the war. You should see the way departments treat each other. It's ridiculous.

We have to compete for funding in ways that encourages us to fight each other and put other departments down so we can win the funding. There's talk of collaboration but no one can do it, we're all looking out for ourselves - especially these days with these huge budget cuts.

I would refer to it as forced collaboration - similar to an arranged marriage. My university gives funds for projects that cross departments and even more funds to projects that cross colleges. So when I talked with the Provost about supporting and validating a collaborative project with another institute they loved the idea BUT....using only our faculty (defies the point....) and, of course, charging a huge amount of money. The message was, "We love this sort of collaboration as long as we can dictate who, what, how, why, where..."

...That's how everyone treats grad students - it's especially bad for foreign students who think they can't say anything or they will loose their visa. You just have to survive it so you can get your degree.

And then what? Do the same to others? The system isn't set up to run without our unpaid labor...



A newly published analysis finds that more than two-thirds of biomedical papers retracted over the past four decades were the result of misconduct, not error - including fraud and suspected fraud...

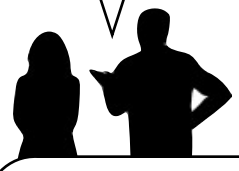
I suffered financially, spiritually, emotionally...That's why I left. I was putting so much into it and just felt depleted. It was supposed to help me be a better consultant...

Under the label of quality our scholarship is fragmented into a gravel pit of publications, rankings, grants, and citation indexes outputs. As Gregory Bateson wrote to the Regents of the California University system back in the 1970s, "Break the pattern which connects the items of learning and you necessarily destroy all quality"

Dissertations are all about ego - showing off that one thing you know that no one else does. You know why they don't? Because they don't care.

He had to choose a thesis title by the end of his 1st semester and couldn't change it in the next 3.

I keep my head low operating in stealth mode so I'm not in the line of fire. That's how I can keep doing this work and hopefully make a difference for others...



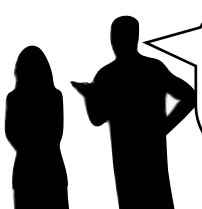
How do you know when you're finished? When you run out of steam? That doesn't seem healthy at all.

The move towards corporatism of academia and this "audit-culture" impacts integrity.

Yep, the integrity of the research and what gets researched in the first place.

Under our guidelines or any guidelines pretty much anywhere, if I created the next Facebook, I would not be granted tenure. But if I published an article about some esoteric aspect of that creation in an arcane peer-reviewed journal that is only subscribed to by a handful of libraries, that would count.

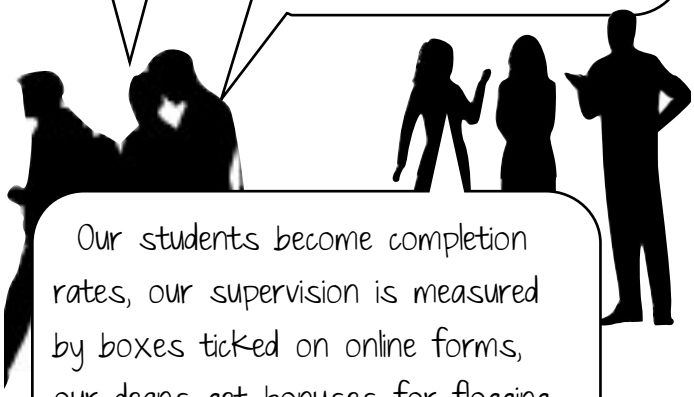
We should be able to make federal policy decisions that take into consideration what these scholars know - they are the experts! But they are so hard to work with, they never want to commit to anything, they talk in a language most people don't understand and they can't move quickly on anything. It's so frustrating!



But it's the Truth. Statistics bear it out - they prove it.

I'm on so many committees I don't have time to teach.

And I have to teach so many classes that I don't have time to research and publish. It's the publications that gets you ahead, not how many students you have taught.



Our students become completion rates, our supervision is measured by boxes ticked on online forms, our deans get bonuses for flogging us to improve our numbers, and the achievement of targets nudges aside, and may ultimately replace, the factors that go into real scholarship, including: thought, learning, creativity, depth of perception, and intersubjective dialogue

...I agree. It contributes to the alienation and violence we experience in the world today: it's a transformational tool of colonial practice in that it has an assimilative intent and it encourages disembodiment.

At my university a lot of the students say they feel a disconnect between the cultures they were raised in and how they have to do things at the university. You remember that case I told you about around informed consent in the aboriginal community and how her elders wouldn't participate in the process that was supposedly put in place to protect them because they said it went against their culture?...

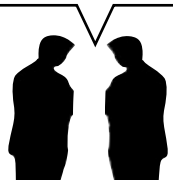
There's an overwhelming whitewashing (pun intended) of our culture, including the connection between spirituality and inquiry.

...That's terrible! It sounds like you're describing what we talk about in nursing as horizontal violence. Sometimes it's overt but other times it refers to the subtle, chilling ways of discounting each other that numb initiative, creativity, self-worth, passion and innovation. Does it happen in other departments?

I'm concerned about the emerging requirement to airbrush our CVs and personas to present a particular clean, polished look for the university's blackboard.

Me, too! It's similar to how women are often taught they need to polish their looks to look a particular way in order to be sexy/beautiful and therefore of value. There is a gap between the complex human creatures we know we all are and the coerced caricatures that they want us to represent ourselves as to funders, industry etc. I hate it. And it's tiring.

...Then I realized I was becoming like one of those people who go to the camps and only see the shoes... It was mortifying.

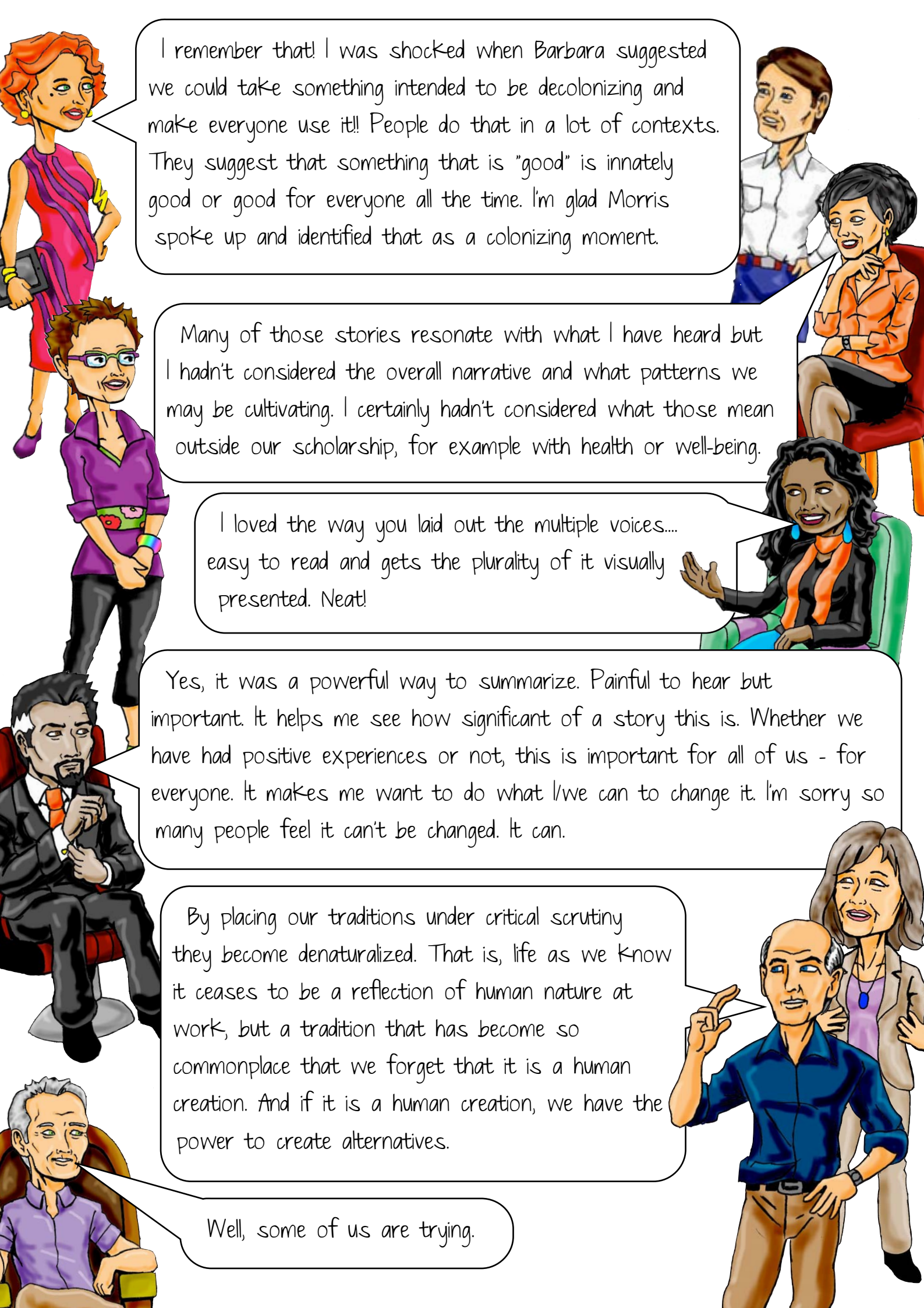


These are just a sample of stories. I have heard that we don't model peace and that our practices, structures, policies etc. in academia often conflicts with how people want to live and work more generally or with the practices they are working hard to cultivate in their lives/families/ communities/ nations - which they name as cooperation, environmental sustainability, transformational learning, loving-kindness, generosity, innovation, being kind and helpful when someone comes to you for feedback etc. I hear stories that people enter academia as students (often adult students) or faculty and then struggle with ideas of inadequacy, unworthiness, arrogance and fear in ways that they never have before.

There are large attrition rates and levels of burnout and a lack of diversity in a time when we are recognizing the need for biodiversity for the sustainability of the planet. I hear that we're working in ways which are both subtly and overtly destructive to our relationships of many kinds. I do also hear that some people and programs are doing good things, making differences - that pockets of changes are bubbling up but that many people aren't feeling or experiencing those pockets yet and that people creating those pockets often feel alone or tired/fed up with/exhausted by the system - a system that says it wants one thing but requires another. Or a community of people who want something in theory but don't understand it in practice or see their role in changing and maintaining it. One change maker says he (like many others) feels strongly that how we do things in academia is an issue of social justice and though his ideas are well received by some colleagues, he feels most people don't get it and the current constructions and ways of doing things in his university system seem to be getting in the way of really understanding the idea of valuing diversity over standardization.

That sounds a lot like one of my colleague's experiences. I remember his Ph.D. defence a couple years ago...

Arvin Bürger's PhD Defence
Decolonising Pedagogies:
Cultural Diversity and its Power to Bring Intellectual, Social and Environmental Transformation
This is very important.
I hope you will be able to identify a decolonizing pedagogy which could then be rolled out across the whole country.
This is really great work. It must be difficult doing this in a colonial institution with many colonial structures and monuments...
...such as this one.


I remember that! I was shocked when Barbara suggested we could take something intended to be decolonizing and make everyone use it!! People do that in a lot of contexts. They suggest that something that is "good" is innately good or good for everyone all the time. I'm glad Morris spoke up and identified that as a colonizing moment.
Many of those stories resonate with what I have heard but I hadn't considered the overall narrative and what patterns we may be cultivating. I certainly hadn't considered what those mean outside our scholarship, for example with health or well-being.
I loved the way you laid out the multiple voices.... easy to read and gets the plurality of it visually presented. Neat!
Yes, it was a powerful way to summarize. Painful to hear but important. It helps me see how significant of a story this is. Whether we have had positive experiences or not, this is important for all of us - for everyone. It makes me want to do what I/we can to change it. I'm sorry so many people feel it can't be changed. It can.
By placing our traditions under critical scrutiny they become denaturalized. That is, life as we know it ceases to be a reflection of human nature at work, but a tradition that has become so commonplace that we forget that it is a human creation. And if it is a human creation, we have the power to create alternatives.
Well, some of us are trying.

Yes, Ken, what you are talking about is one of my reasons for doing this dissertation. We can change this story/these constructions and, like you are saying, John, many people are. Look at us here and at the work each of us has done and are doing. The summary I shared is the most prominent story I hear and it doesn't represent the complexity of this ecological narrative which includes great experiences. I see many pockets of change AND the prevailing narrative of disillusionment, alienation, bullying, disconnectedness etc. exists for so many people - and for some, it's coming into existence more and more. (I hear that especially from people in Australia and Europe.)

People feel an increased sense of urgency that this can't go on - we need to change to survive and be relevant/valuable for today's/tomorrow's world. People are making changes. People are following the status quo hoping someday someone (else) will change things. People are opting out of the system (for reasons akin to what CBC has reported about young people opting out of the Canadian political system, creating other ways of engaging because they don't like the bickering, arguing, abusive attacks etc. in elections and parliament.) People are excited, content, happy, disillusioned, upset, afraid, trying hard to fit in or get a job, fed up, doing all the can, flying under the radar, staying out of it, unaware...a complex ecological narrative. Some stories reminded me of this scene from A.A. Milne's 1926 book Winnie-the-Pooh:

Here is Edward Bear, coming downstairs now,

bump,
bump,
bump,

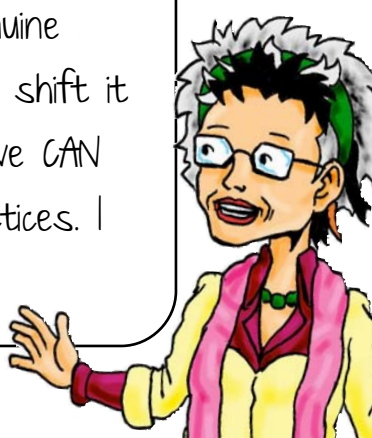
on the back of his head behind Christopher Robin. It is, as far as he knows, the only way of coming downstairs, but sometimes he feels that there really is another way, if only he could stop bumping for a moment and think of it.

Wow, I did wonder whether these stories would take our energy in a negative direction!

Negative yes but they sure rings familiar, Jan! I know people who fit into each of those stories. My own experiences show up in these in spades - which is worth noting because I love my job so I put up with this.

As I was spending a lot of time/energy with these stories I sometimes found it hard to stay grounded in something positive. There were times I was so surrounded by people's experiences about how unsupportive, constraining, outdated and hypocritical our ecology is that this story became part of MY narrative about my doctoral work - I'd notice I'd feel constraints in my dissertation that came from other people's constraints/stories rather than from my direct experiences with the program I was enrolled in. (The story I shared earlier about before the CMM conference at Columbia is an example.) It is a relationship, eh? So what happens anywhere happens everywhere.

There is a lot of emotion in these stories. They seem to frequently evoke strong reactions in people - sadness, anger, defensiveness, denial, a call to arms, deflated-ness, stoic-ness, defeated-ness, dismissiveness of the "validity" of the stories. What I have experienced less of is genuine curiosity about what's going on and how we might shift it or a sense of possibility and empowerment that we CAN shift that narrative/our relational patterns and practices. I believe this narrative, these stories are significant.



That is probably consistent with my experience. These stories resonate with me, too and, like you, John, I love my job. It paints a stunning picture when you put these stories together but for many of us, this is just normal in academia and so we may not even notice or question it. It's just part of our world probably part of the business and industry world, too.

I'd ask what kind of world we have or we're creating when stories like this are so common. Probably not one we want to perpetuate.

The concept of formal education is universally acknowledged as a major resource for maintaining and improving the social, economic, physical, and spiritual health of our world. Doctoral programs represent the highest level of such education, and dissertation work is the pinnacle event in them. Many educators, however, are not satisfied that this culminating product is really doing all that much to solve the challenges facing us in the twenty-first century. In fact, a number of us believe that in many ways, directly or indirectly, the "academy" may be partially responsible for our collective inability to significantly mitigate warfare, global warming, social and ecological injustices, domestic violence, loss of habitat, racism, economic despair, loss of the commons etc.

That's part of why I think what Erin is doing is so critical! We have urgent need to do things differently for our planet and communities to survive and these issues are so important that we can't afford to enter into or work within a system that wants us to do things in ways that are antithetical to the wisdom we have learned in practice/in community/from the wisdom traditions and to what we are trying to make together. We can't afford to be training people - for years - to spend years of our lives living with traditions that go unexamined.

I decided not to do a Ph.D. because I'd be forced to work in ways that are inconsistent with my work as a practitioner and with the way I know I learn best. I'd want a program that let me explore, learn and adjust -- to go where the learning took me, not to just follow a predesigned map or process. I don't want to be forced to use old models for the work including old, hard science structures but would like to experiment with some new models for things like measuring and evaluation.

And I'd need someone to be very supportive of the learning process. Actually, I'd need more than a single person - ideally a team of people so we could support each other, work together in creative ways to inform each others work and provide community... but many people say there isn't time for that or people don't know how to do it. Just listen to the stories people tell about their "committees!" I suppose group research could be a problem too! Collaboration is not usually smiled upon in part because the old model is the rugged independent learner not the social learner. I don't think I could get any of that in a Ph.D. program. And if I did, it would have to be a program that gave me enough of something I couldn't otherwise get that it would be worth the cost of tuition and the cost of the income I'd be losing from work while I put my time into the dissertation.

Shanda! I'm glad you could join us! Welcome! You are engaged in really thoughtful work with organizations and communities to create and support healthy populations and I understand how you would want a program that supports you in deepening or improving your practice. I'd love to talk with you about Communities of Practice and Ph.D. ecologies as I know you work with CoPs a lot. It would be interesting to see what we could learn from CoPs if that was part of the Ph.D. ecology conversation.

I'd love to do that, Erin! I'd be really attracted to a Ph.D. program that was designed as a Community of Practice or for a process of collective learning in a shared domain with a group that has a shared concern or a passion for something they do and want to learn more about it and how to do it better. Community of Practice was originally a learning theory.

That's how I experienced the Masters in Organizational Management and Development program at Fielding. We came together in ways that supported our learning, improved our practice and supported the learning and practice of the rest of the group. The number one experience I hear people talk about as graduates of that program is how we supported each other in community.

That's an interesting idea. Even though "practice" is a concept widely used in the social sciences to refer to what we "do" in a way that Bourdieu wrote about and which overlaps with the Weberian notion of social action and the Marxist concept of praxis, I don't think many of us in, or maybe even outside of, academia even think of ourselves as having practices let alone do any critical reflection on them or improving our practices in community with others.

That might be the case, but change is happening. In our university we have learning communities and we are actively engaged in learning and creating practices together. There is talk about including students in these learning communities, which I think would be the radical step in living practice. Yes practice is organic for me. It is living intentionally in relational spaces. Creating together and asking what are we creating. As a coach, therapist, teacher, advisor, wife, mother etc, all I have is practice of creating with the other and engaging in a joint exploration of what we are doing, which in itself is practice. And to be in such conversations helps me to stay in the practice. A way of relationally foregrounding what is central to me today. I wonder what each of you mean by practice?

I think about practice as the relational acts we engage in every day - ones we can choose to be intentional about - hopefully making wiser choices as we do them again and again (practice in this sense is like practicing a musical instrument or medicine, or a sport or yoga...)

Many academics do seem more concerned with theory by itself than practice or ways of contributing to the civic. I have written 3 books which fortunately have done well but what's the latest statistic on how many academic articles people really read? I heard somewhere that you're doing well if 7 people have read your article. And dissertations? Who reads them? And if it's not about reading them than how come we put so much emphasis on written documents? Theory is important but so is practice.

A colleague of mine - a department Dean - and I were talking and he said he thinks Mahatma Gandhi would have had a great deal of difficulty in a Ph.D. program today because of the lack of emphasis on practice. I think he has a point. And I agree that many of us don't see that we even have practices to pay attention to - habits and traditions but not practices. Or maybe we do think about our practices but we are just too busy, too overworked and underpaid to attend to our practices. The system needs to change.

Social fabric is created one room at time, the one we are in at the moment.

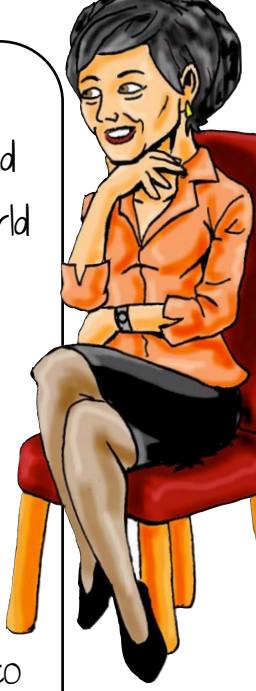
I agree. The question is whether enough of us in the general public recognize that so we actually act to create change.

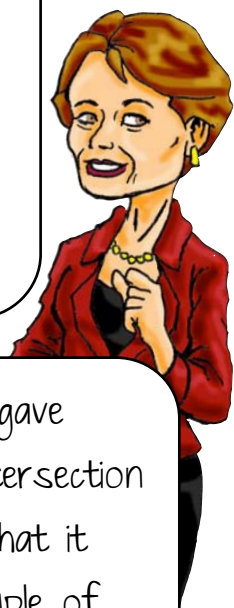
Listening closely to Americans, we find that they do not express a desire for political leaders to fix problems for them. Nor do they expect some big foundation, organization, or other group single-handedly to lead the way to hopefulness and a more humane life (as if they, alone, knew the way). More often people see themselves as the critical actors in righting the nation and their lives today. They are clear that to move in a new direction will require getting back to enduring values people have long cherished and which now must guide the country in moving forward. The values they point to include: compassion - the need for people once again to see and hear each other, reach out to the other, and support each another; the importance of children - viewed as a gauge of the very health of our society, and the basis upon which to build the future; openness and humility - the room to engage with others, listen attentively, discern what may be truly important, and thus act with care; and concern for the common good - to believe, at a time when people are implored daily to think solely about their own survival, their own good, that we hold shared interests.

...People also want to identify practical ways to get things moving - to put the values into motion and create a different dynamic in their own lives, in their communities, and in the nation as a whole...They do not believe this will happen overnight, nor will it come from a series of large, grand new initiatives or policies, for many people no doubt would question the veracity and reliability of such efforts. This new trajectory, people say, will take shape only through actions that start small, and locally, between and among them, beginning close to home, on a human scale.

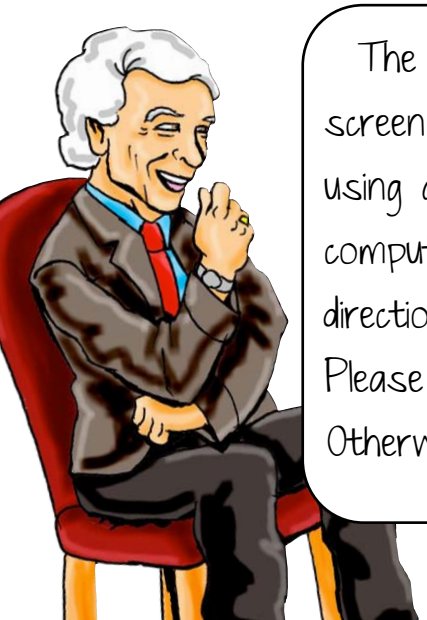
Interesting. I hadn't heard that perspective on the U.S. And I do agree that we can do things in any moment that change the system - we don't need to wait for others to change things. We ARE the system. If we change, it changes.
The essence of creating an alternative future comes from citizen-to-citizen engagement that constantly focuses on the well-being of the whole.
So what changes if we, as citizens or community members of this room, of academia engage on a daily basis with well-being as our the story we are living into, as I believe Erin is inviting us to do?
Our planet will not survive if we cling to the verities of the past. We must recognize that we are part of one group, one family - the human family. Our survival as a planet depends on it.
I love the way you all are framing this...
Erin, you didn't start out working on this as your dissertation topic but you saw a need of some sort and a resonance. What happened next? How did you get from there to here?

Well, for a while I was exploring doctoral practices alongside (and through) my on-line collaboration topic. I was also asking how I could act in service to what was emerging and to our community/our world more than I was. I noticed a significant bifurcation point, a choice I needed to make around where I'd be spending my energy over the next few years. I also recognized that we were at an important bifurcation point in academia more broadly and in the world generally, that what I/we do next really matters. I felt we we have wisdom, tools, experiences and heuristics to support us in reflecting on our relational acts and what kind of practices we want, how to act into those so that the narrative/the lived and told experience changes from something many people - even people who love academia - are often frustrated by or embarrassed by to ways of being together that contribute to our personal and social evolution in qualitatively different ways. What that meant for me, I still needed to explore.

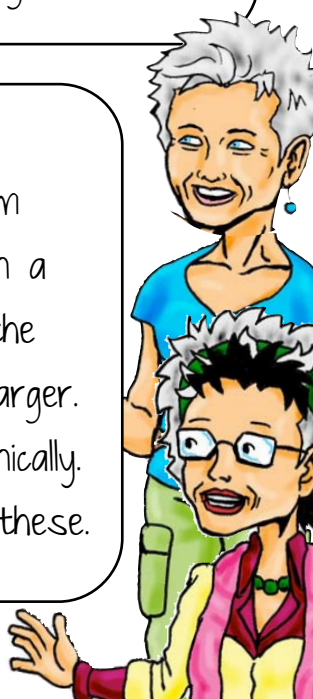




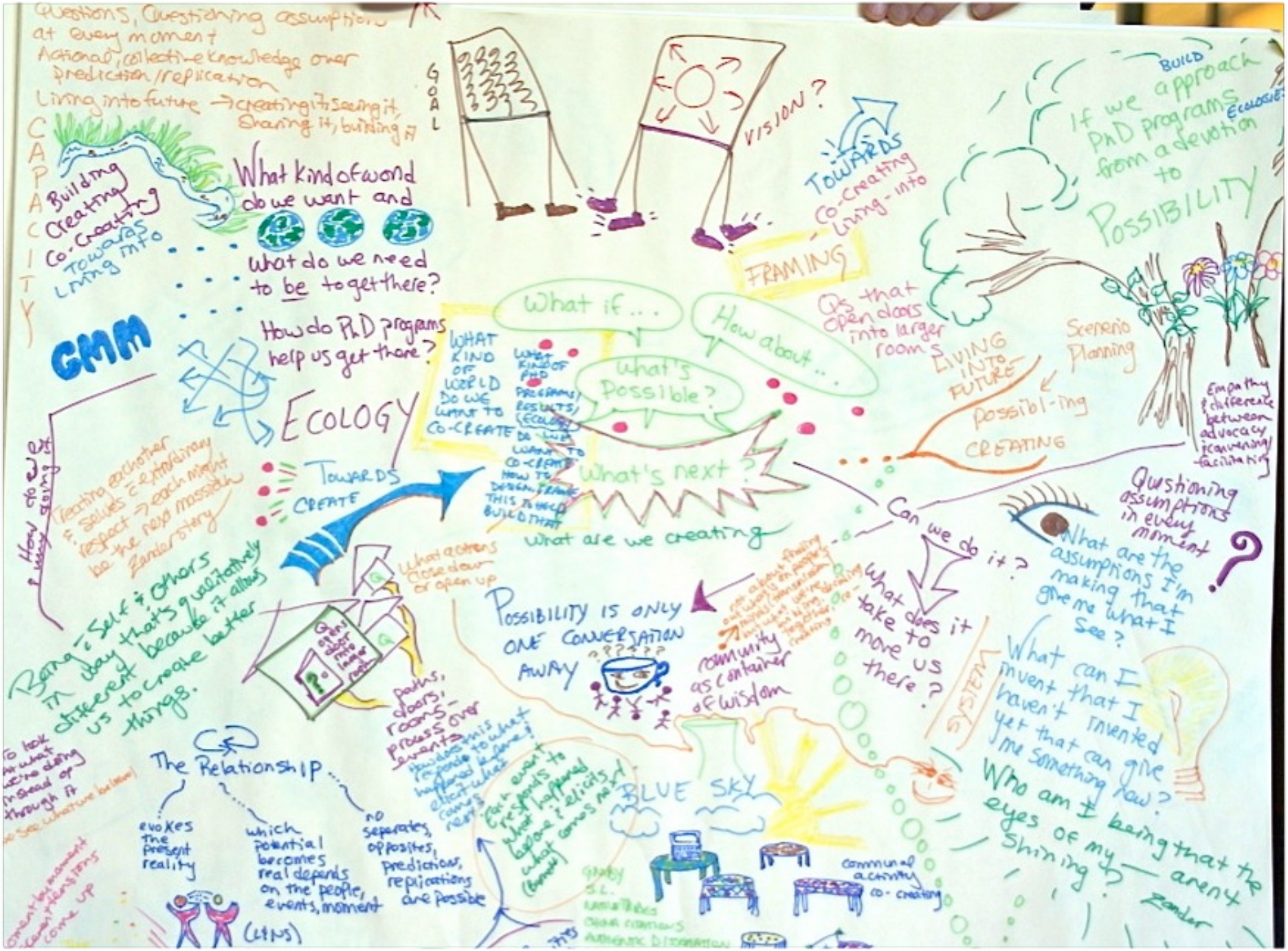
So with a spirit of genuine inquiry and Jan's support and encouragement, I gave myself a couple of days and some recycled flip-chart paper to explore this intersection or confluence of topics (well-being in the world, practices, academia...) to see what it might mean for me and for my doctoral work/my topic of enquiry. Those couple of days were fascinating!!! I have some photos here of those initial flip-chart explorations. I'd love you to take a look at them to get a bit of a sense of what that exploration was like. It wasn't linear or neat or organized though clear themes emerged.



The details may be hard to see on this size paper or screen so to get them as large or visible as possible I am using a horizontal orientation. If you're looking at them on a computer, your PDF program may support you changing the direction of the page or zooming in to make the details larger. Please feel free to call on me if I can help with that technically. Otherwise, take your time looking around and being with these.



Boundary X-ing?
X-fertilization
X-pollinate
over
Depth; compartmentalization
Flourish
Networks +
Nodes +
+Affiliations
Values
Life less anxious, more delight
People's potential & supporting that
Caring about apple, earth, humane ecology
Social justice
Changing based on what we've learned
Flourish
Define complex adapt syst.
Adapt: capacity to alter/change/learn from experience.
Complexity: Diversity great # of connections between wide variety of elements
Background Systems: connected & interdependent (things/agents)
Attributes linked, no starting point. Each cause & effect of other attributes & embedded & nested in each other
Background AIMS
Fractal
Kaleidoscope
Rhizome (no centre/root)
Microscope
Control
Mastry
Expertise
Depth/Compartments
Reformulated as: Dialogue Interaction Negotiation
Banking X-ing X-fertilization
Newtonian
Systems
Highly Turbulent Times
Need for
Reduction of Time Lag
Decolonizing Scholarship
Conversations
Uni metaphores
Expectations
Values
What it was like story
What it's like now
What condition you feel
What condition most innovative
How do your creativity & potential get released
Why are you getting a PhD
PhD comics
Dialogue artifact
How do Creativity & potential get released in PhD students?
What can we extrapolate about conditions for innovation in PhD research programs?
What we know about education, intelligence
Education
OD / change
innovation
Epistemology
Politics / Social Justice
Moral
Environment
Resonance
collective wisdom, knowledge, intelligence
Values/Aims
Complex ad syst
Dialogue
A.I.
Org Dev
What we can extrapolate or suggest looking at or start to shift, redesign
Big D happens over time, iterative, connect e beings
Change from the Qs then Selves (attention)
Change also based on what discovered?
Create conditions for emergence thru Dissertation
What are the conditions for innovation
What creates adaptability
What kind of adaptability is possible?
How do Creativity & potential get released?
DELIGHT
How can we do/what's possible
Gender
Social Justice
Global Crisis
Financial
THRIVE
Edu to meet the needs of industrialism
Sir Ken Robinson
Mastry/Expertise → Negotiation/Participation
Kaleidoscope → Microscope
X-fertilization over depth, compartmentalization
Aims
Aims
Aims



Questions, Questioning assumptions at every moment
Actional, collective knowledge over prediction/replication
Living into future → creating it, seeing it, sharing it, building it
CAPACITY
Building
Creating
Co-creating
Towards
Living into
What kind of world do we want and
what do we need to be to get there?
How do PhD programs help us get there?
GMM
ECOLOGY
TOWARDS
CREATE
GOAL
VISION?
TOWARDS
Co-creating
Living-into
FRAMING
What if...
How about...
What's possible?
What's next?
What are we creating
WHAT KIND OF WORLD DO WE WANT TO CO-CREATE
WHAT KIND OF PHD PROGRAMS/RESULTS/(ECOLOGY) DO WE WANT TO CO-CREATE HOW TO DESIGN, FRAME THIS TO HELP BUILD THAT
Qs that open doors into larger rooms
LIVING INTO FUTURE
Scenario Planning
possibl-ing
CREATING
If we approach PhD programs from a devotion to
BUILD
ECOLOGIES
POSSIBILITY
Empathy & difference between advocacy & convening/facilitating
Questioning assumptions in every moment
What are the assumptions I'm making that give me what I see?
Can we do it?
What does it take to move us there?
What can I invent that I haven't invented yet that can give me something new?
Who am I being that the eyes of my — aren't shining?
Zander
SYSTEM
What actions close down or open up
Being & Self & others in way that's qualitatively different because it allows us to create better things.
Q opens door into larger room
paths, doors, rooms — process over events
POSSIBILITY IS ONLY ONE CONVERSATION AWAY
community as container of wisdom
BLUE SKY
communal activity co-creating
The Relationship
evokes the present reality
which potential becomes real depends on the people, events, moment
no separates, opposites, predictions, replications are possible
(LINS)

IF ????
Relationships
synergy
conditions for innovation?
ripples
collective wisdom
innovation
connect
VISION POSSIBILITY
intentionality
WHAT'S POSSIBLE ????
Richness of human capacity
Delight
Social Justice
Enviro sustainability
WHAT KIND OF WORLD DO WE WANT & WHAT DO WE NEED TO BE OR HOW DO WE NEED TO RELATE TO GET THERE?
How can PhD programs help us get there?
assumptions
Framing
Devotions
WHAT ARE WE MAKING?
what reality are we maintaining, living into, creating?
CO-CREATING?
Who we are & what we can choose to become
THRIVE!
possibility
towards
innovation
WHAT KIND OF WORLD DO WE WANT TO CREATE?
What kind of PhD ecologies would support and reflect that?
Qs that open doors into larger rooms
X-fertilization
ecology model & our roles in it
Dialogue
Collaboration
Relationships
Qs of epistemology power
emergence
inquiry over certitude
what can we learn from complex adaptive systems?
WHAT CAN WE DO TO MOVE TOWARDS / CREATE / LIVE INTO A REALITY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE, ENVIRO SUSTAINABILITY, A RICHNESS OF HUMAN CAPACITY?
If we approach PhD programs from a devotion to possibility, what does that look like, feel like, how does it help us get to this new place?
support Belief in people, possibility
Relationships evoke reality. which potential becomes real depends on relpts (pple, events)
inquiry
uncertainty
create
live into
participate
change
Action Research
where does it take us if we use/live: Relationship perspective communications perspective Appreciinquiry?
conversation
ignite sense of hope, possibility
who am I being that the eyes of my — aren't shining?
releasing creativity, potential
create the conditions for/enviro for pple to tap (relational) potential to make a difference
Complex systems
not about replication & prediction
participation over mastery
X-aleidoscope over microscope
X-pollination over compartmentalization
Dialogues
cafes
emergence
Building relationships
creating space
complex adap. systems
HOW ABOUT ????
what happens when we use a more generative approach?
MODELING BEING
allowing for creation
ECOLOGY
purposes
behaviors
pple
identity
knowledge
information
(how do we develop, work with)
How do we treat another?
relationships
agreements of belonging
WHATS NEXT ????
What are our purposes? what's called us together?
How are we treating one another?
How are we developing our identities?
Δ consciousness about self (indiv, org, syst) diff awareness → new responses

Thanks for the reminder on rotating or enlarging the view...

I love that you included these. Thanks for doing that even though I know you are shy to show your visual brainstorms. They are inspiring.

Yes, I think so, too. I appreciate that you are showing us your initial, unpolished, non-linear ideas. Often that initial stage can seem overwhelming or one we want to organize really quickly. I think it's important that you are documenting it as part of the process. You have some great connections and questions in there.

I agree. We often edit that part out or mark doctoral work as beginning after that exploration has already been done even though it is a significant part of the work. I like your use of open questions in your exploration and there's one thats truck me in particular: What kind of world do we want and what do we need to be or how do we need to relate to get there?

So you didn't start with something you were trying to "prove." You had an idea or an ah-ha that came to life through your exploration. That may be another example of living this inquiry. Where did you go from there?

Thanks everyone! I agree that this exploration was a very important part of my doctoral process and may be for people in general. Transformation often comes from asking questions. And with this exploration, I started asking and exploring questions like these:

- What kind of world do we want to make and how do we need to "be" together to make it? How can Ph.D. programs help us be together in those ways?

- Ph.D. programs are ecologies - living systems made up of inter-dependencies, interactions, relationships and balances - and what happens in academia has ripple effects in other parts of the ecology. How can we act (supervise, publish, cite, think about ethics reviews/IRBs etc.) in ways that are ecologically responsible (eco-centric over ego-centric)?

- What might happen to our patterns/habits in Ph.D. ecologies if/when we orient ourselves relationally/as relational beings/interbeing?

- What if an orientation towards relational generatively/eloquence takes precedent over notions of bounded beings?

- What kind of world do we want to co-create and what kind of Ph.D. ecologies would support and co-enact that? What would Ph.D. ecologies be like if they were a reflection of that world we want to co-create?

- What can we do in and through Ph.D. ecologies to move towards/create/live into social justice, environmental sustainability, peace, compassion, kindness, a richness of human capacity - well-being in the world and what might that afford/enable?

- If we approach Ph.D. programs with a devotion to possibility, what does that look like/feel like/how does it help us get to this new place?

- What might happen in Ph.D. ecologies if we all treated each other with extraordinary respect - being together in ways that are qualitatively different than we are now? What might that enable us to do?

- What are we making together right now? What reality are we maintaining, living into, re-creating, changing in our Ph.D. ecologies?

- What are our purposes in Ph.D. ecologies? What's called us together as scholars? How are we treating one another - in ways that reflect this purpose?

- How are we developing our identities and frame in our Ph.D. ecologies - developing the kinds of people we are/want to be?

- We're making and re-making the world all the time. What's next for us in our evolution of Ph.D. ecologies/what do we want to (re)construct?

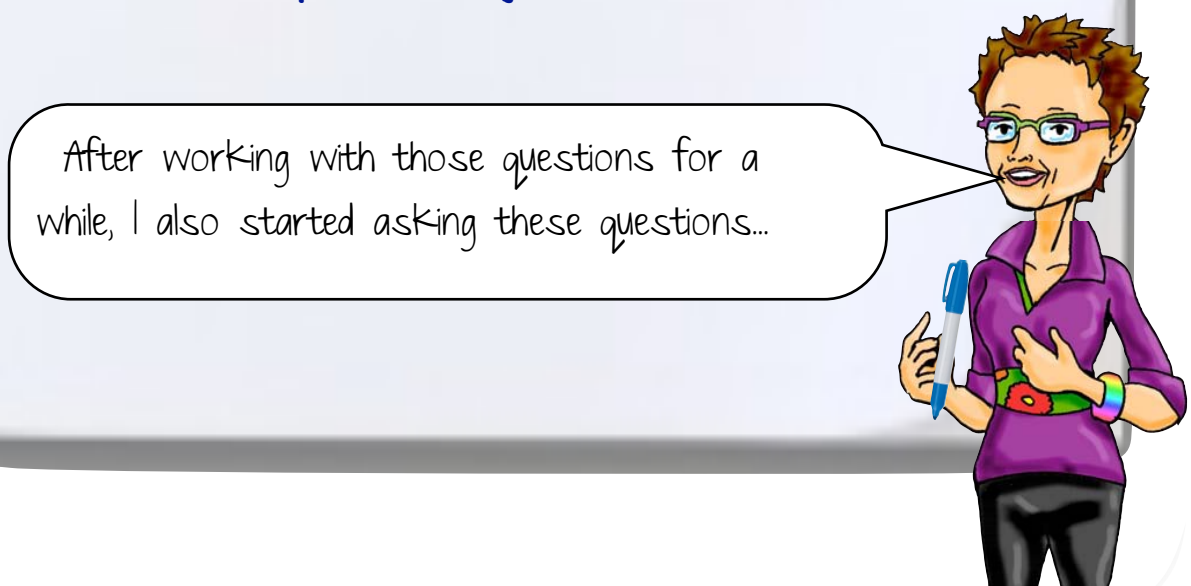
- How do creativity and potential get released? What can we learn from conditions for innovation? What creates adaptability?

- What can we learn from various entry points/orientations that we can apply to how we do things? (for example from complex adaptive systems, appreciative inquiry, innovation studies, organizational development, the wisdom traditions, creativity, artists, different cultural orientations?)

- What are the assumptions we're making that give us what we're currently experiencing? How can we be together that will give us something new? Or help us be more of our best together?

- Who are we being in Ph.D. ecologies that people's eyes aren't shining when they talk about us/that so many stories are negative?

- Where does it take us if we use a lens of/live into a relationship centric perspective or a communication perspective/CMM or an orientation of innovation or community or well-being?



- How do we evoke a qualitative evolution in how we are together in Ph.D. ecologies (and thus in the larger ecology?) How can we create practices/a system which creates capacity for creating better worlds/well-being more broadly?

- How do we build a sustainable environment for different stories, contexts, orientations, ways of knowing to thrive? To expand what we value and what we see as valuable?

- What's our highest level of context for Ph.D. ecologies? What stories will create/ call forth what we want to become? What do I want to call forth in each turn of my life/with my doctoral inquiry?

- What role does compassion play in these turns/this inquiry? How can we have more compassionate practices more frequently?

- What can we do that helps us be better than we need to be together in our practices? And what does that in turn create for the world?

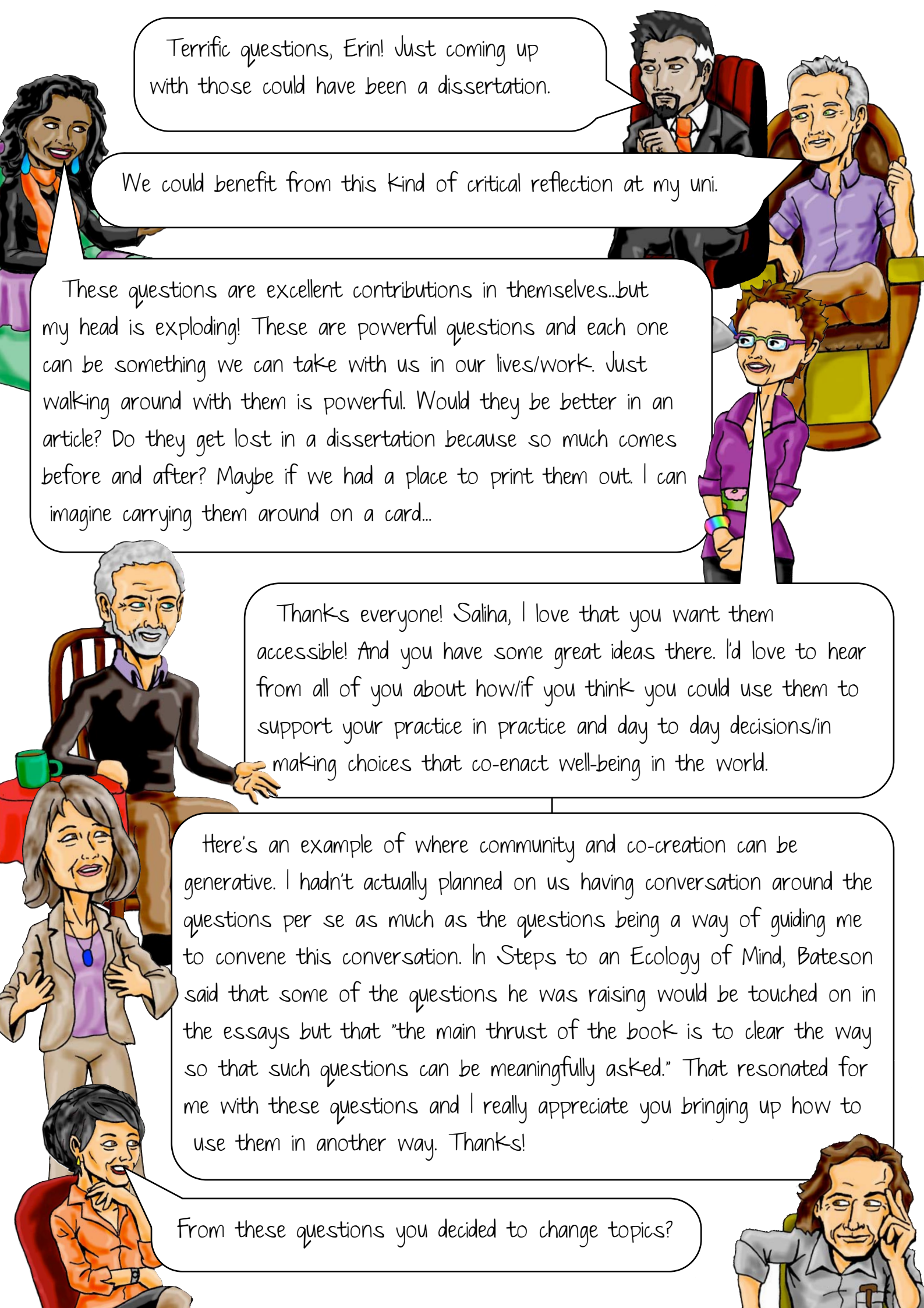
- How can I engage with my dissertation in ways that cultivate possibility? Engage in ways some might name civic responsibility, relational responsibility, engaged citizenship, Engaged Buddhism, being a good ancestor, spiritual practice?

- What is going to be most useful for entering into and carrying this conversation forward? What's the next most useful thing to do or say?

- How can I hold/live the questions and ambiguities of what it might look like to have a Ph.D. ecology that is part of, a reflection of and helps create a better world knowing it must co-evolve?

- What kind of "artifact" can I generate that would respect the ways of working and living into the world that I'm practicing cultivating, be useful to others, expedite or invite access to diverse conversations, invite continuation of conversations, be enjoyable to read...?

- What am I calling into being/co-enacting with the frameworks, practices etc. i'm using? Choices I'm making? Am I contributing in a way that feels generative, that co-enacts well-being/ co-creates better worlds?


Terrific questions, Erin! Just coming up with those could have been a dissertation.
We could benefit from this kind of critical reflection at my uni.
These questions are excellent contributions in themselves...but my head is exploding! These are powerful questions and each one can be something we can take with us in our lives/work. Just walking around with them is powerful. Would they be better in an article? Do they get lost in a dissertation because so much comes before and after? Maybe if we had a place to print them out. I can imagine carrying them around on a card...
Thanks everyone! Saliha, I love that you want them accessible! And you have some great ideas there. I'd love to hear from all of you about how/if you think you could use them to support your practice in practice and day to day decisions/in making choices that co-enact well-being in the world.
Here's an example of where community and co-creation can be generative. I hadn't actually planned on us having conversation around the questions per se as much as the questions being a way of guiding me to convene this conversation. In Steps to an Ecology of Mind, Bateson said that some of the questions he was raising would be touched on in the essays but that "the main thrust of the book is to clear the way so that such questions can be meaningfully asked." That resonated for me with these questions and I really appreciate you bringing up how to use them in another way. Thanks!
From these questions you decided to change topics?

From the whole experience, yes. And it was a terrific decision! I was working with my passion (and creating more of it) and with what had been engaging me in some way or another for years and many people, though they couldn't quite imagine how I was approaching the enquiry, spoke a previously unspoken need for it. Still, it wasn't an easy decision. I had a lot of support from some people but there were suggestions - especially (but not only) from my advisor at the time who I think was trying to be really supportive - that changing topics meant I was "flighty" or I just needed to "buckle down" and "get through" my original topic. Also, changing topics had implications for relationships, my finances, even what country I was living in. All this said, in many ways it didn't feel like I was changing topics - just moving into a different turn.
It's fascinating how we punctuate doctoral work, eh? From a tradition of bounded selves rather than relationship and interbeing? I've been taught that binding can be useful for knowing when you're done and feeling the scope is manageable etc. and I've experienced that traditions of separateness can also be problematic. For me, this topic emerged from work/conversations I was already engaged in/from my life. So where does it begin? When I was filling out my original Ethics Review application, it was clear that I wasn't supposed to talk with "participants" until the app was approved but it was through talking with them that the inquiry emerged. It was action research, co-creation so we needed to define the parameters together rather than me defining, getting approval and then going to them... Punctuation...Something to pay attention to I think.

Anyway, Dorte, yes, I choose to honour what had emerged. I took time finding a university that felt like a good fit - a good community to be exploring this within and as I focused on it, each day, this inquiry became more and more an embodiment of a deep desire to be in service to our community (that of our Ph.D. ecology and the greater ecology we're all part of) in a way that some people might name civic responsibility or relational responsibility or a moral endeavour or engaged citizenship or engaged Buddhism or being a good ancestor or spiritual practice. It's been all of these.

I have never thought of "punctuation" in that way before. It has an impact on how research is framed. Also, there's a lot to be said for the choice that you made. Partly in just that you saw the choice and made it. Also, it's almost like your first focus, which sounds like it would have been very valuable and have made for solid research, would have helped us in one domain and that this has the potential to help us regardless of domain.

I find it useful to distinguish between research that helps us do the same things better and research that helps us do better things. For convenience, call these the forward and upward vectors of progress where "forward" might mean new weapons so that we can fight wars in new places such as outer space, and "upward" might mean learning how to make peace so that we don't need new weapons when we move into outer space. If Siegel is right about our needing "a new way of being," then the "upward" vector may help us deal with the transformed relationships among human beings and between human beings and our environment.

I agree that we need new ways of being and I also know that many of us are steeped in old ways of being through which we'll enter new ways. Erin, as I participate in this great conversation, I think I understand your dissertation but I don't think I could explain it to anyone else - especially someone stepped in old ways. So let me ask this, if you were to describe your dissertation to someone steeped in traditional academia in a way you thought they could understand, how might you name your methodology? Action Research?

I'm curious, Dorte...What are you looking to achieve by having her label her inquiry as a methodology (and one based on a pre-existing category?)

If Erin wants to be in relationship with the broader academic community she needs to speak with their vocabulary to be more clearly understood.
This is harder work than it might actually seem. Ludwig Wittgenstein said that "What can be said can be said clearly. But not everything can be said." That was in his first book. By the time he got to the philosophical investigations, as I understood him, he had backed down from the first statement and drastically modified the meaning of the second. For me, the concept of "clarity" itself is crazy-making. If the social world is, as I believe it to be, polysemic (or, as Philip Wheelwright put it so long ago, "largely fluid and half-paradoxical"), then statements that seem to be clear are the ultimate deceptions. How dare you accuse me of being clear? I am FAR more complex a person than that!
I'm going to borrow that story!
laugh
It is really quite impossible to say anything with absolute precision, unless that thing is so abstracted from the real world as to not represent any real thing.
Erin is doing an excellent job of holding the both/and of compassion and a clear, meaningful way (though I know that will vary by each of our contextual readings).
I think this is a classic conundrum. There is danger in playing the game - the words change you. We want to be clearly understood but not reinforce the idea that we have to fall into familiar categories or certain constructs in order for our work to be deemed valid.

Whether or not a research approach or a means of representing it has been given a name, any format can be sufficiently "valid" if it makes a unique and substantial contribution to understanding the world better or to making it a better place to live... Labeling methods may even get in the way of more creative ways to answer important questions.

Yes, thank you. Well said and I agree.

Answering questions is also a form of label we bring to questions. Harlene often says all questions are not asked to be answered. Questions can be invitations to generate possibility. I also love what Rilke says:

Live everything
Live the questions now
you will then gradually
without noticing it
Live into the answers
some distant day.

~~What~~ it is how to relate to it.

Nice, Saliha. I don't know Harlene but Erin said this about her dissertation, too - not all questions are to be answered but lived, held... One of the questions for me to live and hold is what are some ways to situate an inquiry so that there is shared understanding of how to relate to it while not getting in the way of the work itself? Erin, you once said something about how your inquiry meant different things to different people and that you intentionally stayed open to choosing specific framing and naming in each context instead of one overall naming (to socially construct the frame in relationship - real time.) Is that right? And how was that?

Good memory, Alex. I've actually written pages and pages on how I approached this and you just summarized it beautifully in just a few words! That's great! *laugh* To label or not to label was indeed a significant bifurcation point in my inquiry and interesting to play with. I tried it both. On the one hand, I thought giving it "a" label could invite some neat experiences (like a sense of security and direction, meting people's expectations, invitations into particular conversations/ fields of research/bodies of literature, conferences to consider etc. And in some ways, using a label did indeed do just that!

And it also felt a bit essentialist (it seemed having a pre-set structure/description/ abstract/elevator speech - intentionally or not - said this inquiry has some innate characteristics outside of the diversity of relationships and conversations in which I'm talking about it at any moment. Also, as nice of experiences as it invited, it also denied many experiences. For example, some people felt like they "got it" with one label but many more for whom the labeling wasn't meaning-full and sticking with it would have stalled or ceased conversation. Giving it one label wasn't useful for the VARIETY of conversations I was in and that diversity or variety was so rich I wanted to keep it. And when I tried a single label I actually found myself feeling tense - in my body/my muscles - in a way that wasn't conducive to well-being and wasn't generative for the inquiry/for creativity and different understandings. I think part of what I was experiencing was incoherence - from my Buddhist, Ayurvedic and social-relational constructionist orientations I see all things as impermanent, constantly changing.

That includes this inquiry: my dissertation topic is socially constructed. In relationship. Not once but in an ongoing way each time I engage with it. It is being and has been constructed with you. So although I did write abstracts and the like, I tried to do that in a way that invited conversation and kept the conversations open. In face to face conversations, I kept my framing flexible enough to emerge out of the shared understandings and experiences - the relationship - I was in at the moment.

And that worked well for you? You could navigate that?

Yes, for me it did. Using different relevant stories and framings in the variety of relationships and episodes I found my self in was rich - we more easily coordinated and managed/made meaning together - my inquiry became more real for people - to me as well as others. Each time I talked about it in different ways, I learned something. I loved hearing what came up for other people/for you, what they and you saw that I hadn't articulated, noticed, foregrounded or intentionally created! We co-created something new together - something with dynamic meaning, always in motion. For me in this inquiry, staying flexible with naming helped make a unique and substantial contribution to understanding and taking steps to making better worlds. I'd say there was relational flow. Ken, can you say something about that?

In the process of relational flow, we generate durable meaning together in our local conditions, but in doing so, we continuously innovate in ways that are sensitive to the multiplicity of relationships in which we are engaged. Ideally, if there were no impediments to the relational flow, there would be a full and creative sharing of meaning from the immediate face to face relationship, to the local community, to the surrounding society, and ultimately to the world at large. In each relational moment we would resonate with our surrounds, absorb it's potentials, create new amalgams, and return them to the larger flow of relations in which we are constituted.

The reeds give way to the wind and give the wind away
- A.R. Ammons

I sympathize with your desire to avoid limiting labels but I also think of Bateson's comment, "Any categorization is necessarily limiting...but we can not avoid categorization." Since we live in language, we can never step out of it. And, by it's nature, language is a differentiating device. To say something is "good" distinguishes it from "bad" (although we can never really know how my "bad" and your "bad" connect or do not connect). So, if this is that nature of the social world, all we can do is continually reflect on alternative "labels/categories/ terms".....attempt to create a fluidity of language...

Um hum..that's one of the stories I have about labeling and language, too. I have been in a lot of situations where a label is where people get stuck - often on the nuance of the naming. I've attempted to work with that in this dissertation. Barnett you once said that naming something may be only a mere shadow of what it is but can help us work with it or be in conversation about it. That was really helpful for me and I could benefit from more practice with, conversation around and exposure to/modelling of naming and labeling which honour a relational, complex, polysemic orientation. I'd like to do that more fluidly than I do...

I often practice holding the labels lightly and coach my therapy students on how to create labels with their client while also practicing the art of light holding. Or put differently, it is the art of both the presence (of the label) and its non-presence; it is and it isn't.

Sometimes having labels is a starting point for that relational dance and sometimes it can close off the creative process.

Sometimes it helps you find your "tribe" and sometimes it feels downright oppressive.

Interesting the different ways we name or story this...

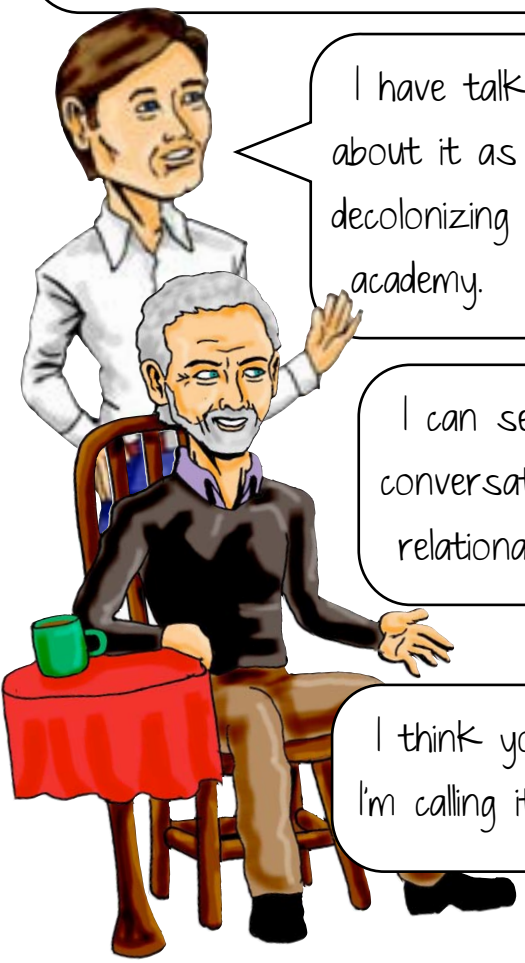
The meaning of the living words that come out of the experiences of great hearts can never be exhausted by any one system of logical interpretation. They have to be endlessly explained by the commentaries of individual lives, and they gain an added mystery in each new revelation.

Interesting. I can appreciate that. Can you give me some examples of how you might have named it in different situations?

Sure. Let me start with your question a while back about Action Research.

For someone who is familiar with AR, using the term could serve as a kind of shorthand to say that, among other things, this is value oriented insider research with others on my own actions, those of our group and our scholarship/theories, aimed at personal, group and large scale change connected to social justice and that I use non-linear cycles of planning, action, observation and critical reflection. For some people I talked with, the term wouldn't mean anything but for those for whom it did, it could open up some interesting conversations.

For others, the opening was that this is trans-disciplinary or practice-led or a dialogic action inquiry about personal and social evolution or creating alternatives or about large-scale change. For others, Knowing it is about our communication patterns and CMMish is important. For others it was that I was engaged in this inquiry in a way that was part of my Buddhist practice. For others it was just talking about how what we do matters or that I hope this contributes to Ken's idea of what a relational orientation invites in the way of practices or of generating alternatives that "breathe life into the promise of relational beings."



I have talked about it as decolonizing the academy.

I have named it as large-scale organizational change work and spiritual practice.

I can see how each of those could invite you into different conversations. And I DO think it breathes life into the promise of relational beings!

I think you are developing a new research method. I'm calling it "dialogic deconstruction/reconstruction"...

It is the "relational" alternative to the post-modern deconstructionist/critical theory methodology that can be brutal (a take no prisoners mentality). What I find so brilliant about the dissertation is that you are modeling a way of acting into a Ph.D. ecology that is compromised of professors who will judge whether your work is worthy of the designation Ph.D., by facilitating a process with them that deconstructs traditional Ph.D. ecologies. Absolutely brilliant!! Where you say you want to go in the dissertation is to create the framework for a socially relationally constructionist realm of abundant possibility....and as your title suggests mindfulness of what we're making in our Ph.D. ecologies. Both of those aims can be seen as a research method of "mindfully dialogic deconstruction/reconstruction".

Fascinating! Dorte, how did you find any of these descriptions? Could they help you be in conversation with others or help me be in those conversations?

Yes, they were very helpful. I think some of my colleagues would be interested in knowing it is performative, others the auto-ethnographic component and others the sociological orientation...

In this age of specialization men who thoroughly know one field are often incompetent to discuss another. The great problems of the relations between one and another aspect of human activity have for this reason been discussed less and less in public.

That is such a lonely thought. Erin, you have worked in a lot of different industries, could you talk about this with anyone outside of academia?

Absolutely. I've talked with my physiotherapist about it - she understood and could talk about why it was important. Same with my neighbor who works at City Hall, my Ayurvedic teacher/physician, my Mom who was a social worker and led health related divisions for county and state government, my house-sitter, my hairdresser...

I recommend to my colleagues a criterion of evaluation on which I have long relied: "the hairdresser test." If I cannot make my research intelligible to the person cutting my hair in way that sparks his or her curiosity, then I must reconsider its value.

Given tendencies toward the isolation of knowledge-making communities, we must...raise the question of "who benefits." This is a non-question for those within a community. Within a community there is a shared view of progress, and it is sufficient that one's work contributes to the shared goal. Within a discipline, the criteria of "what is worth doing" are robustly apparent. However, from a relational standpoint, benefits from WITHIN a given tradition are insufficient. More prominent is whether and to what extent knowledge-generating communities contribute to life outside their confines. The enormous investments in the sciences, for example, are lodged in the trust that there are broad benefits for society. Yet, as we develop isolated islands of meaning, so do the values of society become progressively muted...This is not at all to discount the enormous contributions to a society of research within universities. For example, the contributions of chemistry to medical practice, of biology to sustaining undersea life, of physics to probing outer space and of comparative literature to appreciating other cultures, of philosophy to deliberation on the human condition are laudable. Rather, the issues here are primarily those of priority and potential. If greater priority were placed on the contribution of research for the greater good, would the potential for societal contribution not be far greater?

This speaks to why it's important to look at our culture where falsification is so prevalent. Someone may feel pressure to publish (first) so falsifies which impact anyone using the research e.g. medical protocol.

Agreed. In Australia, there are conversations about whether a Ph.D. is relevant for people - whether it will help them get a meaningful, valuable job in society. Most people answer "no" though others think learning is valuable itself - job or no job. There is also conversation about how many people who teach university classes are seasonal workers with no rights, not necessarily subject matter experts and that there may only be a handful or fewer full-time faculty in any department. The system is set up in a way that it is hard to give time and energy to what you think DOES matter - like environmental sustainability which is of big concern in Australia.

I join with the environmental educator David Orr in believing that current educational forms are at the center of our ecological problems. Orr argues that they tend to divide the world by academic disciplines, advocate domination over nature, promote individualism and rights over citizenship and responsibility and separate rationality from feeling and valuing.

"We are students of words: we are shut up in schools, and colleges, and recitation-rooms...and come out at last with a bag of wind, a memory of words, and do not know a thing. We cannot use our hands, or our legs, or our eyes, or our arms." - David Orr

State legislatures across the United States are often skeptical of the research contribution of their universities. Their skepticism leads them to ask why professors carry such small teaching loads. It also leads to meager allocation of tax funds to university education. For the public, there is also resentment over the billions spent on questionable explorations in space and atomic accelerators, while poverty, crime and drug use remain unchecked.

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I'm hearing a reinforcement of the prevailing narrative about academia that Erin shared and that we need to change to be relevant and valuable.

One of the things I did with in my dissertation, was to try to take turns which were congruent with the kind of issues we want to address in the world. We have talked about separation, what might happen if we come together across time, space, discipline etc. in dialogue? There's much we don't know, what happens if I replace an expert stance with a collaborative one? There's no formulaic or single answer, but it was valuable to notice how many choice points there are and what they could be contributing to, what conditions I could try to help create...Rich, I have thought of this like you and The Harwood Institute talk about "The Sweet Spot" - taking action on a public challenge in a way that builds conditions for change in our community.

Increasingly as I travel the country, I find myself talking about "the sweet spot" and the importance of finding it cannot be over emphasized. Let's face it, we will never have all the resources, time and people we want to address the challenges before us. Instead, we must find ways to leverage our resources for making progress. That, I believe, requires that we must find The Sweet Spot. Then we can have the very capacity we need to act on the challenges we seek to overcome.

Love the idea of the sweet spot to leverage change. I always think of it as the confluence of "organic" practices/potentials/resources. As we say at the Taos Institute, "We can change the world one conversation at a time."

That's what I think Erin is doing. These conversations invite us to reflect on change and we are creating change (including new prescient) both of which help us to think about our future choices in a way that builds capacity for further change.

Many people try to do something "different" and they are held back by the same people who also want change to happen - held back because it's new and people aren't certain that new is acceptable even if the change is intended to make the research more valuable. There's a lot of gatekeeping and dogma in academia and not a lot of room for risk taking. We often talk more about change than actually create it or support it's creation.

I think Erin is creating the change she envisions, which includes engaging us in the conversation.

Looking back at the worst times, it always seems that they were times in which there were people who believed with absolute faith and absolute dogmatism in something. And they were so serious in this matter that they insisted that the rest of the world agree with them. And then they would do things that were directly inconsistent with their own beliefs in order to maintain that what they said was true.

Science...contains within itself the lesson of the danger of belief in the infallibility of the greatest teachers in the preceding generation ... Learn from science that you must doubt the experts. As a matter of fact, I can also define science another way: Science is the belief in the ignorance of experts... We absolutely must leave room for doubt or there is no progress and no learning. There is no learning without having to pose a question. And a question requires doubt.

Um hum.

That the Buddha's question led to his awakening is a significant part of his story, and we should take note of it. In his story we will find the simple message: we access our greatest intelligence through engaging our life with the spirit of wonderment, not through seeking absolute conclusions.

The Buddha discovered that when he asked a question, his mind was engaged and yet open. The process of inquiry itself protected him from the extremes of either ignorance or false certainty.

You know what, I don't think we really design our programs to be open actually. We design towards definition, proof, certainty, validity, reliability...

The state of not knowing is a riveting place to be! Some of our best moments come when we haven't yet decided what will happen next. If our confusion finds its genesis in our habit of turning away from the open state, what would happen if we habituated ourselves to staying open?

The problem with following any methodology is we often stop thinking, stop being present and just follow - closing ourselves off to many possibilities.

Every time we collect and analyze data, we call into being a particular pattern of communication that could have been otherwise, and if it were different, would have different effects. The design of the study specifies who is involved and in what roles; the research question or hypothesis invokes a narrative that makes what we do coherent and persuasive to particular individuals and groups; and the methods that we use comprise the vocabulary in which we will name and engage the objects of our research. When we report the study, we become the custodians of all the many conversations involved in the project. Our decisions about voice, narrative and vocabulary both conceal and reveal what happened in the study, and either honor or colonize various conversations that were involved.

So if I decided I wanted to pursue a Ph.D. and I had a topic in mind that I wanted to explore, would I have to design the study from the beginning or could I stay open to what would emerges?

That's a good question. It partly depends who you are working with and your topic. In some cases, it is helpful to choose a methodology early on. Think of your research design as a set of guidelines which not only help you uncover, make sense of and tell the story you are looking at but which also situates you within a particular community or set of paradigms which can help lend legitimacy to your work. Sometimes, however, you will need time before you can determine which methodology you ought to propose using.

In my doctoral work I was required to narrow my topic and choose a design right from the start as a way to provide structure and focus. This probably helped me complete my research in a timely way but it wasn't as transformative of an experience for me as others say theirs was for them. And though it was good research, I know there's a great deal I didn't notice or pay attention to which could have been even more interesting than what I did focus on.

I hear what you are saying and of course in the United States, the dissertation focus generally does not begin until doctoral course work is completed for up to two years. Many of my colleagues agree with you that this gives much time for thinking about research topics and learning more about a variety of subjects, but I disagree. I think the best way to learn about a subject is contextualizing it within a project about which one is passionate, like the dissertation. I also believe the dissertation exploration can be more complete while saving students thousands of dollars in tuition money.

This has been a hard sell in American universities whereas most international doctoral programs focus on dissertation research from day one. Now, this said, I do believe that getting too specific with a dissertation research project's expectations is not a good thing. One must remain open-minded throughout and be willing to take various turns in the road. If one is unsure of what will emerge during a research project, it seems that attempting to predetermine the structure or focus can block the emergence of creative material.

I believe we need room for a continuum of sorts. I remember talking with one student who was deeply frustrated because, even though he had a general topic in mind, he had to define his specific focus and his methodology prior to engaging the people he was "researching." He felt this requirement mandated him subjugating the participants in a way that he was extremely uncomfortable with and didn't feel served them or him. He was an outsider to their community and really felt it was important for him to create the narrowed focus and the approach to the research WITH them, not FOR them partly as a way of supporting the community's well-being after a tragedy they had been through (the general topic of his research) but that his system prevented that. I faced similar issues in my first IRB which required predetermining many specifics (the IRB process was supposed to be a way of making sure people would be protected) when I felt co-designing methodology WITH them served that purpose better.

....talking about an unfolding methodology.....Dian Marie and I talk about this in our book, Research and Social Change: A Relational Constructionist Approach. In fact, I would say most of the book is about just this...

I'd like to read that book, Sheila.

As my advisor, the biggest gift Saliha gave me was to let mine unfold. I originally imagined something like a TED conference or World Cafes I would then talk about. It was a good idea in many ways but something didn't quite feel right. It somehow felt like I was facilitating and reporting something which could have the potential to inform my choices and other people's more than practicing/ transforming patterns and choices real time. I'm not articulating that well. It was a feeling I had - one that wasn't cerebral (I could have made a strong, logical case for having stayed with the original form and in many ways it would have been much easier and taken less time.) I'm glad I gave myself the space to let it unfold though and that Saliha could flow with that.

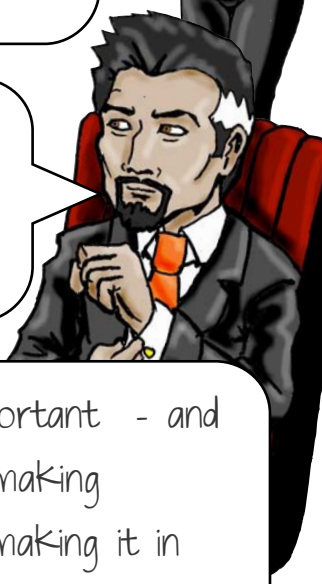
It's fascinating to hear you talk about that. I appreciate that you paid attention to your sensing (and earlier you said you paid attention to your physical being - feeling and noticing tension) as well as what came up for you cognitively. What I also hear is that you took theory (relational constructions) and embodied them in practice. All of those take a lot of self-awareness. Where there's alignment and congruence I think there's more likely to be well-being. Sometimes in academia I think we park our relational orientation at the door so we can maneuver in the system.

...We exist in a world of co-constitution. We are always already emerging from relationship; we cannot step out of relationship; even in our most private moments we are never alone. ...The future well-being of the planet depends significantly on the extent to which we can nourish and protect not individuals, or even groups, but the generative process of relating.

I propose that the primary aim of education is to enhance the potentials for participating in relational processes - from the local to the global. The aim, then, is not to that of producing independent, autonomous thinkers - mythological creatures at best - but of facilitating relational processes that can ultimately contribute to the continuing and expanding flow of relationships within the world more broadly.

And Ken, I see Erin doing just that with her inquiry: "facilitating relational processes that can ultimately contribute to the continuing and expanding flow of relationships within the world more broadly."

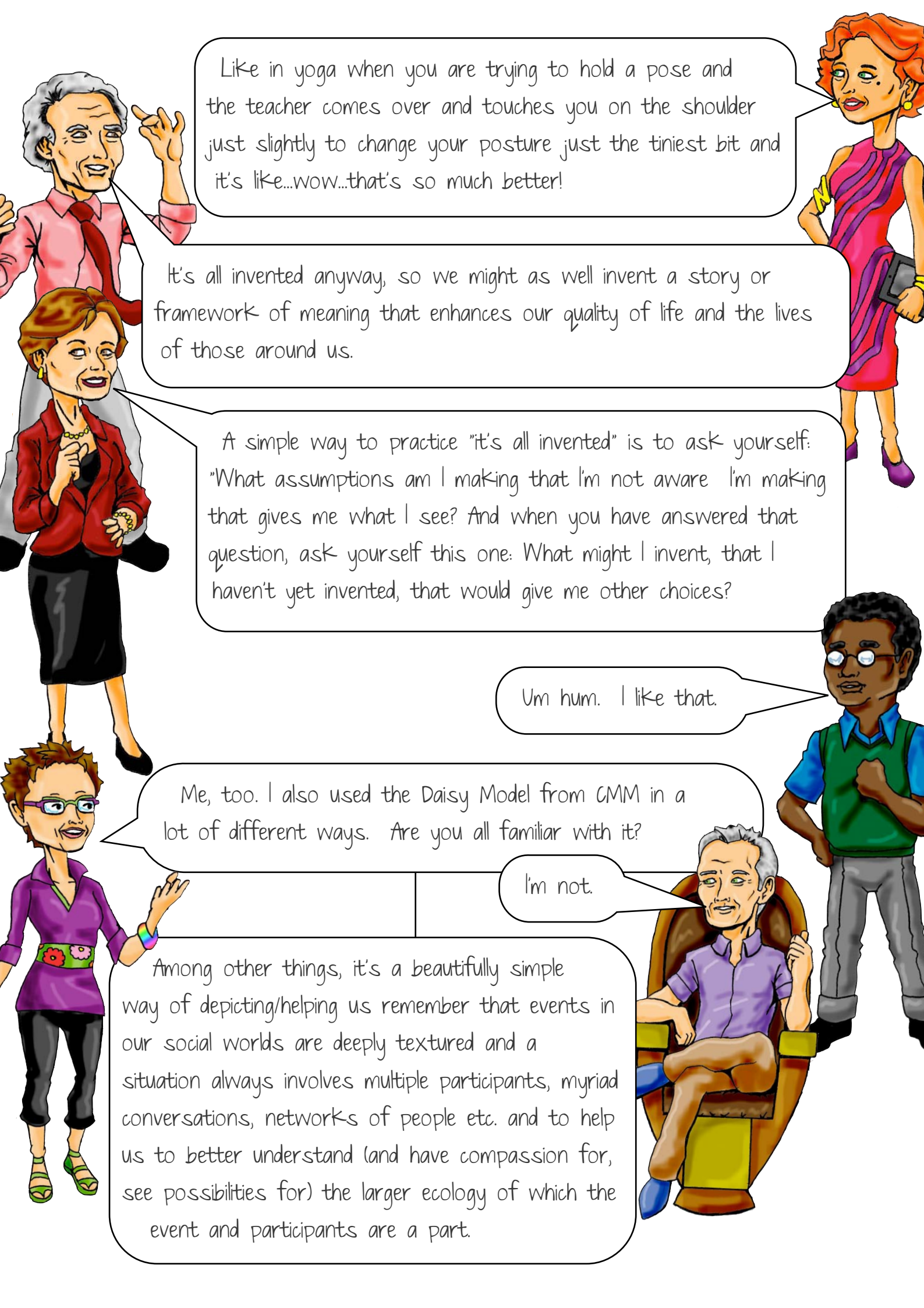
Yes, and...the purpose of education is also to help students develop skills and abilities that will serve them and the common good in the 21st Century. These skills and abilities include creative and critical thinking; problem solving; learning how to learn since information is changing so rapidly, etc. etc.



I agree and part of that learning is about our diversity, complexity and connectedness in the world - that we can make a difference no matter what we're doing or what role we're in. Erin is doing that beautifully.

Existing in a world of co-constitution is why i feel it is important - and can be very generative - to ask the questions what are we making together in our Ph.D. ecologies, how are we making it (and remaking it in the ongoing process of social construction and what does that in turn make) and how can we make better worlds (call into being through our practices the worlds we're working to create?) What can we do in our next turn, the next situation we find ourselves in that helps create new

Asking these questions was one of the practices I engaged in throughout my dissertation and I combined them with asking what I'm putting as the highest level of context/the most important storyline. Was it self/ego/prestige/looking good that was guiding my choices? Was it cultivating compassion or richness of stories? What story was my priority when I was sitting at the computer for too many hours at a time with an aching body? Probably not one of co-enacting well-being. When I could identify and switch the story it was as if everything aligned a little better and new possibilities opened up.


Like in yoga when you are trying to hold a pose and the teacher comes over and touches you on the shoulder just slightly to change your posture just the tiniest bit and it's like...wow...that's so much better!
It's all invented anyway, so we might as well invent a story or framework of meaning that enhances our quality of life and the lives of those around us.
A simple way to practice "it's all invented" is to ask yourself: "What assumptions am I making that I'm not aware I'm making that gives me what I see? And when you have answered that question, ask yourself this one: What might I invent, that I haven't yet invented, that would give me other choices?
Um hum. I like that.
Me, too. I also used the Daisy Model from CMM in a lot of different ways. Are you all familiar with it?
I'm not.
Among other things, it's a beautifully simple way of depicting/helping us remember that events in our social worlds are deeply textured and a situation always involves multiple participants, myriad conversations, networks of people etc. and to help us to better understand (and have compassion for, see possibilities for) the larger ecology of which the event and participants are a part.

There are a lot of different ways you can use it. On as basic level, in the center of the daisy you describe the situation or person under consideration. (For me, I may have put my dissertation.) Then each petal represents a different person/organization/group/network or stories impacting the situation/in relationship with the situation. (I may have put the many conversations this comes out of or approaches I take to it or where it fits with my other work and my life as petals.) You can use the exercise as a way to help look at the relationships, complexities etc.

Or I could put "Ph.D." in the center and the petals might be students, faculty, publishers, doctors using protocol developed based on university research, people who don't want to get a Ph.D., spouses and partners and kids of any of these people, communities with situations they want to work on, etc. This helps me visualize the complexity and situate what we do in Ph.D. programs as being part of a whole ecology.....I'm wondering if there'd be any value in going through an example of one way you could use it? Anyone interested in that?

Okay, great. Like I said, there are many ways you can use this. I'm going to make up a quick example on the spot here. Kim, would you mind if I base it off of some of your exercises?

Please go ahead.

Thanks. So if you can all grab a piece of paper and something to write with or a computer where you can draw and type...This practice will be an invitation to be reflective on how we see ourselves in the Ph.D. ecology and what supports or challenges us in making choices that support well-being. It is an invitation to suspend judgement and to personally engage in a little practice.

Let's begin with thinking of the ways you are part of our Ph.D. ecology - your roles/relationships (for example author, examiner, committee chair, teacher, researcher, alumni, colleague, peer reviewer, teacher's assistant, someone working on their doctorate, grant recipient etc....) Choose one of those where you're finding it challenging to make choices that you think help co-enact well-being in our ecology. Put that at the center of your daisy.....Now think of some of the relationships, circumstances, stories, assumptions, experiences that reinforce this being a challenging situation. Make each of these a petal on your daisy.....Now add on petals for any relationships, stories, experiences which DO help you make choices in this role that co-enact well-being. Pause.....What petals are missing that, if they were present, might change the story you have about the role or situation that is in the center of your daisy? What difference would it make if these petals were present? Feel free to put them on your daisy....Now stand back and look at the whole flower. There's a lot of complexity there! Which petals are getting the most attention? Which ones would you like to give more attention? Less? Are there petals you're ready to let drop off? Pause...As you end this practice, think about the impact (immediate and potential) of your reflecting on these questions and giving attention to co-enacting well being in the Ph.D. ecology.

This is fascinating. As I fill in my daisy, I realize that I see our school-wide policies and the administrator who has created many of them as somehow trying to work against the rest of us. And I don't know why he'd be trying to do that. Maybe it's just a story I have made up. What would happen if I decide to have a different kind of relationship with him? Also, I realized I had a lot of "I can't" petals. But some of the supportive petals were colleagues who feel they can. So, is the "can't" just a story I need to let drop away?

Interesting, John. I realized my work, life experiences, colleagues and spouse would all help support me in co-enacting well-being. So would being in a program that's a good fit for my work-style. And a stipend to off-set the cost/the stress of strained finances.

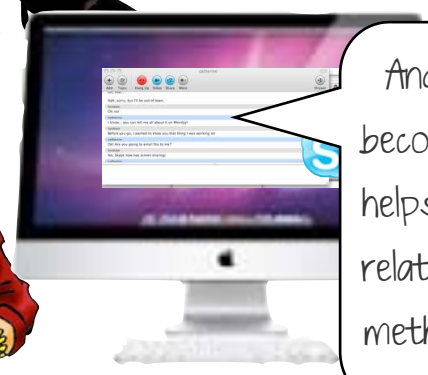
I used co-editor of a journal. One of my petals was colleagues who also want change but who continually reinforce traditional ways of doing things by what they'll accept for the journal. That's so frustrating! It's probably about feeling like we need to legitimize ourselves and that's the way they think we need to go about it. I think they see me as a rebel (not a compliment.) So I put "legitimacy" as a petal and worked with what happens if we re-define how we see legitimacy or who we're looking to validate us. And what happens if I re-define my relationship with them to story myself as an innovator rather than a rule breaker?

My husband is a student so I put spouse at the center. I realized my schedule and other commitments, our budget, his deadlines all contributed to challenges but it's really neat work and I like idea generation so that helps. Maybe I can make more time for that.

It's a very simple model and I can see how it can be useful in many situations. Napkin doodles to help see something more clearly or in a different way.

Many people use it very quickly, just like that, James. And thanks for trying that out, everyone. I'm glad it was valuable. There are many models we have access to which can help us notice and discern complexity and choice points. What I was trying to do there was just show one of many examples of how one of many tools (the Daisy Model) can be used. Barnett, can you share another that may be applicable to Ph.D.

Whatever else they do, researchers orchestrate several conversations, each with its own vocabulary, narrative structure, and implicit moralities. In the final report, some of these conversations are ignored, others are colonized or suppressed, and one is favored. CMM suggests the "daisy model" as a heuristic for identifying these conversations. If we put the research project in the center of the model, each petal represents a constituent conversation; a richer description of the process than the formal report is likely to provide.



And then it becomes part of and helps support a relationally oriented methodology...

And the conversation continues...

Later...

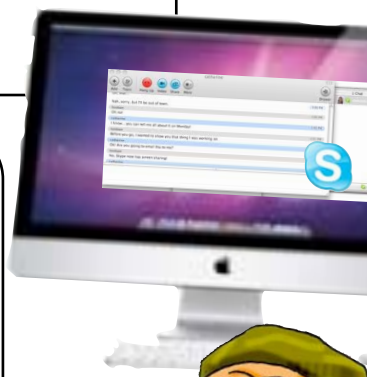
...I want to thank you again for inviting me into this conversation. It's been wonderful. I mentioned before that some of what keeps me from wanting to pursue a Ph.D. is that it doesn't feel like I'll be learning in community and the way people's doctoral work is evaluated and peer-reviewed doesn't typically seem generative, it seems punishing or at the very least, not about learning. I also resist the idea of having to choose a field or discipline to place myself in when I work at the cusp of so many communities. Can any of you speak to that?

If innovative scholarship is the outcome of hybridity, of impurity, or blurring the boundaries between disparate realms of reality, disciplining is its enemy. There is no "thinking outside the box" without risking banishment from the box...The development of disciplines erects barriers separating knowledge-making communities from each other and from the surrounding world. The result is antagonism, ignorance a stifling of creativity, and a diminished contribution to general well-being...Knowledge-making depends on discipline, but strong disciplining is neither essential nor welcoming of creative exploration...

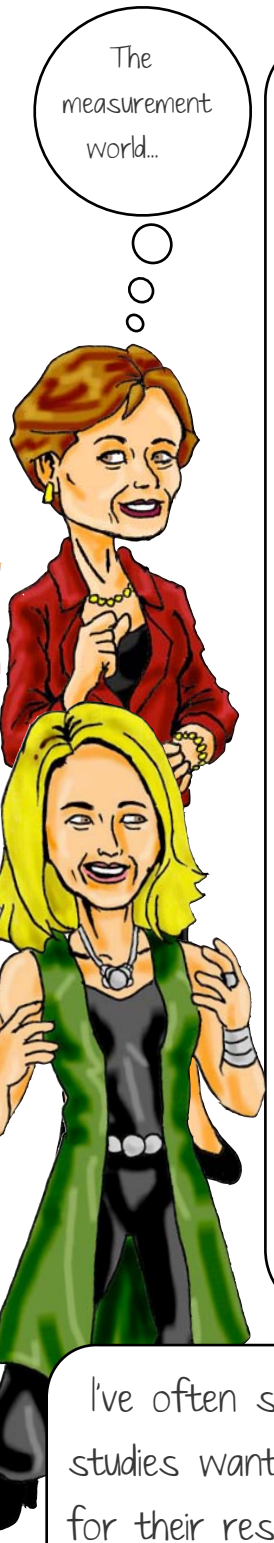
One of the stories I heard during this inquiry was about a scholar (a good friend and colleague of the person telling the story) who was working in a well respected university in the United States. I'm summarizing here quite a bit but basically, by the criteria the university used to determine someone's professorial advancement up the ladder, he could have been considered an exceptional faculty member - including, among other things, that he was publishing extensively (more than most of his colleagues) in prestigious publications, which was something the university put a lot of weight in. His peers, however, took issue with his advancement saying that in his work he "strays" too far outside the discipline and that he wasn't narrow enough in how he looked at things, he wasn't like them/their field enough.

And for these reasons they didn't feel he should advance - or maybe even be part of their department at all. And so that's what happened. Their objections came up year after year and in a way that really felt like bullying and meant that he didn't advance. Each year he was shunned more and more by his peers for "straying." That continued until he finally decided to leave the university. People shared many stories that have those basic bones of peers/colleagues bullying, shunning, competition and dismissing people because they "stray." It's interesting to think about what that, having been made in turn makes and how it's re-made in the ongoing process of our relationships and social constructions and how we can act in ways that improve upon these events and constructions.

I also had a colleague who experienced something similar. It was mean. And heartbreaking. I think it always stayed with him. His work was leading edge and important, in part because of the way it spanned boundaries.



And to address what you're saying about examinations, Shanda...I'll admit evaluation takes priority for a lot of people but I don't think it should. People try so hard to get it "right" in their Ph.D.s. To choose the "right" methodology, the "right" number of participants or interviews, the "right" data points, the "right" literature. I suppose we could ask if our forms of assessment are reinforcing the notion that there is a "Right" way? How do we support the construction that we have infinite choices and possibilities and it's important to try to make a choice which might be most useful in a particular context? As the phrase goes, it's more of an art than an exact "science."



I found a similar pattern, about evaluation focus Dorte - one which emerged through how I was working with my notes. I was using a writing program called Scrivener. In this program, you're able to work with something like electronic index cards which I used as a more eco-friendly version of what I have done with other projects which is to have small pieces of paper with ideas/ data/topics on them which I could move around, connect and combine in different ways in order to facilitate seeing different connections/having different narratives and patterns emerge/noticing different ways of putting something in context etc. For this inquiry, I arranged and connected people stories and experiences around Ph.D. ecologies in many different ways and as I did this again and again it seemed that most of the topics and stories keep connecting back to a single point - one I'd call evaluation or assessment. Whatever else was going on, evaluation and assessment seemed to be at the center for a lot of people. Frequently, their story of evaluation was driving many, if not most of, their choices and how they thought about what is possible in their research inquiries and in Ph.D. ecologies more generally.

I've often seen it happen where people started their jobs or studies wanting to make choices they thought were the best ones for their research question or their context and to use methods they thought would be really useful to them as learners or scholars, but they ran into problems with examiners, committees and peer reviewers (and sometimes funders) who wouldn't approve the choices or saw them as too risky. These people (I'll put myself in that category) learned to use an assessment and evaluation focus as their first priority when making choices - what will be approved without problems, what will help them get tenure, what will let them finish with a good evaluation or get something published, what won't be threatening to their peers or supervisors etc.

Um hum...I've seen that so many times. And I can understand it. After all, people aren't only doing this work as a hobby. They are doing this work within a particular system. They want to graduate, they want the credentials, they want tenure, they want funding and prestige and in order to do that they need to do things the way the evaluators or assessors want. It may feel terrible for many people but that's the system. It's like a cycle of poverty in how it perpetuates itself. I want to change it and I know it's so big. I'm trying to grapple with my responsibility if I encourage someone to follow their ideas even if I know it might not be accepted.

We are at the very beginning of time for the human race. It is not unreasonable that we grapple with problems. But there are tens of thousands of years in the future. Our responsibility is to do what we can, learn what we can, improve the solutions, and pass them on.

Um hum. I think it is important to question that which we feel is unchangeable. Assessments - the need for them, how they may relate to learning and how we conduct them - are a construction just like everything else. We have many examples in our lives where we're learning about complex issues without examinations (parenting for example.) It may sound radical to eliminate examinations for university though many secondary schools are doing it now, supported by the research that exams and grades can hinder our learning more than support it. (3 exam-free schools just opened up in your city, Erin.) If we were to agree as a community that examinations are important, we need to look at HOW we assess/evaluate. What ways? What criteria? Are these "relationally generative?" About learning? Building better communities? Supporting well-being in the world?

Great questions, James. I know someone I'd like to have sit on that committee! I feel like I innovate all the time. But I do have a niggle about what if I'm on a schedule or working with limited resources and something new doesn't pan out. I'll admit that I tend to think I wasted resources - more than seeing it as learning.

Eric, I see you there off in the wings and it looks like you have something you'd like to contribute. I know you said that if you could make it here, you couldn't stay long so please jump right in if you'd like.

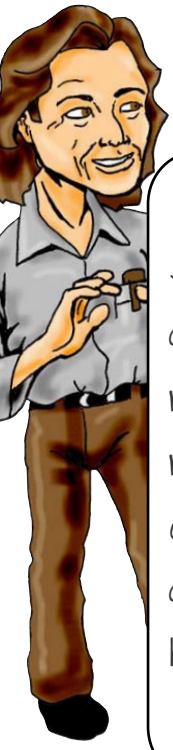
Thank you, Erin. In art, we make mistakes and waste time. I like to think of this phenomena as constructive waste. There are times when artists are very efficient in the wrong direction for a while - a novelist may write 100 pages before getting to the page that will become number one - but the work is not wasted, and the pages are not thrown away.

Artists have the fortitude to be inefficient on their way to opening a new frontier. They have the skill to accept the waste, recognize it's constant possibility, even embrace it., and shed no tears (well, maybe just a few) when it is recognized. This is still a killer for me personally. I adore efficiency and pushed for it tirelessly in my own business. Yet, there are times when the work of art refuses to be efficient, and there are times when I do my efficient damnedest and still end up having to lop off a whole chunk of work. As we grow up, we are told not to worry so much about making mistakes. And then we get clobbered when we make one. The work of art avoids the binary thinking of right vs. Wrong; it focuses on more effective/less effective; it views dealing with waste ore as an internal part of finding gold.

Eric, you're reminding me about the spirit of innovation and including what some might construct as "mistakes" in our definition of performance - in how we are where we are. We take risks to grow and need be able to view what happens as interesting/something to learn from with non-judgmental compassionate acknowledgement. There's also something about being in relationship rather than trying to control how everything is. In this inquiry, there was so much I explored and some of it wound up in the final "product" and some of it didn't. I tried different things, altering things regularly because of a conversation or new insight or to make room for other conversations (this conversation about assessment is a good example - I originally had it at the beginning of this book!) That was all very important part of my inquiry.

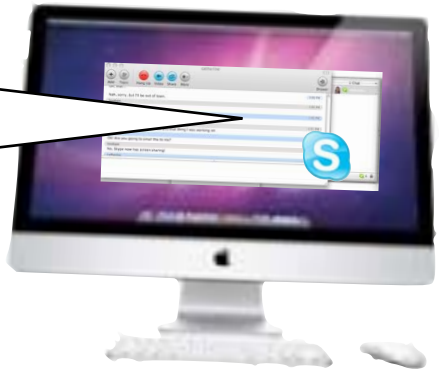
Erin, yours and Eric's comments remind me of our approach to evaluation when we are developing something new or innovating. Traditional forms of evaluation (formative or summative) don't work well when we don't have a "model" to test, when we don't know how to create a desirable change in a complex adaptive system and when we have to experiment and course correct as we go. An approach called developmental evaluation has been developed by some leading edge evaluation thinkers/practitioners (like Michael Quinn Patten) that some folk are now using in innovation settings where you are "experimenting" in real time. There is/has been considerable resistance to this from more traditional evaluators but leading edge foundations and social change agents are really seeing the power of this approach where you focus on rapid feedback and course correction as you -- in service of creating the "innovation". For those of us working in complex adaptive systems (e.g. raising a child) where creating conditions for change isn't predictable this has become a powerful way of working. Some of us are calling it intelligent risk with rigour - the rigour is in the developmental approach to evaluation.

A traditional approach to evaluation ends up privileging the evaluation over the innovation - or as you would say evaluation becomes the highest context--"there is a right way to do evaluation" -- not the change in community that you are trying to create. To embrace this developmental evaluation approach takes a willingness to risk, courage, especially when you are working with institutions like governments where traditional outcomes measures have been the norm. It also takes some understanding of complex systems change (as opposed to simple or complicated systems). Many of our societal challenges are complex systems that are being tackled as if they were complicated systems. (in "Getting to Maybe" Michael Quinn Patten and Brenda Zimmerman do a great job of distinguishing the difference among these systems.) Working in this way requires a paradigm shift and the courage among some of the players to try to do it differently.



Jan, that's wonderful to hear about. Among other things, it sounds like there's an acknowledgement that you need to look for different things because you are doing something differently. It reminds me a bit of people working with participatory action research and people in international development needing to use forms and tools like the standard LogFrame where the design of the tools dictated particular ways of working or what got privileged - they helped keep things the same instead of supporting the changes the work was intended to create.

Yes, thanks for that, Jan! I use DE in my work, too and it would be interesting to think about how I would use it not just in my doctoral research in communities, if I went that route but in my actual dissertation - my final product.



For many of us, our familiar everyday world is a world of measurement - there is a central position held by assessments, scales, standards, grades and comparisons. In this story of the everyday, each of us strives for success, hoping to arrive at a better place than where we are. There's an unseen assumption that life is about survival and getting ahead in a world of limited resources. Now let's suppose that a world of possibility stretches beyond the world of measurement to include a world that is infinite, generative and abundant. Unimpeded on a daily basis by the concern for survival, free from the generalized assumptions of scarcity, a person stands in the great space of possibility in a posture of openness, with an unfettered imagination of what can be. In the realm of possibility, we gain knowledge by invention.

We decide the essence of a child is joy and she is. Our small business attracts the label of the can do company and that is who we are. We speak with the awareness that language creates categories of meaning that open up new worlds to explore. The action in the universe of possibility may be characterized as generative, or giving, in all senses of that word - producing new life, creating new ideas...the relationship between people and ideas is highlighted, not the people and things themselves. Emotions often relegated to the category of spirituality are abundant here: joy, grace, awe, wholeness, passion and compassion. You are more likely to be successful if you participate joyfully with projects and goals and do not think your life depends on the marks because then you're better able to connect to people all around you... When you are oriented towards abundance, you care less about being in control, and you take more risks. In the measurement world, you set a goal and strive for it. In the universe of possibility, you set the context and let life unfold.

I participated in my Ph.D. with joy. I felt awe, a kind of wholeness and passion. Until the last 6 months which felt kind of like what in Australia is called as "fagging" or a you might know as a hazing. I felt like a skinned-rabbit! It was so shitty! We all go through it, or many of us do and we think we'll get something good on the other side.

I had to make changes to my dissertation that didn't feel good. I don't even like showing it to anyone! Not that I can imagine they'd want to read it - it's so long! I'll write you an article but read that? No thanks! Anyway I don't feel good about it anymore after the changes I had to make in order to graduate. The whole process was like a matrix system, not dialogic. I think it would have been better if it was a dialogue but it wasn't. It's like this went to that person and then to that person and back to me and...ugh! It was so political, too! Things sat on this person's desk or that one's based on previous relationships and whether they liked each other and the conversation patterns sounded like "it's her fault, it's his fault." The relational politics played out in such negative ways and it really had an impact on me. One time I found myself in someone's office (one of the his fault her fault people) and I found myself yelling and leaning over that person! Can you believe it? That was so unlike me! People who know me know that I'm never like that! I didn't even recognize myself! And I'm so embarrassed but that's what happened to me in that system.

And it was such a competitive environment. I felt powerless and I felt like that whole 6 months of assessment took the heart and soul right out of the process and me. I had been warned to never put someone on your committee who has recently received their own Ph.D. because they will be way too harsh on you. But for many reasons it turned out that I had recent Ph.D.s on my committee. The newer they were, the harsher they were - just like people warned me about. It's like people who had been around for a while felt like they could be more flexible or look with wider eyes and new people felt they had to prove something by putting you down or making you suffer through what they suffered through. It's a cycle we need to break. The assessment wasn't fun or really valuable for anyone including the examiners.

That sounds like a terrible experience. I'm sorry you went through it. Can you imagine how the system could change, John?

Sure. I'd try to change it by getting myself on people's committees. To stop that cycle right there. Sometimes you want to speak up when you're in it but how can you when you are so invested? All the money so many people spend - especially in other countries like the U.S. And the time. I spent 6 years and put so much of my heart into it. After that you feel like you can't speak up because you don't want to compromise getting the degree. It wasn't about the world being infinite or abundant. Like you Ben and Roz suggested it could be. It was about survival. Now that I survived, I can help change it for other people by doing something different on other people's committees.

I wonder how often our emphasis on "getting it right" or how things "need" to be a certain way for us to be satisfied (and I mean all of us - students, committee members, supervisors) takes people from passion and a state of thriving to mere survival or even breakdown.

Richard, you have talked about the pressure of expectations and what it was like for you when you moved into academia after working on the Manhattan Project. Do you feel like sharing something about that?

I would get offers from different places–universities and industry–with salaries higher than my own. And each time I got something like that I would get a little more depressed. I would say to myself, "Look, they're giving me these wonderful offers, but they don't realize that I'm burned out! Of course I can't accept them. They expect me to accomplish something, and I can't accomplish anything! I have no ideas..."

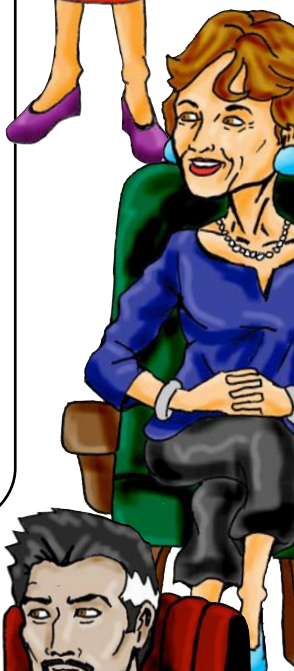
Finally there came in the mail an invitation from the Institute for Advanced Study: Einstein... Von Neumann...Weyl... all these great minds! They write to me, and invite me to be a professor there! And not just a regular professor. Somehow they knew my feelings about the Institute: how it's too theoretical; how there's not enough real activity and challenge. So they write, "We appreciate that you have a considerable interest in experiments and in teaching, so we have made arrangements to create a special type of professorship, if you wish: half professor at Princeton University, and half at the Institute." Institute for Advanced Study! Special exception! A position better than Einstein, even! It was ideal; it was perfect; it was absurd! It was

The other offers had made me feel worse, up to a point. They were expecting me to accomplish something. But this offer was so ridiculous, so impossible for me ever to live up to, so ridiculously out of proportion. The other ones were just mistakes; this was an absurdity! I laughed at it while I was shaving, thinking about it. And then I thought to myself, "You know, what they think of you is so fantastic, it's impossible to live up to it. You have no responsibility to live up to it! It was a brilliant idea: You have no responsibility to live up to what other people think you ought to accomplish. I have no responsibility to be like they expect me to be. It's their mistake, not my failing. It wasn't a failure on my part that the Institute for Advanced Study expected me to be that good; it was impossible. It was clearly a mistake–and the moment I appreciated the possibility that they might be wrong, I realized that it was also true of all the other places, including my own university. I am what I am, and if they expected me to be good and they're offering me some money for it, it's their hard luck.

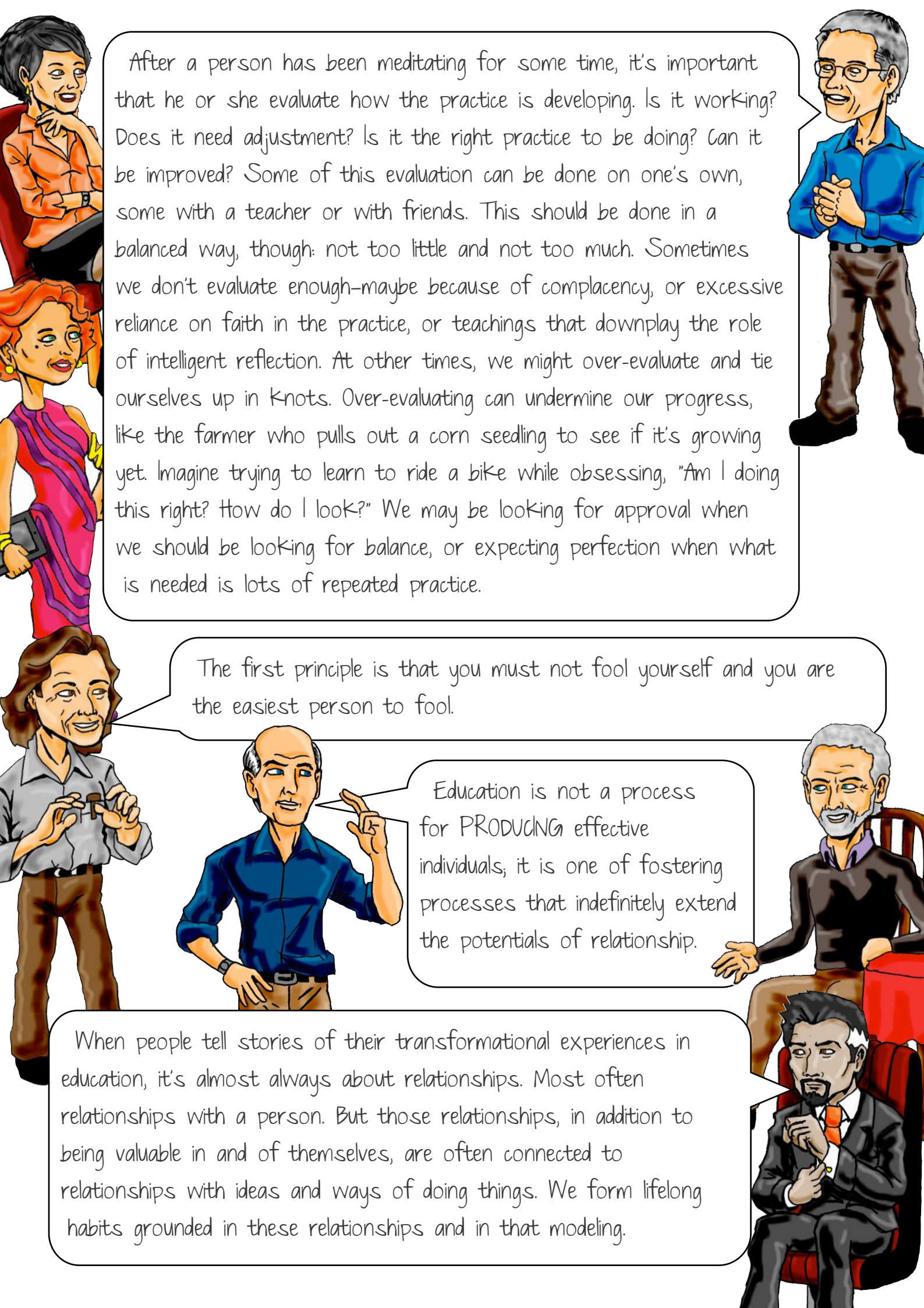
Then, within the day, by some strange miracle–perhaps he overheard me talking about it, or maybe he just understood me, Bob Wilson, who was head of the laboratory there at Cornell, called me in to see him. He said, in a serious tone, "Feynman, you're teaching your classes well; you're doing a good job, and we're very satisfied. Any other expectations we might have are a matter of luck. When we hire a professor, we're taking all the risks. If it comes out good, all right. If it doesn't, too bad. But you shouldn't worry about what you're doing or not doing." He said it much better than that, and it released me from the feeling of guilt.

Fascinating. Thanks for sharing that story. I feel a lot of responsibility for what I do - for the choices I make and their outcomes. It's a joint responsibility.

Part of what I'm hearing in what you're saying is that we have stories or constructions about what's "good" or "enough" and those can get in our way. Changing that story/that construct and that pressure, changes how we feel and what's possible. It changes our relationships. Part of my Buddhist practice is about not seeing ourselves as being those stores - to be able to open around them. In social constructionist language we may say that we are all living into multiple stories all the time. And we can change those stories - including stories the community holds about individual or relational responsibility and about what is "good" or "expected"



Um hum...yes. Gil, you're a scholar and a Buddhist meditation teacher. How do you think about evaluation in relation to your meditation students?


After a person has been meditating for some time, it's important that he or she evaluate how the practice is developing. Is it working? Does it need adjustment? Is it the right practice to be doing? Can it be improved? Some of this evaluation can be done on one's own, some with a teacher or with friends. This should be done in a balanced way, though: not too little and not too much. Sometimes we don't evaluate enough–maybe because of complacency, or excessive reliance on faith in the practice, or teachings that downplay the role of intelligent reflection. At other times, we might over-evaluate and tie ourselves up in knots. Over-evaluating can undermine our progress, like the farmer who pulls out a corn seedling to see if it's growing yet. Imagine trying to learn to ride a bike while obsessing, "Am I doing this right? How do I look?" We may be looking for approval when we should be looking for balance, or expecting perfection when what is needed is lots of repeated practice.
The first principle is that you must not fool yourself and you are the easiest person to fool.
Education is not a process for PRODUCING effective individuals; it is one of fostering processes that indefinitely extend the potentials of relationship.
When people tell stories of their transformational experiences in education, it's almost always about relationships. Most often relationships with a person. But those relationships, in addition to being valuable in and of themselves, are often connected to relationships with ideas and ways of doing things. We form lifelong habits grounded in these relationships and in that modeling.

I grew up in a traditional Jewish household, which meant, apart from much warmth and chicken soup, an assumption that the children would be "successful." It was never openly articulated, but it was implied in many family interactions.

Each evening at the dinner table, for instance, with my parents seated at either end, and we four children between, my father would turn to my eldest brother and say, "What did you do today?" And my brother would describe, at what seemed to me considerable length, all the things he'd accomplished. Then my second brother would be asked the same question, then my sister. By the time they came to me, I would be a nervous wreck, because usually I didn't think what I had done that day was very significant. Moreover, I realized that the question being asked was not really "What did you do today" but "What did you achieve today?" And I thought I hadn't achieved nearly as much as my very accomplished siblings. So I grew up with an undertow of anxiety that lasted into my middle age. The drive to be successful and the fear of failure are, like the head and tail of a coin, inseparably linked. They goaded me on to unusual efforts and caused me, and those around me, considerable suffering.

Of course, the surprising thing was that my increasing success did little to lesson the tension. Until the splash of cold water. My second wife walked away from the marriage midstream. At the same time she asserted that we would always be in relationship, and that it was up to us to invent the form. "Let's invent a form," she said, "that allows us to contribute to each other, and let's set a distance that supports us to fully be ourselves." I saw the game of success was just that, a game. I realized I could invent another game. I settled on a game called I am a contribution. Unlike success and failure, contribution has no other side. It's not arrived at by comparison.

All at once, I found the fearful question, "Is it enough?" and the even more fearful question, "Am I loved for who I am, or for what I have accomplished?" could both be replaced by the joyful question, "How will I be a contribution today?" When I began to play the game of contribution, I found there was no better orchestra than the one I was conducting, no better person to be with than the one I was with; in fact there was no "better." You can choose to be a contribution. Declare yourself to be a contribution. Throw yourself into life, (and your work) as someone who makes a difference, accepting that you may not understand how or why. When you play the contribution game, it is never a single individual who is transformed...

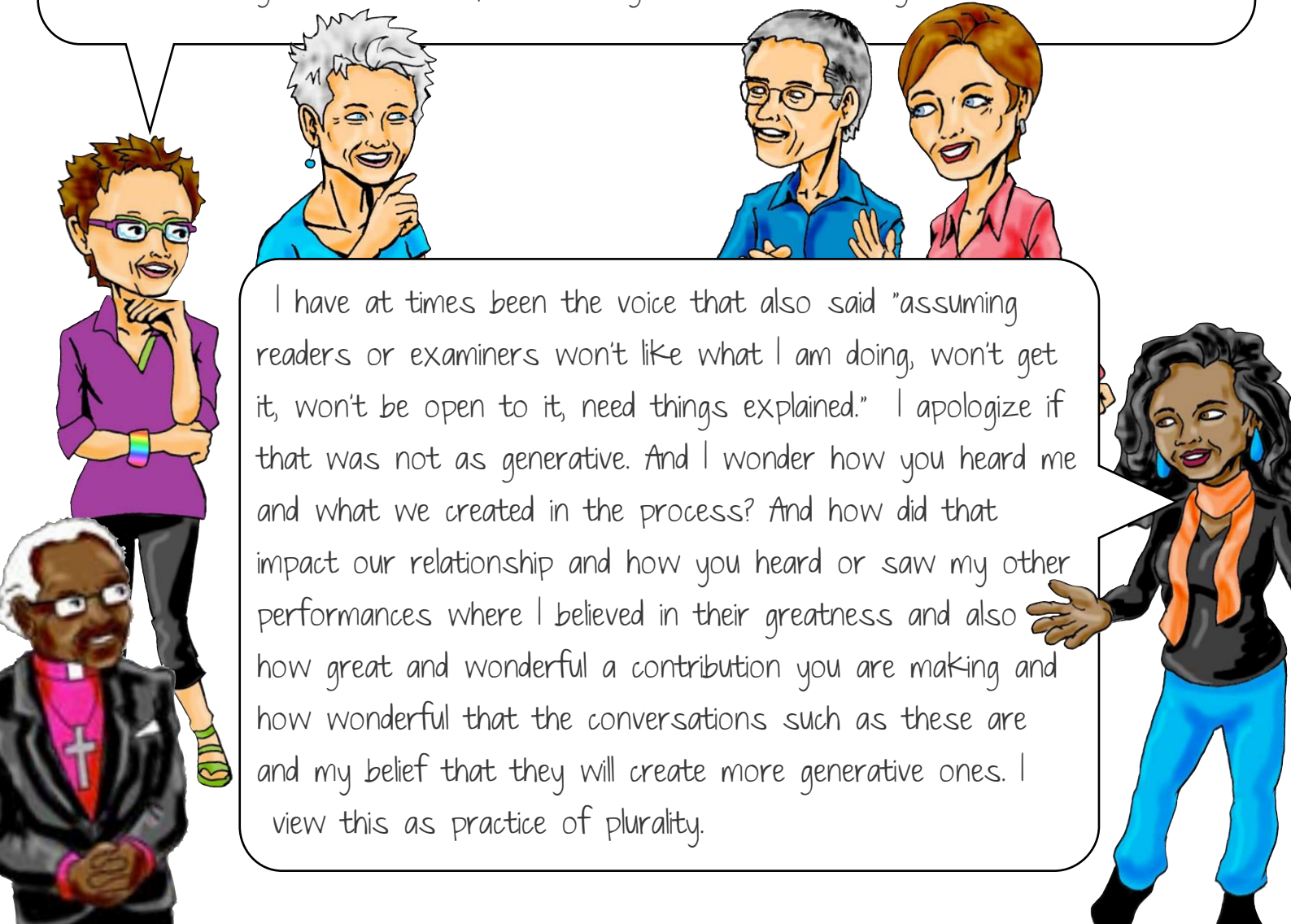
Transformation overrides the divisions of identity and possession that are the architecture of the measurement model, recasting the tight pattern of scarcity into a widespread array of abundance. And naming oneself and others as a contribution produces a shift away from self-concern and engages us in a relationship with others that is an arena for making a difference.

Naming not only oneself but also others as a contribution produces a shift that engages us in a relationship with others. It has to do with granting people greatness. How much greatness we're willing to grant people makes all the difference.

....love shifting the question to what contribution am I making.....I like to talk about noticing our own finger prints on everything that emerges....

I really like that, too - the what am I contributing and the fingerprints. And I like the idea of granting people greatness. It made a difference for me in this inquiry - including how I wrote. It felt very different when I was working from advice I was constantly being given about assuming readers or examiners won't like what I am doing, won't get it, won't be open to it, need things explained many times than when I was imagining greatness and great contribution from them/working from a desire to really trust that we could have a really valuable conversation together. It was also present in the form I chose - I was assuming wisdom and value in the room/in people's experiences....

You know, I've been very aware over time of how this inquiry and my Buddhist practice have become intertwined and I wasn't conscious until this conversation right here how the Buddhist practice of Metta or loving-kindness meditation made a difference in how open I was in my inquiry and how generative it was. Hum.....Metta as it relates to how we think about "how we are doing".....wondering what a practice of compassion and loving-kindness might open up within our Ph.D. ecologies (and what cultivating loving-kindness through our doctoral practices might mean for making better worlds.....



I have at times been the voice that also said "assuming readers or examiners won't like what I am doing, won't get it, won't be open to it, need things explained." I apologize if that was not as generative. And I wonder how you heard me and what we created in the process? And how did that impact our relationship and how you heard or saw my other performances where I believed in their greatness and also how great and wonderful a contribution you are making and how wonderful that the conversations such as these are and my belief that they will create more generative ones. I view this as practice of plurality.

Hum...What do I want to create here? What do I want to call forth?

This is a potentially loaded conversation. A risky one.

Thanks for those observations, Saliha and for your questions. Every relationship is complex, eh? Our speech acts don't occur in isolation. We bring in daises full of petals/of conversations and relationships we are in, history of what we have said, done, heard, witnessed before - each turn is a response to something and elicits a response, every turn opens up or closes down possibilities and the quality of our conversations form our relationships our social worlds... What I'm trying to do with this dissertation is help foreground and discern choice points, critical moments in how we are together, in what we're making. There are many. You and I had some significant bifurcation points in our relationship. Many turns, many potential paths we could have gone.

I'm happy to talk about your questions in more detail. One thing I'll offer right now that is present for me is that mindfulness of making and managing meaning, of coordinating with others, discerning ways of acting in the moment in difficult situations in ways which make better worlds is all, is an ongoing practice. For all of us. Even people we think are so incredibly skilled at this say it's an ongoing practice for them. One best practiced in community. I don't think this practice is about trying to choose the "right answer" - we're acting into situations much more complex than that. I do think it's a practice that takes compassion, loving-kindness, curiosity, a willingness to learn together...and sometimes to "debrief" as I think you're asking for here...Thanks for asking! I'd love to have the conversation...

And the conversation continues...

Later ...

...In cultivating loving-kindness, we train first to be honest, loving, and compassionate towards ourselves. Rather than nurturing self-denigration, we begin to cultivate a clear-seeing kindness. Sometimes we feel good and strong. Sometimes we feel inadequate and weak. But our loving-kindness is unconditional. No matter how we feel, we can aspire to be happy. We can learn to act and think in ways that sow seeds of our future well-being, gradually becoming more aware of what causes happiness as well as what causes distress. Without loving-kindness for ourselves it is difficult if not impossible, to genuinely feel it for others... As long as our orientation is toward perfection or success, we will never learn about unconditional friendship with ourselves, nor will we find compassion.

When we stay present for ourselves, we develop a heightened sensitivity or awareness of the choices we can make. Every moment we come to a fork and the fork has to do with how am I going to respond in this situation. Do I respond in by giving into my anger, greed, fear, envy or whatever it might be or do I choose that which brings more kindness, more friendliness. Do I choose that which is more compassionate that which is more generous. Every moment there's this choice. It's hard to see those choices but a very important function of mindfulness practice is to have the stability of mind, the calmness, the settledness to see how we're making choices all the time.

Goodness changes the way we see the world, the way we see others, and, most importantly, the way we see ourselves. The way we see ourselves matters. It affects how we treat people. It affects the quality of life for each and all of us. What is the quality of life on our planet? It is nothing more than the sum total of our daily interactions. Each kindness enhances the quality of life.

What from our tradition do we need to let go of or reinforce to transform our culture to co-creating more of what we're talking about?

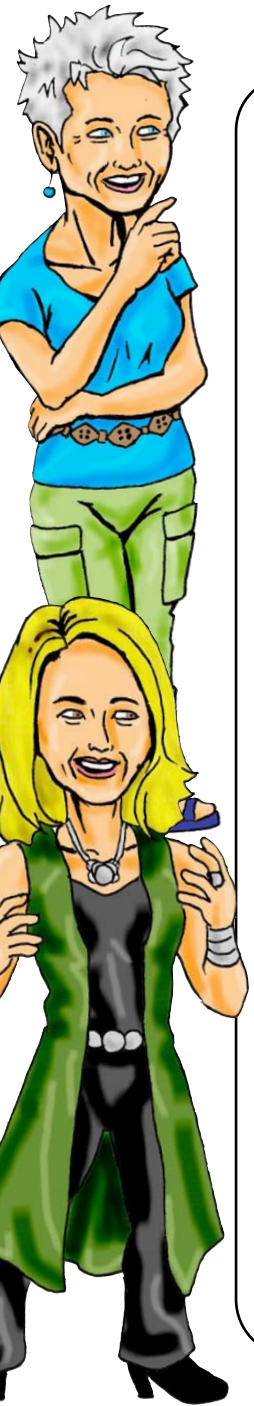
The longstanding and much cherished tradition of the individual self carries with it enormous costs...it invites a sense of fundamental separation and loneliness; encourages narcissism at the expense of relationships; generates unending threats to one's person, and transforms the self into a marketable commodity...If we come to appreciate the reality of relationship, we will be in a position to transform tradition.

A metaphor that comes to me is moving from a tightened fist (something about wanting to control or protect myself) to an outstretched, or at least an open, hand. We in the West live in an individualistic culture. It gets expressed and reinforced in many ways-here is one that I chanted as a kid when I was teased: "sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me". But, of course the way we are with each other matters. Words do hurt, unhealthy patterns get made in one context and repeat themselves in other contexts, and scar tissue develops...in the heart...in the mind...and throughout the body and spirit. I was recently thinking about this and about how healing it is to be in the presence of someone who shows compassion and love. The definition of "heal" is to form healthy flesh again, and to unite after being cut or broken. We need to remember how much of our lives occur through "mimicked contact"; of observing how others "do life" and finding ourselves mimicking what we see.

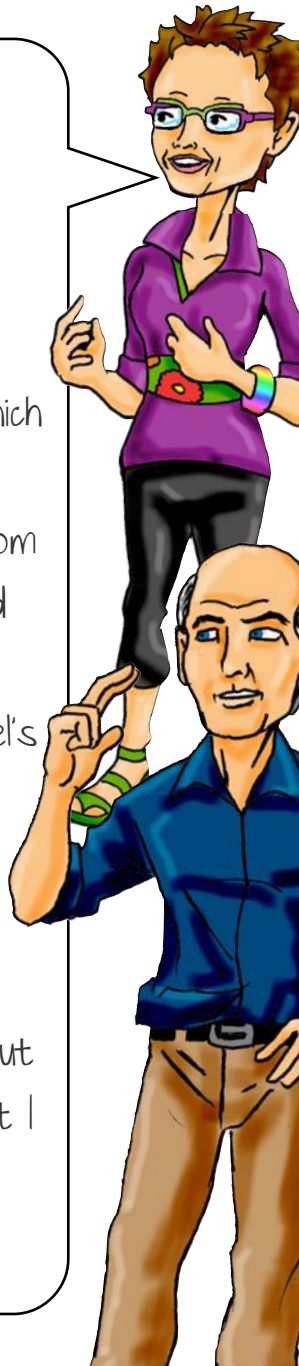
...how do you not fall for the trap of it being a mental activity?

How we write, evaluate, our emphasis on "critique" etc. are all things we learned and many of us reinforce.

So if we focus on creating better worlds through Ph.D. programs and that has a focus on relationships, cultivating loving-kindness and mindfulness of the choices we're making, then it seems to me that the evaluation can't just be about what an individual "did." It needs to be more relational than that or maybe about our development somehow. I know people enrolled in creative arts programs that are there to get feedback that helps them develop life-long practices. They might not all get that but the ones who stay in the programs often are the ones who ARE getting it - it's a big part of why they stay. But I think for the most part we're typically assessing and evaluating an individual and what we think they did and whether they did enough of it. Erin, how were you thinking about evaluation for this inquiry?

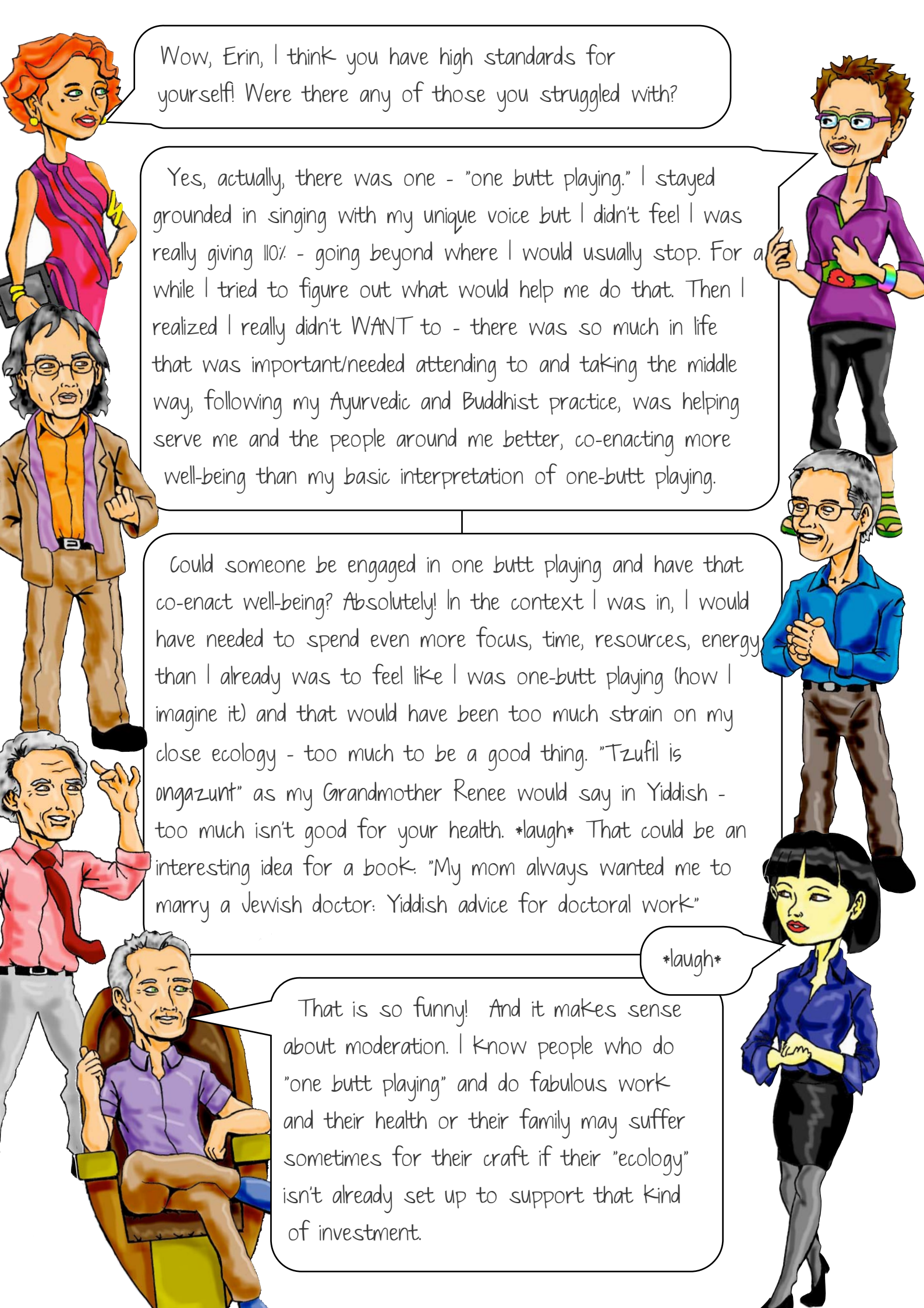


Great question, John. I thought early on that having a community of practice would be really valuable in thinking about decision points and "how I was doing." I also thought of touchstones/strategies/advice/signposts I generally reflect on or try to cultivate in my life and how those might apply to, help ground, guide or keep me engaged with my dissertation and which could be useful check-ins for how and what I'm doing. These were inspired by many people's work including, for example, from CMM/Barnett and Kim Pearce's recent work, Peter Reason and Judi Marshall's writing about Action Research, Ben and Roz Zander's book The Art of Possibility, Elizabeth Mattis Namgyel's The Power of an Open Question: The Buddha's Path to Freedom, Deborah Bird Rose's Slow Scholarship manifesto, work coming out of the Corporation for Positive Change and from my Buddhist practice - just to name a few! These were touchstones I could keep coming back to to help me throughout the inquiry and particularly my dissertation writing. This is what I came up with. There are many. I'd love to hear how you all experience them/what resonates or opens up ideas...



- Am I mindful I am participating in a multi-turn and multi-storied process?
- Am I co-enacting connectivity, engaging the wisdom of our collective intelligence (paying attention whole body-mindfully?)
- Am I developing new capacities/practices which help me enter into generative relationships with others, even under less than optimal conditions?
- Am I opening up possibilities with the turns I take? Being invitational and proactively compassionate? Saying no when appropriate and in ways which open doors and pathways/inviting conversations over ending them?
- Am I embracing all stories as incomplete, unfinished, dynamic (even inconsistent), relational, complex and valid? Am I able to welcome and relax into wonderment, expansiveness, paradox, playfulness, movement?
- Am I getting feedback that I'm making a difference in people's lives?
- Am I honoring relational responsibility - including with reviewers/examiners? Am I being generous and gentle with myself and others/giving people an "A" when imagining or anticipating their responses? Staying excited?!?!
- Am I developing skills/habits of listening deeply with curiosity while also standing tall (Buber's standing my ground while remaining profoundly open to the other) in ways which foster inquiry and invite others to engage in creative conversations based in genuine inquiry?
- Am I acting on what I love in service to something larger? Co-creating better worlds? Co-enacting well-being? Working in ways which reflect my commitments to what some call liberation of all beings)?
- Am I working with emergence in generative ways - seeing evolving choices/shifts as signposts of learning? Am I practicing with expansiveness, mindfulness, impermanence, non-attachment (including allowing ideas, approaches, methods, conversations to drop away?)
- Am I being both an attractor of and generator of possibility?

- Am I practicing Ben and Roz Zander's "one butt playing"? Working with passion and enthusiasm beyond where I would usually stop? Am I singing with my unique voice?
- Am I staying present with open questions, embracing boundarylessness, able to be with the fullness of an experience without needing to come to conclusions? Am I allowing room (stillness, space) for things to arise?
- Am I experiencing joy, nourishment, fun and growth? Am I engaged?
- Am I engaging the five core strategies of appreciative leadership? The wisdom of inquiry, the art of illumination, the genius of inclusion, the courage of inspiration, the path of integrity?
- Am I engaged in curious, experimental, open, adaptive, imaginative, expansive, responsive and responsible ways?
- Am I becoming more intimate with this ecology? Am I letting people into personal parts of my journey in service to/as part of this work?)
- Am I being gentle with myself and others? Am I including "mistakes" in my definition of performance?
- Am I practicing the Five Mindfulness Trainings to cultivate the insight of interbeing? http://www.plumvillage.org/mindfulness-trainings/3-the-five-mindfulness-trainings.html
- Am I engaging in practices/ways of being in relationship (to this inquiry, with other people, with ideas and constructions etc.) in ways which help habituate me to openness and mindfulness?
- Am I inspiring people? Am I and are others engaging in new practices or living with new forms of understanding or constructions?
- Am I being a good ancestor?
- Am I paying attention to how it "feels"? How DOES it feel?

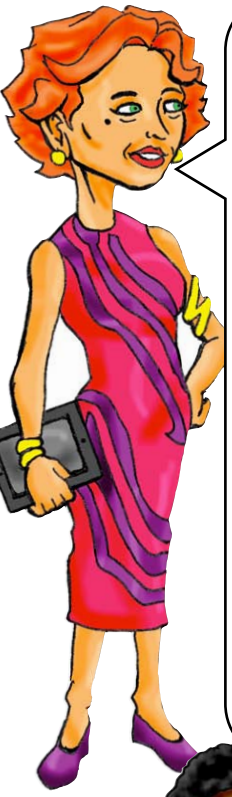

Wow, Erin, I think you have high standards for yourself! Were there any of those you struggled with?
Yes, actually, there was one - "one butt playing." I stayed grounded in singing with my unique voice but I didn't feel I was really giving 110% - going beyond where I would usually stop. For a while I tried to figure out what would help me do that. Then I realized I really didn't WANT to - there was so much in life that was important/needed attending to and taking the middle way, following my Ayurvedic and Buddhist practice, was helping serve me and the people around me better, co-enacting more well-being than my basic interpretation of one-butt playing.
Could someone be engaged in one butt playing and have that co-enact well-being? Absolutely! In the context I was in, I would have needed to spend even more focus, time, resources, energy than I already was to feel like I was one-butt playing (how I imagine it) and that would have been too much strain on my close ecology - too much to be a good thing. "Tzufil is ongazunt" as my Grandmother Renee would say in Yiddish - too much isn't good for your health. *laugh* That could be an interesting idea for a book: "My mom always wanted me to marry a Jewish doctor: Yiddish advice for doctoral work"
laugh
That is so funny! And it makes sense about moderation. I know people who do "one butt playing" and do fabulous work and their health or their family may suffer sometimes for their craft if their "ecology" isn't already set up to support that kind of investment.

I'm intrigued about "joy" in your touchstones. Did you experience joy while working in your dissertation?

I did! Often. Usually. And not always. At one point I was playing with the idea of joy as both a measurement and an outcome (inseparable.) When I wasn't making joy, I'd look at what I was doing, how I was engaging, what stories I was holding/what I was attached to etc. and see if something needed to shift. Through doing that I was indeed able to create shifts that felt really good! It turned out to be a great indicator and prompt to check-in.

I appreciate your touchstones. I am imagining what some of mine might be based on what is important in my life, including being a good ancestor. I think this approach of yours to evaluation as learning and a combination of personal and social evolution is admirable and quite atypical in Ph.D. programs. Most often, it's more a ritual of membership. Evaluators assess for whether or not someone is enough like them, has read and analyzed enough of the same authors, knows enough of the same history, people, vocabulary that they want to admit this person into their club/their discipline.

What is this culture about that we need people to be like us and do things our established way but then also criticize all their work as not good enough? What is this about? Protection? Scarcity syndrome? Trying to bolster ourselves in other people's eyes? I don't see how this kind of separation and criticism serves anyone, really and as part of that, I don't know who the evaluations, the way we do them now, are serving. Who benefits?



I think I see what you mean about membership. For example, even though I promote original work, if I'm going to assess someone, I do want to see them refer to the people's work I think is important, people I would refer to so I know they have certain knowledge or understanding that I'd expect people in our discipline to have and be able to talk about. I could ask myself, where's my sense of biodiversity in our ecology? And if someone is contributing something new, how might centering the old impact on that? Does something need to drop away to make room for something else?

Good questions, Katharina. And as you asked, Nong, how is this membership model serving us and what might serve us better or already has in other locations in our ecology?

Alfie Kohn's work, "Punished by Rewards

I do believe that Ph.D. ecologies are part of MUCH larger and very powerful systems. And the students and professors in the Ph.D. ecologies have been part of a reinforcing tradition of "what it means to be a student" for most of their lives. Here in the US, the educational ecology is still very steeped in an enlightenment perspective...In California, University departments are required to use standardize measures to show the State that student learning outcomes are being met. So, right now in the US students are exposed to standardized tests from K-university with the emphasis on the grade. The higher the grades, the more money institutions get and the more opportunities students have for going to more prestigious universities. For those of us who want to change the "educational ecologies" we need to be mindful that the system is self-reinforcing up and down the educational ladder. But the other pole of "we can create what we want–there are endless possibilities" does not take into account the power of the institutionally-reinforcing system.

As an educator, what I have done to help manage the tension between these two poles is to think about the "transformational move" as "joining the grammar of the system; challenging that grammar; and then extending/changing it." In practice it has meant completely rethinking "evaluations and grading". Grades are mandatory–but methods of grading are not. What I have done during the last 20 years of my 27 year career at the college level is to begin the semester by "naming the grading dilemma for professors and students" and (as a way of "extending the grammar) allow "redos" on all assignments. The classes I teach are primarily performance oriented (i.e., public speaking and writing). I know what a good presentation and a well-written paper look like so I have clear criteria about the expectations and what kind of feedback I'll be giving students. I also know that it's actually in the students' best interest to have opportunities to do their work over again (sometimes several times) to help them master the skill set. But make no mistake about it–it's much more work for me. I'm committed to doing the extra work because I know this system of evaluation will "make" something that more traditional evaluation systems do not.

The first thing it makes is a different kind of relationship between the student and me. If students know that they can redo an assignment I become more of a "coach" than a critic. It's not that I'm not critiquing what they are doing, but the critiques are in a broader context of mastering the skill. When students know that their grade is set once they have taken the test or completed the assignment they are much more interested in the "grade" itself (the question on most every student's mind is "just tell me what I need to do to get an A). When the pressure to perform well on every assignment and for the first time is eliminated, it creates a space for a different relationship with me...and with their own learning and mastery of the subject matter. My grading system became very popular with the students because there was a safety net that they didn't have in other classes. And many students completed the class because of this safety net...and they have developed an important skill set in the process.

What I was able to do with this grading system was straddle two sets of values and obligations that pulled in different directions. I was able to give students a grade at the end of the term that, for the most part, reflected as well as grades can their level of mastery. I was also able to do this in a way that transformed my relationship with them and that privileged their learning more than their grade.

I resonate with your practice. In my class I start out by saying you are all "A" students, as in your own ways you have worked hard to get here. Now let's work together to maintain it & if that means submitting drafts or redoing some of the work, I will work with you. And as Kim states it's a lot more work for the teacher too, but in the end its about the process of learning and the relationship and less about the grade itself while honoring the tradition of grades that the students are habituating.

Interesting. I definitely don't think grades are compatible with relational generativity or making better worlds. Can anyone share what you think are indicates "good work" in dissertation contexts?

I published a book a few years ago called The Authentic Dissertation: Alternative Ways of Knowing, Research and Representation. In it, authors of unique, "out of the box" and "authentic" dissertations, some that have received international awards, tell brief stories about their dissertation journeys. They share their reasons for challenging the status quo and the special value of their subsequent scholarship. As diverse as their dissertation stories are, they have one thing in common. They are authentic. They are, in essence, spiritual undertakings and reflections that honor the centrality of the researcher's voice, experience, creativity and authority. As such these researchers created dissertations that...

- Focus more on important questions than on research methodologies per se
- Seek to make the world a better place
- Move away from an over-emphasis on academic writing if it tends to stifle creativity or one's true voice
- Are aware of shortcomings of the English language
- Tend to be interdisciplinary
- Do not fall for the myth of "objectivity"
- Do not rely on external authorities
- Reveal virtues (generosity, patience, courage, respect, humility, fortitude etc.)
- Align with sustainability priorities
- Are not overly anthropocentric in nature
- Remember that art, music and storytelling are living information systems
- Are situated in experience
- Respect multiple culturally determined ways of thinking and living
- Care about and contribute to social and ecological justice
- Comprehend the true value of diversity
- Regard the people's vision of reality
- Challenge all forms of oppression
- Are critical of cultural and educational hegemony
- Appreciate dreaming and visions as potentially valid resources for knowledge
- Recognize the pitfalls of a male-dominated, white-western world
- Honor traditional Indigenous ways of knowing
- Integrate knowledge, scholarship, research, reflection and practice
- Understand the power of stories, music and other forms of art as a source of wisdom
- Reveal mindfulness each step of the way
- Appreciate the role of sacrifice in the journey
- Pay attention to perennial cycles and wisdom in nature
- Remember to look for life's beauty and joy

Interesting. I'd like to hear more about appreciating dreaming and visions as potentially valid resources for knowledge in Ph.D.s. It seems like it would be very foreign to many examiners and that could be potentially alienating for both them and the students.

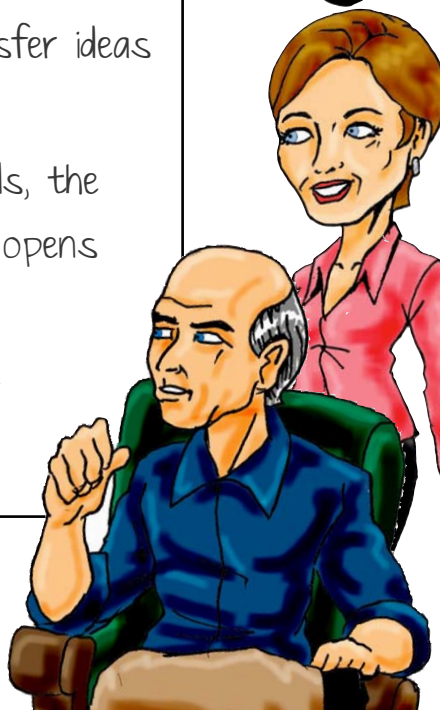
Whether something in the approach is foreign to examiners or not, my experience is that the assessment itself is often alienating. For me, I was on staff at a university (for more years than I'd like to admit) before I decided to do a Ph.D.. My role was to help faculty develop their skills and build strengths they needed. We were friends and colleagues and they respected how much I helped them do their jobs. But when it came to me being assessed by them, it was like all the sudden I was no longer a professional or a colleague. I was a "student" and they were vicious. My dissertation had been such a wonderful time up until then - it was like a treat to have that time to spend on something I was passionate about. I loved doing it but they killed that completely. Killed anything fun or engaging about it. And they were from my own culture! It's like we're in the business of new knowledge but people don't want to

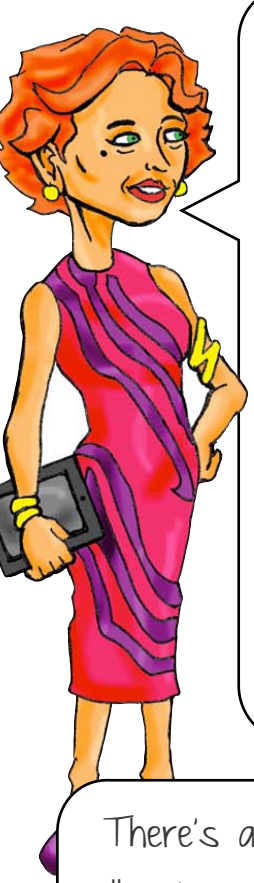
That's a terrific list, Four Arrows. Do any of you know of any study where examiners are asked what they would actually IDEALLy like to see in a dissertation, if they weren't thinking about what would get published, or what their peers would think etc. What they think actually makes a difference in the world?

It would be an interesting study to conduct. I don't have a sense of whether we'd be able to think in new ways or if we'd resurface the familiar. I'd like to hope we could come up with good ideas but one never know what will come out.

In the journal Academe, published by the American Association of University Professors, Lovitt's 2005 article, "How to Grade a Dissertation" describes the conclusions of 276 faculty members at ten research universities who collectively had sat on nearly 10,000 dissertation committees, across the sciences, social sciences and humanities. I'll highlight their conclusions about dissertations that the faculty rated "excellent," Keep in mind that the research revealed that outstanding dissertations "were very rare," a problem I hope will be rectified when more scholars begin to reach the goals I talked about earlier and express them in their work. These findings are relevant to legitimate concerns about the rigor of work that is arts-informed, storied, autobiographical, critical, anti-oppressive, ecologically situated, or Indigenous-oriented. Their conclusions about dissertations rated as excellent are:

- there is no set formula that leads to excellence
- outstanding dissertations defy explication
- faculty said such dissertations display a richness of thought and insight and make an important breakthrough
- such dissertations are a pleasure to read
- the faculty members describe students who produce outstanding dissertations as very creative and intellectually adventurous
- the dissertations leap into new territory and transfer ideas form place to place
- the dissertation writer used or developed new tools, the dissertation pushes the discipline's boundaries and opens new areas for research
- and outstanding students typically think and work independently.





Interesting! And it all had resonance for me until the working independently part. I appreciate that there is no set formula, that they are adventurous and a pleasure to read, that they pushed boundaries...By thinking and working independently I wonder if they mean not looking to the system for answers? Or not bothering people? Or what? We try to foster relationship in our department. That said, students and faculty often get evaluated based on what people see as individual and independent efforts more than relational ones. For example, how many publications we have is more important that the difference we make in student's lives. Our culture is all about publishing. Here we are required to publish at least 3 pieces a year. (First author = individualistic orientation.)

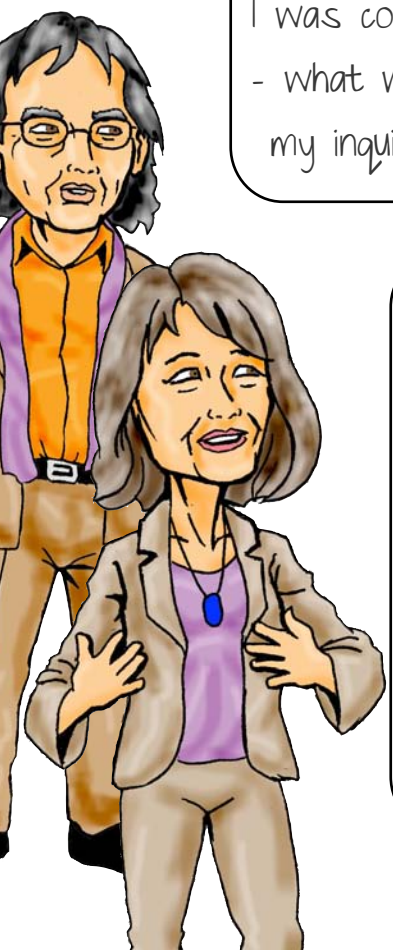
There's a professor at Sydney Uni doing great work - year after year students talk about him as the one who was the most important influence in their lives and he really cared for them, they talk about him as a fabulous teacher. He's writing a very thoughtful, profound book. But that book and that time with students does not equal 3 publications a year. So they fired him! There was student outrage. One student had won the university gold medal and he wrote to the uni articulating very clearly why he thought this professor should be reinstated and with that letter he sent back his gold medal! I don't think it will change anything though. Maybe they need to go to the newspaper. The uni won't like that kind of press. And this kind of way of being certainly doesn't align with what Ken was saying about the purpose of education. It may, however, be part of what Four Arrows identified earlier as how we may be contributing to social problems instead of helping ease them.

Good points, Katharina. I think it's important that our evaluation is a dialogic relational process and that it's meant to help people be their best. That applies for students and staff.

If I go back to creative theses and how those are evaluated, what I have found in my research on them is that if it was a dialogic process that started at the beginning of the program instead of just coming in at the end, artists seemed to feel good about it - they knew it was about developing their practice and really, that's why they had enrolled - to develop their practice. Someone was supporting them, helping them. My evaluation felt so crummy in part because it wasn't dialogic. It was about critique and exerting power over people - it was not about helping me develop or even course correct like Jan talked about with Developmental Evaluation. Erin, how was your evaluation for your master's thesis? And did you use similar criteria as your touchstones here?

Well, my masters thesis was a bit untraditional and one of the things I tried to attend to was helping the evaluators with how they could situate/think about what I was presenting to them. I hoped I could help put them at ease with engaging with it and thinking about what to look for. For example, I talked about working from a paradigm that recognizes that all knowledge is socially situated, that the knower and knowledge cannot or should not be separated, nor can they be impartial or value neutral. I talked about a paradigm that values lived experiences, interactive methods and people as autonomous and self-directing subjects to work with, rather than objects to be studied. I referred people to Guba, Harding, Smith, Truman, Mertens and Humphries, Heron, Reason, Maguire, and Lincoln's writings for more on that paradigm. I acknowledged that people coming from a positivist paradigm may judge the inquiry to be too biased, too subjective, not scientific, not rigorous and not done 'right,' which prompted feelings of vulnerability within me and went on to say that this inquiry was an expression of my need and desire to learn and change, and I was taking full responsibility for my approach and its consequences...

I talked about how there was ongoing dialogue about use of the term 'validity' and the significance of this construct within participatory research, how I was still learning (through reading and doing) what made up my own concept of quality and how I looked forward to feedback (cycles of action and reflection) on the subject. I also said that in that inquiry relevance and authenticity were important over reliability and the degree to which the methods I used seemed to fit the situation, how the inquiry informed and contributed to my understanding, and how the process and results contributed to my development were also very important. Talking about those perspectives and criteria, and doing it early on (as I had intend to do here!) did seem to help readers - they commented on it. And although I thought there was going to be a lot of resistance to my inquiry or a lot of people who felt it wasn't scholarly enough or rigorous enough or who couldn't see all of the theory, learning, application etc. that went into the performative/ presentational form they were reading - people's response was actually extraordinarily positive. I received the highest marks possible and received an invitation to present my dissertation to students, faculty and alumni. People felt it was really a very important contribution. I'm so glad that it was valuable for them - it certainly was for me. It was good to think about how I was constructing the standard I wanted to invite them to use to evaluate it - what was important to me in my inquiry from the perspective of having my inquiry help develop and support generative ways of being together.

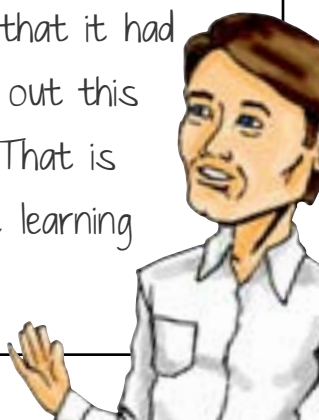


I love the way you showed to your Master's thesis committee that you (1) understood the scholarly literature, (2) had read and researched broadly, and (3) had chosen to integrate those "traditional" aspects of a thesis in a less traditional manner. By letting your committee know how you hoped to be evaluated, you participated in creating the evaluation.

Thanks, Sheila! Eden, I read in your doctoral thesis that in the course of your enquiry you recognised and embraced Ubuntu, as part of an African cosmology, both as your living practice and as a living standard of judgement for your thesis. I appreciate that framing. Can you share with us some of that experience?

It was through my Ubuntu way of being that I arrived at Knowledge claims, that is, a belief that I knew something that I wished to make public. I knew that what I did worked for me in my life in ways that other approaches had not. My thesis sought to bring that Ubuntu way of being, as a dynamic relationship with the conditions that I sought to influence into the Academy as a standard of judgement. I judged this work by the extent to which it had enabled me to improve my emancipatory practice in ways that are valuing of humanity and practically capable of contributing to transformational change.

My thesis was a search for theory as much as an account of action - a theory of a kind that Argyris describes as 'actionable knowledge' in the service of one's core values and feelings, with the intention to help human beings and organizations to act more effectively in the 'real world', and with the ultimate concern for justice, has helped to make life full of learning and fun. I believed that this work, if it was to be successful and not just a means to gain an academic qualification, needed to meet standards of judgement that may go beyond those of the Academy. For example, I wanted it primarily to be experienced as of being real value to myself. I believed that I have carried out an enquiry over a period of time that had helped me live out my values more effectively than before and improve my practice significantly. It had been systematic in that it had been disciplined and sustained over years. Through carrying out this systematic inquiry I had met my second criteria of validity. That is that it was experienced as being of value to those whose learning I seek to be an educative and decolonizing influence on.

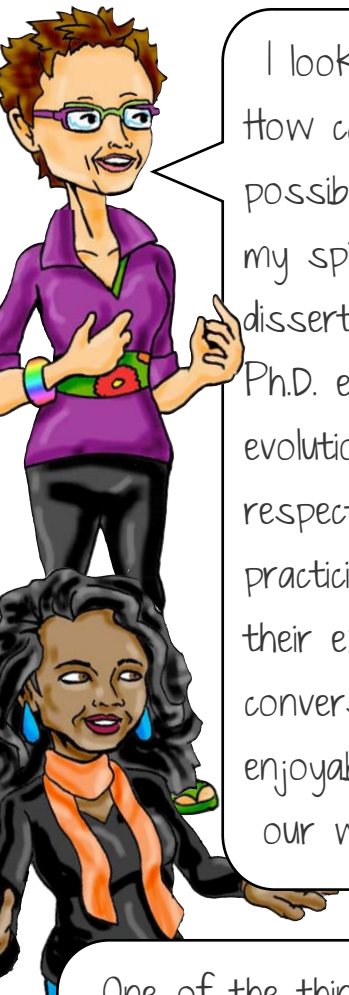


That sounds terrific. The idea of value is interesting. If people don't get it, is it still valuable? Does EVERYONE need to get it? Or get it immediately? If they don't (at that time) experience it as being of value maybe because it was subtle or because they don't get it, does it still have value?

Even if everyone doesn't get why it is interesting/valuable or exciting, the research may still be very important. The Sensei at the Zen Center I practice at once said that students often look for an explanation or answer to a question or try to recap the teachings/instructions in a way that is like trying to fit a big breadbox into a little breadbox. The student's experience of practice is not at a place where they can take it in. That doesn't mean there's something wrong with the instruction or the student, it's just about where someone is with their practice. As we deepen our practice the breadbox will get bigger! I've been a Zen student for 15 years and there are many things the dharma teachers and monastics say to me that don't fit into my little breadbox.

We have different ways of knowing things. Most commonly we know "things" through our habitual objectification of them. When we objectify something, we draw a boundary around it and therefore can only know it in a limited way.

Elizabeth, I found your book The Power of An Open Question to be valuable in living with and practicing with Buddhist teachings in my inquiry. During our conversation here I have been wondering what it would be like to explore the Eight Fold Path or Thich Nhat Hanh's 14 Mindfulness Trainings as part of this discussion or part of my touchstones because they are teachings I'm looking to live into in the world and I'd hope any inquiry I undertake would be part of that practice - that development. There are many practices, traditions and frameworks people could look to for inspiration or guidance!



I looked to many. You heard some of my questions earlier: How can I engage with my dissertation in ways that cultivate possibility? Help me be a good ancestor? Are congruent with my spiritual practice? What might it look like to design a dissertation that helps support the continuing evolution of our Ph.D. ecologies while engaging in conversation about that evolution? What kind of product could I generate that would respect the ways of working and living into the world that I'm practicing with and trying to cultivate, be useful to others in their explorations, expedite or invite access to diverse conversations, invite continuation of conversations and be enjoyable to read? How can I create an episode that serves our work in the world?

One of the things I did was to try to work with the logical force that often accompanies reading, writing and reviewing dissertations. I wanted to try to facilitate, enable and participate in different kinds of communication patterns/speech acts than what people often experience around dissertations (with higher ratios of curiosity, questions, co-creation, compassion, engagement, kindness than re-porting, defending, critiquing, telling, informing...) I wanted this dissertation to bring to life one way (one of countless ways) to approach a dissertation with a relational orientation: I wanted to provide a sense that this dissertation is a multi-turned, multi-storied, polysemic, incomplete, dynamic, co-created inquiry. So I made choices to try to help provide that experience and invite further creation of it.

This is all very interesting. I appreciate all these examples and the touchstones you have given us for thinking about your dissertation, Erin. Were there any particular criteria that your program required?

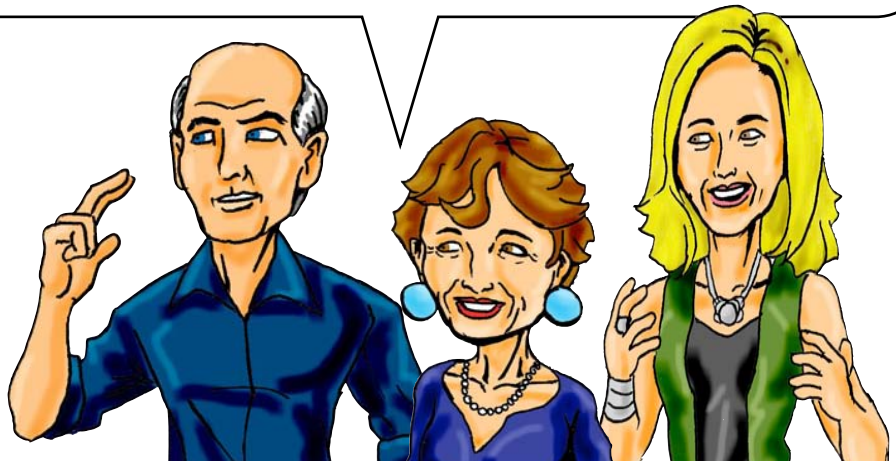
Great question. There could have been informal or even unspoken requirements that my advisor had though I think she remained very open to what I was coming up with. There were also requirements from the university like the dissertation had to be a printed book rather than a play or an electronic dissertation (wiki, video, interactive online book etc.) This was a challenging requirement for me, by the way and I challenged it a lot from the beginning. I know others have, too. For me the book requirement meant many things including, for example, a greater carbon footprint (at my university we need 50 printed paper copies.) Paying attention to the impact our activities have on the planet is very important for well-being. It also meant, in my view, a less relational way of communicating - or at least a less conveniently relational one. For example, a live electronic version would have allowed me to hyperlink in context (like in the cases where your talk bubbles are something you have previously said, I could link people directly to that document with a single click) and people could view and add to the turns real time in a way that values transparency, nonlinear processes and ongoing participation or co-creation. I think these are all important skills to cultivate if we are to live well together. And it meant being non-inclusive of many ways of communicating people find extraordinarily powerful and transformative like stage performances as an example.

DVD documentaries have been accepted by ProQuest for years as long as there are enough written pages (around 30 is one example) and the binding has a sleeve for the DVD. I've fought hard to get Fielding Graduate University to accept this and finally won it.

That's great, Four Arrows! I know a number of examples from Australian universities where people do a combined performance or visual arts presentation with a smaller written component. And I love that the Journal Science holds a contest every year where they ask people to submit dance versions of their Ph.D.s It communicates their lab research in such a different way. I have also seen an incredible amount of masters thesis work which have valuable three demential, tactile components or are all electronic. I think you know Canadian Glen Gatin, an educator who completed his dissertation as a wiki. It was brilliant.

I agree there are terrific forms. Sometimes the Academy seems open to them and sometimes it doesn't. What other requirements were there?

Many students ask about criteria of excellence in writing their dissertations. Such questions are especially significant for the Taos/Tilburg program, as its constructionist orientation is one that offers great latitude in how a dissertation may be organized, in its forms of writing, in what kinds of methods or research practices are permitted, and so on. Yet, there are several things we customarily look for in evaluating dissertations, and which will be important to many who serve as dissertation examiners. Although all these criteria are not relevant to all dissertations, among the most common desiderata are:



•An introduction to the topic of the inquiry, and an explanation of its importance to potential readers (and possibly why you were drawn to the topic). Why should readers care about this dissertation and the topic? You may also wish to treat how this topic has been dealt with in the past, what can we draw from this work, what are its limitations?

- An account of what the writer hopes to learn by conducting this inquiry. This point is made to emphasize the importance of this work for the author - how will the author learn through the process of conducting this inquiry?

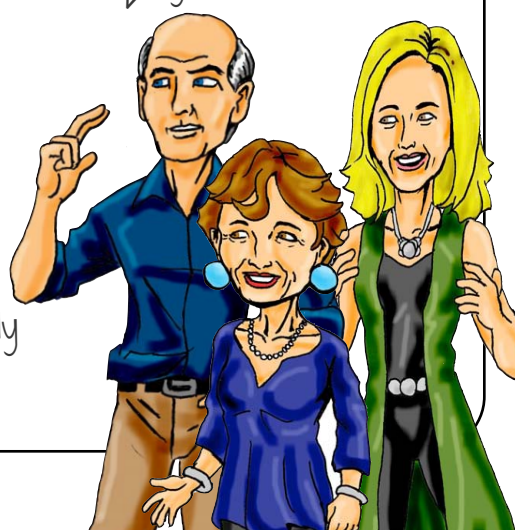
- An account of the relevance of social constructionist ideas to the topic of the inquiry. How, for example, do constructionist ideas inform the topic, how do they open new ways of understanding or approaching the topic, or address some of the limitations of preceding inquiry?

- References to relevant scholarship (pertaining to both "traditional" approaches to this topic and a constructionist approach). The typical dissertation should link topics in scholarship to practices in the world. Thus, links to scholarly writings (books, journals) are essential. These may be reviewed in a single chapter and/or distributed throughout the dissertation.

- A description of how you are going about your inquiry, including the organization of the thesis. What is the rationale? If you are using a particular method, why has this method been selected? In what ways is your selected method coherent with your constructionist orientation? Discussion of ethical considerations is appropriate.

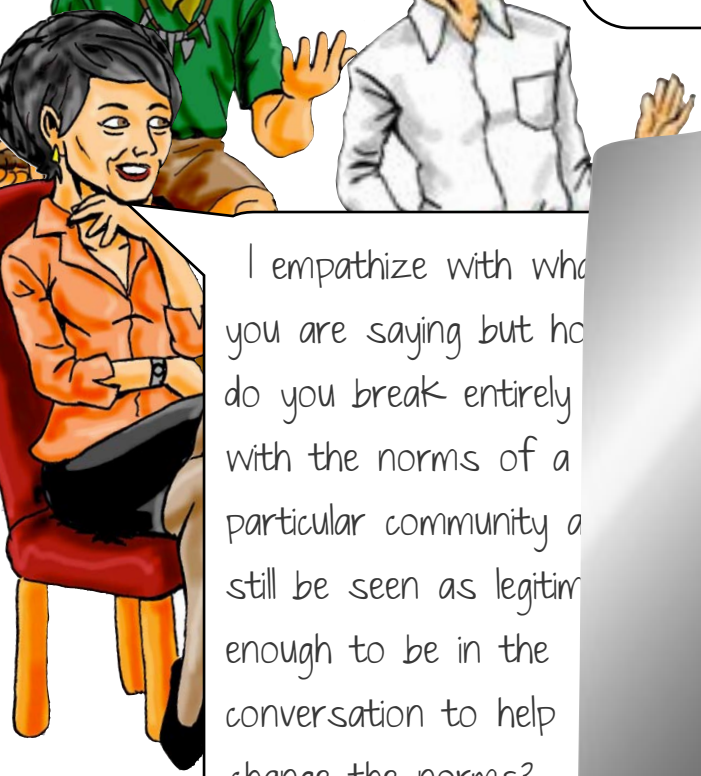
- An account of the applicability of the work to the world more generally. How does this work inform or invite practices in the world? What can others use in this work, what can they learn? What might you do next if you were to continue inquiry into this topic? Or, what might you suggest as useful and generative projects for others?

- A form of writing that any literate audience can understand. Is the dissertation readable, informative, and possibly even enjoyable to readers- for both lay and scholarly audiences alike? (First person writing can be useful here.)

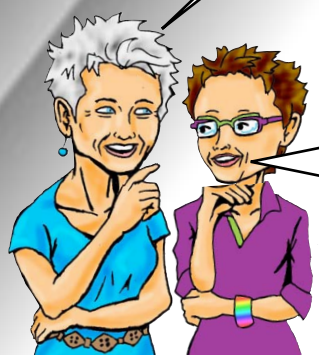


I appreciate how you don't edit out the author like many people do. And if I can ask a question, couldn't having it be essential that they link their work to published scholarly works be a way of maintaining the colonized academy? There's a lot of great knowledge (ancient, current, popular, new...) that won't be published in scholarly publications - publications that are only open to a select few. Being published in them doesn't mean what you are saying is useful either which may be evidenced by how few people read articles published in academic journals.

I like that you are asking that.



I empathize with wha you are saying but ho do you break entirely with the norms of a particular community a still be seen as legitim enough to be in the conversation to help change the norms?

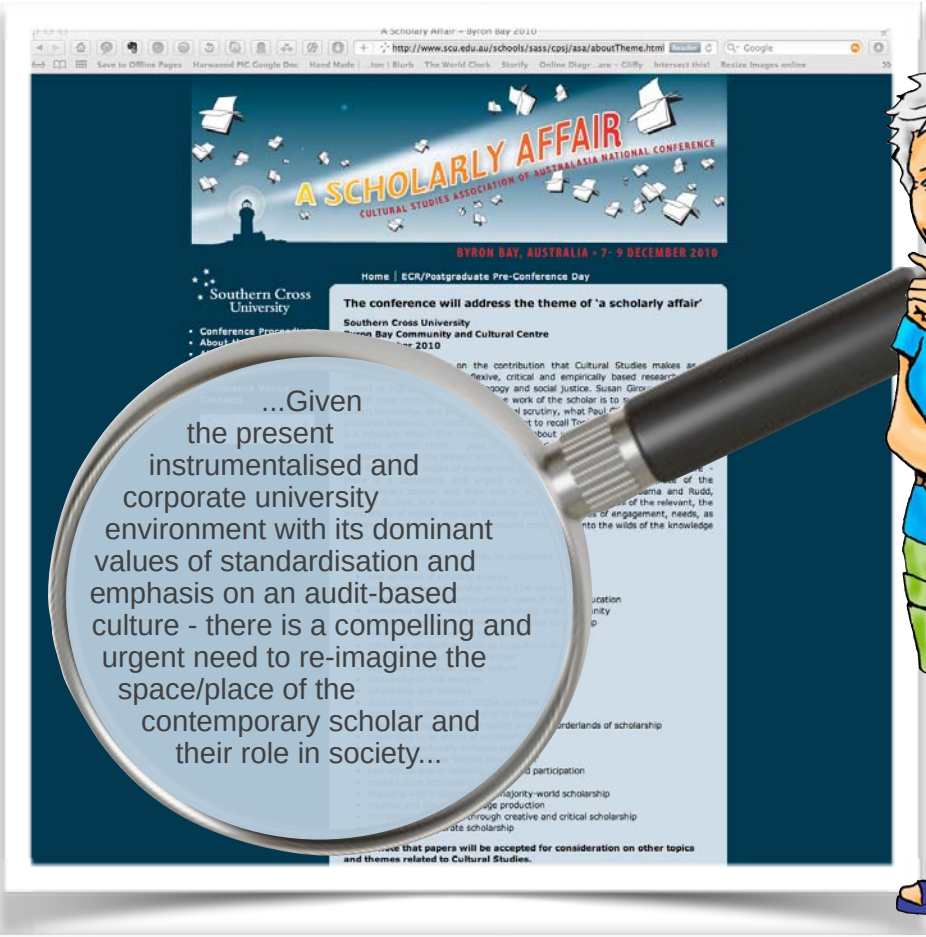


Hi sweetie. You've been at the computer for a long time now. Want to take a break?

That's sweet of you to ask. I think I would benefit from a break! My shoulders are all tight. It's such good conversation (and I'd like to get this editing done) that I haven't been stepping away. It's time. Want to go for a walk?

Erin, am I remembering correctly that tension between the "culture" of the academy and peoples' culture as women and as indigenous people came up in that workshop you conducted in Australia? I talked with a colleague who participated in it and she said it was incredibly powerful - that it made a significant impact on her and the other participants including that it helped relieve a lot of stress and feelings of cultural oppression they were experiencing and shifted their sense of authorship in their academic journeys. In her mind, part of what was powerful was having the space to talk but also that it helped them shift their assumptions about what is(not) possible in Ph.D. programs - that they have more choices than they realized about how they author this story.

Yes, and thanks for that feedback, John. That was a fascinating and powerful workshop, great conversation. It was organized around this inquiry and very much co-created. I designed and co-facilitated it with a neat trio of colleagues - including Jan and Margi here. It was for a Cultural Studies conference called "A Scholarly Affair" in reference to Toni Morrison's observation that 'racism is a scholarly affair.' Our workshop was called: Transforming our "Scholarly" Ecologies: The art and practice of bringing our holistic selves to our work. Here's a little context:



Transforming our "Scholarly" Ecologies: The art and practice of bringing our holistic selves to our work

The conference theme offers that "there is a compelling and urgent need to re-imagine the space/place of the contemporary scholar and their role in society." This vibrant, interactive session takes this need seriously. One of the opportunities of this moment in history is to see our scholar practitioner selves as a part of a larger ecology - recognizing that what we do co-creates our worlds. This participatory workshop invites us to explore this worldview and re-imagine what it means for our practices. The workshop co-leaders (a diverse international group of scholar-practitioners) will work with the group to create example practices/imaginings and will share examples/ imaginings from their work in the global community where people are creating shifts by bringing what's important to them into their work, working from their deeper purposes and engaging in practices that are consistent with creating the future they want to live into.

We'll engage on questions that matter such as:

- What do we create when we bring what's important to our holistic selves to our work? How do we do this in meaningful ways?
- What opens up when our scholarly ecologies embody what we value (e.g. our Buddhist practices, commitment to dialogue, indigenous traditions, desire to thrive, cultural diversity, relationships, performative selves, wellness practices etc.)?

Using participative processes that build on the wisdom in the room we will re-imagine our place/space/practices to help us manifest the worlds we're working to live into. And...we'll have lots of fun while doing it! Please join us as together we manifest possibility.

Everyone who came to the workshop turned out to be a woman - most of whom were entering the wise woman years of their lives and all of whom were working on doctorates that focused on co-creating wellbeing in their communities. We had a distinctly Indigenous presence in the room. Oppression was also very present as John suggested. Stories of frustration, confusion and disconnectedness came into the room as did a sense of relationship - of being in relationship(s).

As co-facilitators, we tried to be really mindful of what we wanted to call forth in each turn so that the workshop was generative and useful for people and that it went beyond story telling into re-storying. It was a powerful time and a lot shifted in that room as we explored the possibility that Ph.D. ecologies could feel different than these women were currently experiencing them - that they could feel good! Margi gave us the gift of creating a poem, real time, that re-presented what we had done together there. I think you can hear the frustration with their experiences of our Ph.D. ecology and also some of the possibility and potential for transformation in that poem. Margi, do you mind sharing your poem? I think that will be more powerful and valuable than me describing what we talked about.

this is a seductive invitation,
an invitation to evoke the new stories to guide us
this is a provocative and vibrant invitation
to develop a different profile of yourself
as the sensuous scholar

welcome to this new country of academia
a place where our body becomes alive
where we think with your heart
and we embrace our spirit of possibilities
moving towards a generative, imaginative engagement...

i close my eyes and dream of other ways
questions enter asking me
how can i do this differently
how can i step away from my
"badge of honourable stress",
of "well-earned depression"

i begin to shift my story
i begin to embrace possibility
i begin life giving witnessing
both of myself
and others
"i bring my ears today"
"i bring the gift of friendship today"
"i give a piece of my heart today"
"i give the gift of my presence today"
"i love to look a these flowers [holding a frangipani]
while they turn, and i gift a turning,
a looking at things another way"
"sometimes i cannot think of just one thing:
its my multi-ethnic stories
that turn and turn inside"
"today i bring purposeful intention"
"today i offer the fit of standing strong in the abundant universe of possibility"
"I think this is a gift: unconditional acceptance of oneself"

and while i sit with all these gifts, how do we find our way into new stories?
how do we re-story?

She steps forward, with her story, tightly wrapped up in memory.
she wants to evoke possibilities
she wants to practice how to think in a generative way

"i am feeling so alone with it...my research"
we draw in our chairs.
we come closer.

"in my current job there is a lot of aloneness.
it confuses me
am i an add-on?
i want to engage!
in my confusion i ask the question
"where is best practice hiding?"
is it sitting inside me as i reach out
trying to engage with the educational community?
integration?
not particularly
effort?
people get into their own thing..."
She breathes deeply.
and recommits
to her passion.

she breathes some more

"it takes me 3 months to get a meeting with my Head of School"
"my supervisor is just not interested in me. He is not engaged with me.
the Head of School adores him.

i feel alone.
i breathe
tears come
tears go
i know i am not alone in this experience
but also i am alone in this experience"

she wants to feel as though she is succeeding. she wants to shift the aloneness in her job, and in her city.
she is used to smaller buildings and wider fields
she is used to birds singing and children laughing
and neighbours popping in for tea
she is used to community
but now she is in a large city where time is different
where neighbours are different
where the air is different
where the birds don't sing
"i miss my community ...Nimbin...
how can i bring some of Nimbin to the city
could i do something to shift this aloneness in the city?

i will share my experience
and i shall also share my experience

sometimes i think. that's all it is
a new supervisor
and other times
i feel completely adrift
am i experiencing what my indigenous
students experience?
of being abandoned?

"you a white girl
you in black job"

do other people walk her tracks?
have her tracks been walked before?

and with the help of her friends, she begins
to realise that she is not alone.
she hears about her new friend who is in
pain when she hears her story
and she is comforted by her new friend
and they cry together
and they turn today
just like the flower that turns and turns
"i am a strong, tenacious and intentional
woman"
she cries
and she holds her frangipani,
she turns her frangipani in her fingers
and she feels their soft velvet petals
and the sun colour
and she notices her fingers
and she jumps to another time

Stranger Danger!!!!!!!!!!!
supervisor danger!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

"who are the five people you can go to when
you are feeling unsafe" says the teacher to
her class, twinkling her fingers
and out of that leap of faith:

that imaginative, provocative and vibrant
invitation,
the group outlines their hands
and they write: five people I journey with
 on this transformative journey
and, in that moment, they feel a "collapsing
and shifting of that known
landscape" (Husteudt, 2006)

and begin to evoke another story.
and they dream.
they close their eyes and dream a new
Manifesto

i shift
i bend
i hold
i change
i am the hostess to my own dissertation
i create my own space
my own woman's room
i set my table with beacons
touchstones
nourishing stops on the menu's tracks.
i place the trees of knowledge
trees of nourishment
my tree of symbol
rocks
feelings
i provide a meal that mentors,
i proved a meal that nourishes,
i invite feedback and possibilities
i invite five people to sit at my table
i invite.....[write in
 your five people]
i invite everyone who sits in this circle
and we create, together, our meal for
change.
for provocative and vibrant happenings,
for sensuous scholarship.

welcome to this new country
of
academia.

Wow. Thanks, Margi. That sounds exceptionally powerful. I hear a sense of disconnect and alienation, of loneliness and misalignment. I also hear the possibility or creating new stories - of empowerment that we can actually impact the system...It sounds like it was a really powerful workshop.

It was very powerful. I saw one participant in the hall the next day and she looked absolutely, visibly lighter, happier and more energetic than she had the day before! She said the change came from the workshop and how different she felt afterward. Another woman said she wove our workshop into her own presentation later in the week because she felt it was so powerful and so important that she wanted others to know about it. She said it was not only what we were talking about but our design and practices and what that helped create in the room/how we all were together.

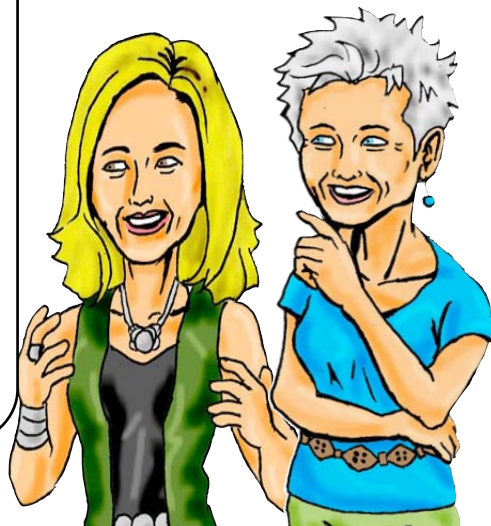
Wow! I'd forgotten how that conference theme, workshop abstract and poem are great examples of what I hear you saying your dissertation is about - practicing to invite a re-storying or "re-imagining of the space/place of the contemporary scholar and their role in society."

It's clear they have had some bad experiences in academia and really want change that will better help them help their communities.

And they started to change those negative experiences - right there, by changing their stories and how they acted into their next turns. I see a desire for change in almost everyone I talk with, actually. And I simultaneously hear the story that things CAN'T change. I see people choosing practices that help maintain things as they are because they feel it's what they have to do to survive.

Earlier in the week at that same conference, a woman told me she was so sick of listening to people read their papers from a podium - that they rarely seemed relevant or interesting and also that she learns best from interactive discussions. So I invited her to our session the following day. She looked mortified and said it sounds interesting but she can't go to something 'like that' because it won't help her get her ahead in the university - that we HAVE to do it the old ways - "that's just the way it is." Another example, I was at the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry and many people were talking about inquiring in innovative ways that would better serve the work they were doing than traditional paradigms but for many of them their practices were extremely traditional - far from what they said they wanted to be doing, even in that environment which supported innovation. When I asked about this, many of them said the only way they could come to the Congress was if they followed what the university wanted them to do and that left little if any room for innovation. I saw a lot of pain there, a lot of stress. And people carry that into other parts of their lives, too.

Erin, in your workshop example, people came in feeling stress, oppression, few options maybe. In your second set of examples, people also seem to be feeling that. What did you learn about what was transformational in the workshop which might help others in similar situations?

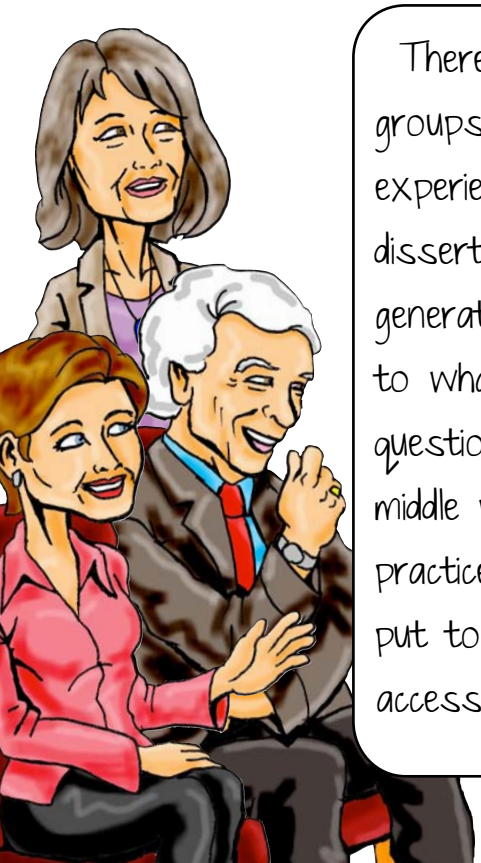


Great question, James. I don't think this is formulaic - that there's one answer or response we all need to take. I do think acting with what Barnett named as increased phronesis (how we act into situations with practical wisdom and consciousness of what we're making together rather than just getting caught up in the flow) often involves unbinding distinctions between large-scale change and personal practice.

Some of what was valuable in the workshop were things like helping people construct a richer story than the one they were telling about Ph.D. ecologies. I gave you a summary of the prominent narrative I'm hearing as an example of why attending to this is important. For the participants, they knew these stories, they were living them, and it was important for them to hear and experience wonderful stories as well. They loved to hear the examples I shared of how other people were doing things and to think about what kind of stories they wanted to live into, which helped increase awareness of the role they were playing in this making or could play in a new story. They had the space/place/community to explore how they might act into the episodes they find themselves in to call forth those stories. We worked with new interpretations of context - what's important for them, what might be going on with their supervisors, head of schools etc. so they could see those people as more complex actors (the Daisy Model can be useful for this or any of these, really.) They also said that the way we set up the room, the circle of chairs, the indigenous artwork, the flowers in the room, the words/a kind of a prayer someone offered at the beginning, Margi's poetry - all helped them connect with something larger - with what's important to them, why they're engaged in this work in the first place, which as I said before is grounded in helping their communities/in making better worlds. That enlarging of the frame seemed to be really important as was the sense of community.

For me, living a relationally constructionist orientation and taking the communication perspective helps ground me in why mindfulness is critical (we live in worlds of meaning, meaning is constructed in relationship, what we say and do matters - it makes our worlds...) Asking CMM's basic questions (what are we making together, how are we making it and how can we make better social worlds?) are useful practices for me at any time. I use them every day: what am I making as I choose to sit here and work another hour without a break? What kind of a world am I making when I say it's not okay to take a break and stretch? What happens if I put a story of well-being as my highest level of context/foregrounding making well-being? What shifts?

Other questions I sometimes use which come from your book, Making Social Worlds, Barnett are: How was this made? How is it re-made in the ongoing process of social construction? Who participated in making it? Who didn't? What was the quality of the process by which it was made? Having been made, what does it in turn make? How does it affect the ongoing process of social construction? How can I/we act in ways which prevent the occurrence of undesirable events and objects? How can I/we act in ways which intervene in and improve already existing undesirable events and objects? How can I/we act into ways which call into being preferred events and objects?



There are many practices we can use on our own or in teams/groups/communities etc. You all probably have practices from your experiences which you find generative and could share. My dissertation touchstones are examples of questions I found generative and adapted from many people to help me pay attention to what I want to be making with this dissertation. I also used questions from my Ayurvedic practice (for example, what does the middle way mean for me and my doctoral work?) and my Buddhist practice helps support me in very, very important ways. Kim, you put together a great group of practices I find really valuable and accessible in your new book, Compassionate Communicating.

And Rich, I think The Harwood Institute has some valuable frameworks - the 6 Intentionality Tests, Turn Outward Quiz. Aspirations Triangle, dedicated time for holding Innovation Spaces asking: What are we learning? Why is this important? What are the implications? Where else could we use what we are learning? What are we seeing that suggests things are changing in the community or the organization? What possibilities are there for moving ahead? What insights did this conversation spark? What do we want to make sure we carry forward for next time?

Peter, in The Answer to How Is Yes, you extend invitations to us to move from How do you do it? to What refusal have I been postponing (shifting from method to choice), from How long will it take? to What commitment am I willing to make?, from How much does it cost to What is the price I am willing to pay?, from How do you get those people to change to What is my contribution to the problem I am concerned with?, from How do we measure it to What is the crossroad at which I find myself at this point in my life/work (does what we are considering still have meaning for us, the institution, the world?) and from How are other people doing it successfully to What do we want to create together?

Eden practiced with Ubuntu with his doctoral thesis. Roz and Ben, your book The Art of Possibility, you offer all kinds of great practices. Jan, you mentioned DE. We talked about Action Research. We have therapists in the conversation, educators, community or organizational development practitioners - so much great knowledge on relational practices for creating new meaning and action, new or richer stories, caring for relationships!

What a wealth of great resources. A good reminder of how much we know and can practice with.

You have done a beautiful job of introducing us to each other's work throughout this conversation and in weaving our ideas together. You could have used footnotes for citations and you didn't. I thought I'd prefer footnotes but I actually think I liked it better as a fluid conversation. I assume that was an intentional choice?

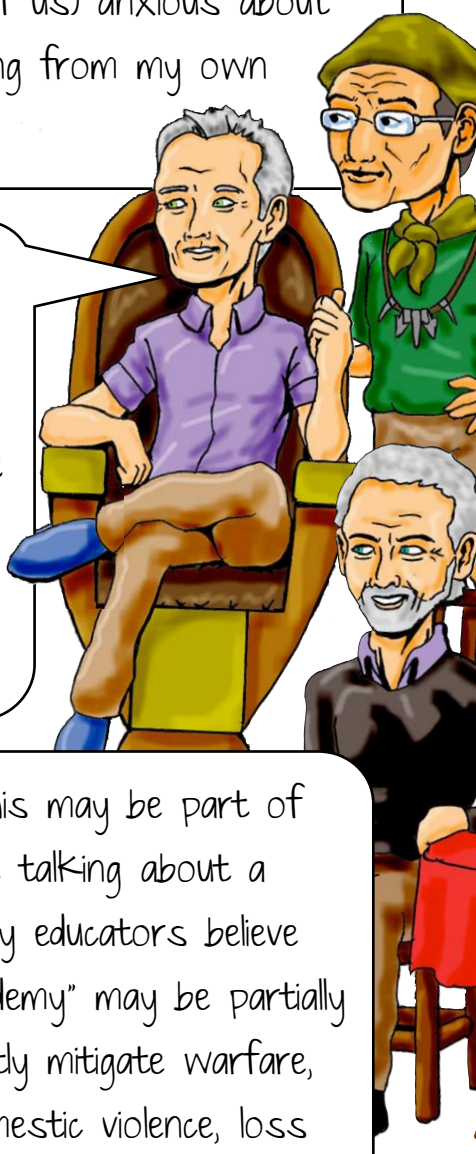
Yes, thanks for asking. I'm glad you experienced the fluidity. That was part of what I was trying to design for. It was also part of exploring traditions/stories of how we write, publish and cite - a topic I think is a fascinating topic to explore from a relational constructionist orientation when we're looking at what we're making, how we're making it and how we can make better worlds in and through our Ph.D. ecologies. For example, some people are concerned about what a closed, competitive and critical system peer review may be and what that makes, others about how seldom people are reading journal articles or high priced academic books compared to the numbers of people reading blogs or books they can pick-up online or in many bookstores and what that means for being in relationship, others are concerned about what we're making when we construct stories which "validate" or "privilege" certain ideas and writing (those in a particular form) over others and writing over other kinds of communication, others are concerned that if knowledge is constructed in relationship, what are we making if we attribute it to one person, others about the style of academic writing and how inaccessible it is to many of the people and communities we wish to be in conversation with... And the list of conversations goes on.

Doris Lessing said "It is one of the paradoxes of our time that ideas capable of transforming our societies, full of insights about how the human animal actually behaves and thinks, are often presented in unreadable language."... In my view, our major traditions of scholarly writing contribute to a chilling ethos of alienation and antagonism within the academy and between knowledge-makers and the public.

The primary response to most academic writing is critical; the challenge is to locate the hidden hand of unreason (unless there are ways one can use the writing to strengthen one's own position). When scholarly publicly place their work before each other, they will often confront a phalanx of raised hands. The vast majority of these carry an invisible sword. This is academic life. The primary result of most scholarly work, if it registers at all, is negation of relationship.

John Shotter said "Is there a kind of violence at work in intellectual debates and discussions; in the university colloquium, seminar, or classroom; in academic texts? Is there something implicit in our very ways of relating ourselves to each other in academic life in present times that makes us fear each other? Is there something in our current circumstances that makes us (or at least some of us) anxious about owning certain of our own words, or taking a stand? Speaking from my own experience, I think there is."

I think it is violent. I think that's a great description of what I have experienced directly or indirectly. And I think people are so anxious about critique that it's hard to put ourselves out there and be in dialogue in a way that brings our humanity, and uniqueness onto the page or into the conversation.



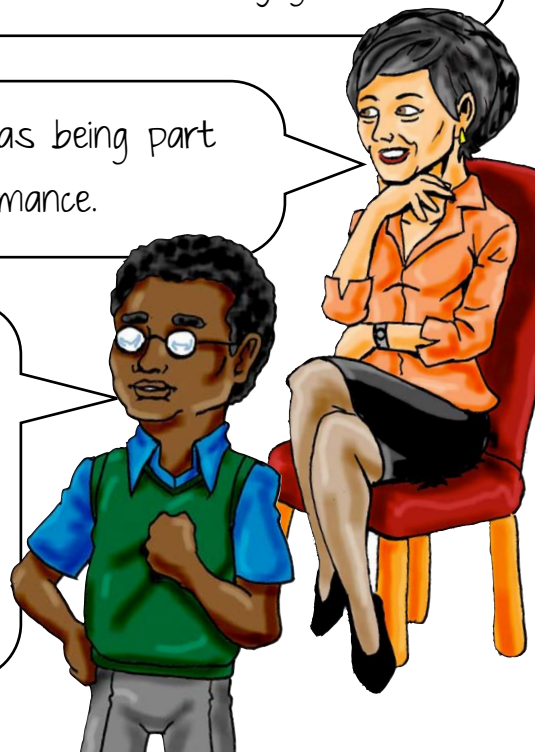
I've heard similar stories, too, John and Ken. This may be part of the story, a petal on a daisy, of what you were talking about a while ago, Four Arrows, when you said that many educators believe that in many ways, directly or indirectly, the "academy" may be partially responsible for our collective inability to significantly mitigate warfare, global warming, social and ecological injustices, domestic violence, loss of habitat, racism, economic despair, loss of the commons etc.

In addition to a lot of the conversations I already mentioned, I also explored traditions around writing, publishing and citing and how they serve us for being in relationship in today's world of the internet/electronic media. For example, what value does it add to provide page numbers for quotes in our current day and age of electronic publishing when the page numbers change depending on the font size you're using, the device you're reading on etc. and often people google the quote to follow-up on context rather than seek out a hard cover, page numbered book. Would something else be more valuable? And does the city of publication still matter to us? Is that still meaningful? What stories do we hold that make it meaningful?

What are the reasons we have been citing the ways that we have? One reason is to help people find the work we're citing. What's the best way to do that in today's world? For what we can imagine for tomorrow or what we can imagine would help create generative relationships? Another reason we cite is to protect ourselves - to prove we did diligent work, we have other's writing to defend ourselves, we aren't just speaking on our own or taking other people's words...These questions can circle back into John Shotter's observations. What's going on? What have we been making and how are we making it that these are our ways of being in relationship together? How do we make something more "better?" It's a fascinating topic and I tried to be mindful of what I was making and contributing to with my choices, tried to ask questions and play/practice with different options that seemed relationally generative.

I see taking these kinds of risks as being part of your rigour, part of your performance.

You have said this inquiry was performative and something you lived. I imagine there is a lot more than you explored than we're talking about here - appropriately so I'm curious to know how did you know when you were done with the dissertation?



Great question, James - one intimately tied to many topics, including evaluation. Ken, you just mentioned something Shotter said. I'm thinking of a Shotter story, too - one you tell Barnett. He says, "If someone stops you in the middle of a conversation and asks 'what do you mean by that?' your answer should be, 'I don't know yet, we haven't finished our conversation.'" That could also be an appropriate response to 'when is the dissertation finished!'

laugh Well said.

Early on I decided that since this was to be an ongoing conversation integrated into my life, it may make sense to bind it by time. There are turns which came before, turns which will come after and here is where I am right now at this time. That was useful - I could have finished early and would have learned a lot but also not have learned some of what I have now. The spaciousness of taking up until the time I set for myself was really generative.

Then when I came upon that date I had constructed for myself, I was in the middle of some great turns with people that I wanted to stay with and let unfold and my bounded time wouldn't work for their schedules. So I let that construction go, remained open and kept working on it until it felt like I was ready to move on - including having had time for reflection, news discoveries, integration...And at some point, something changed in how meaningful this was for me every day. I "felt" like it was time to move on, so I worked to punctuate it in terms of this doctoral turn and to put this dissertation out there in a different way for others in our community, our ecology, to engage with if they'd like. There's a lot that can still be done, conversations to be continued and I imagine I'll still be working with this in different ways and in a variety of contexts for some time but my doctorate is about done.

The person who rigorously maintains the clarity to stand confidently in the abundant universe of possibility creates an environment...generative of certain kinds of conversations.

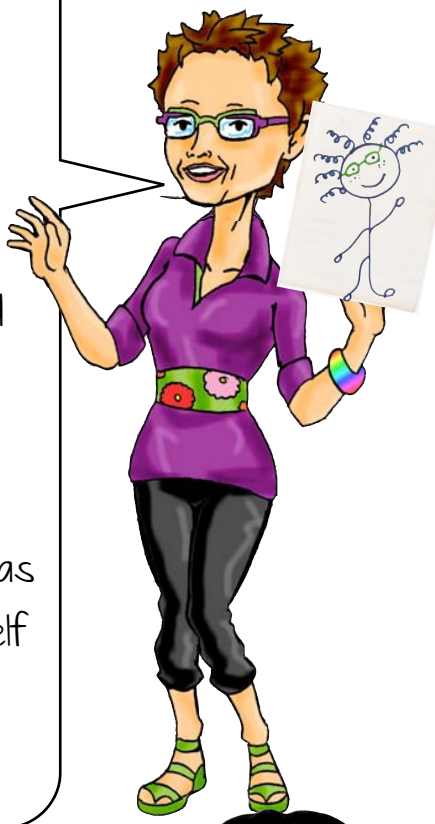
Yes, well done, Erin. Are there things you'd do differently next time?

Thanks! Definately. This is an evolving practice. I've learned a lot and there are things I imagine could have been valuable for this inquiry if I had had the resources (time, money, wisdom...) and things I would do if I was continuing with this.

For example, it might add richness to be able to send drafts back and forth to people so they can keep sharing stories/comments as this evolves. I'm conscious that this time, someone could add a turn and then others could add turns later and with those turns in the conversation, the first person may say something different than what they did before those turns were included. This happens with standard quotation use, too, eh? At one point I wanted to insert a conversation from Judi on the page and I realized that she said it years ago. Would she still contribute that kind of a turn or have her ideas developed significantly since in a way that she would offer something very different? And most people here comes from a handful of countries or regions of the world. I would love to have more of that kind of diversity.

As I said earlier, I was conscious of my carbon footprint while I was doing this, including minimizing my use of paper. We're required to submit this as a printed book but next time, if possible I would want to have an interactive electronic platform where I could insert relevant videos, songs etc. and people could add turns more easily or more frequently if they'd like. And by the way let me talk about the art for a second since we haven't talked about that yet.

I started by drawing all of you myself. Words sometimes don't feel like my first language (in any language) and for a long time I have wanted to learn some artistic practices to help me express experiences in other ways. I thought this was a good opportunity to do that. I imagined I would draw or collage all of you. Geesh it was hard! Like exercising a leg that has been immobilized in a cast for 20 years! I got as far as drawing a re-presentation of myself but the ones I created of all of you seemed to be more noise than value add.



Something I realize was that my attachment to drawing you all myself (so I could learn to draw) was connected in some ways to a construction that doctoral work is individual work - I had to do it all - a construction that seemed to sneak in, very unexpectedly! So I decided to partner with someone (Sam.) He penned the drawings and I manipulated things with the computer. It was a great opportunity to practice in many ways. So about things I'd alter if I was continuing with this, if I had more money to put towards it, I'd like some of you re-drawn. Some of you are drawn in ways I think gives us a hint into your energy. Others of you I'd like a different version of - how you're represented is a speech act itself and some aren't how I intend them (Like you Four Arrows, Nong, Roz, Kim...) I'd also like more scenes like the courtyard where we all took a break. Not having Sam represented prominently anywhere on the page was his decision. And I'd still like to work with drawing...

I wanted very much to learn to draw, for a reason that I kept to myself: I wanted to convey an emotion I have about the beauty of the world. It's difficult to describe because it's an emotion. It's analogous to the feeling one has in religion that has to do with a god that controls everything in the whole universe: there's a generality aspect that you feel when you think about how things that appear so different and behave so differently are all run "behind the scenes" by the same organization, the same physical laws. It's an appreciation of the mathematical beauty of nature, of how she works inside; a realization that the phenomena we see result from the complexity of the inner workings between atoms; a feeling of how dramatic and wonderful it is. It's a feeling of awe – of scientific awe – which I felt could be communicated through a drawing to someone who had also had this emotion. It could remind him, for a moment, of this feeling about the glories of the universe.

Beautifully described! I love the idea of communicating in a way that reminds somebody of something. One of my challenges with this inquiry was to put into words (or choose to leave out?) some of my learnings/ah-has/growth/richness when the words felt limiting and objectifying or a poor translation instead of what you just said about wanting to evoke or remind someone of something that know/they have experienced. Some of it is ineffable in wonderful ways. Some of it showed up in performative ways (including turns we're not seeing here) some didn't. I struggled with that for a while in terms of what it meant for my dissertation. Now I just try to open to it and do what I can on the page to help co-create, co-enact or perform an idea.

I think you have done it well.

I love how this looks. I just love it!

Me, too. It gave me the sense of being in conversation. I like how you had people on the page even when they weren't talking. When I asked you about it, you said sometimes they inspired a turn or you'd be interested in hearing from them on that topic or you thought they might be interested in the turns others were taking. I liked that. I also liked the thinking bubbles. Another layer in the conversation.

I'm glad to see you do such a visual performance with your inquiry as often these conversations are being had in disciplines that are art-based where the call for art-based dissertations is a response to their field of practice. While I think the case you make in yours cuts across disciplines and provides people without an art background an example of how to engage in a practice-led inquiry with respect to any substantive area. And here the art is not art as we view it traditionally but rather it is the art of practice, dialogue and ecology of communication and making/construction.

Making things is a peculiarly powerful act. It is the making itself, the experience, that is the real payoff... If we can acknowledge and honor the art we perform...we can dramatically enrich the quality of daily life. Contrary to professional wisdom, art has not always been a noun, a valuable object. At the birth of the word "art," it was a verb that meant "to put things together." It was not a product but a process.

Thanks! Early on in my inquiry process I identified my dissertation as being a verb. That was a great construction for me. Much has gone on throughout the inquiry. If this was a party, you would have heard a lot of different conversations branching off from each other as well as there being a lot of conversations and thoughts you weren't hearing. As we're doing this on paper, I tried to have it be easier to follow than that so there are many conversations and thoughts not showing up on the page. That's okay - it's not about the content as much as about the conversations.

Also, because this isn't a synchronous conversation or even an asynchronous one that you all signed up to be in in an ongoing way, there are turns which ARE on the page but some people won't see them because of when they are engaging.

Hang on...I'm thinking about what you said that your dissertation was a verb. Not just an end product, I'm guessing, but a whole journey?

I like your statement about thinking of your dissertation as a verb. In my new book, Teaching Truly: A Curriculum to Indigenize Mainstream Education, I have a chapter on English Language Arts where I talk about the problem of noun-based languages like English in contrast to verb based "in motion" Indigenous ones.

Oh, that's interesting.

I would love to read that, Four Arrows! Thanks for bringing it up. I find it very interesting how language plays a part in how we see the world and then how we determine rules and structures. That has been evident to me as I lived in different parts of the world where the languages were structured so differently and emphasized on different world views. I think that would be fascinating to look at in terms of Ph.D. Ecologies. I'll read your book. Sheila, I wonder if you would be interested in it, too with your perspective on language and language games.

Can we shift back to the implications for weaving together asynchronous conversations like you did for this dynamic or motion filled piece?

Sure. Well, one of the implications was that I never knew who would raise what so a topic I had intended to address at a particular point might have come up much later or not at all (you should see the cutting room floor!) because of where the conversation went instead. Good practice in non-attachment! It was challenging in many ways (even to figure out the formatting on the page) but fascinating and wonderful For example, (now this was neat learning for me) even when a fictional or composite person said something. Those characters really were people themselves, not puppets saying what I wanted them to. If a turn was created (rather than quoted from someone anonymous) maybe in response to a turn someone else took, it was because I could imagine what this fictionalized character might say. And even if it's not where I wanted to go, I'd honor that voice as part of the conversation even though I could have authored them a different way. It's like they started writing themselves! And those turns really opened up a lot in terms of how I was thinking about things otherwise. It was fascinating and really demonstrated the power of dialogue.

So sometimes people, like me for example, took turns which came from stories real people had told or questions they had asked and other times they were your own dialogic voice coming out onto the page or it could be that based on what you have lived and heard throughout your enquiry you created characters where you, in a sense, heard what they those characters might say and those turns still inspired new insights?

Yes! When I first started constructing this conversation on paper, I may have used a composite or fictionalized character to help create turns or to create dialogue so I wasn't just taking really long turns until others had a chance to add in their thoughts and also so that there was dialogue that they could speak into, but they wound up really being turns that stood on their own - that I hadn't pre-imagined if I can describe it that way.

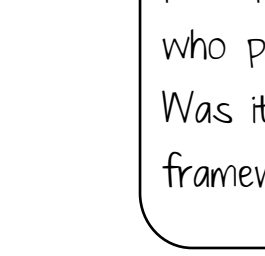
Seriously? That's interesting.

"The book writes itself." I've heard other authors say that. And I think this is an example of really living what you're talking about - being open to co-creating, emergence, mindfulness and probably some kind of trust in yourself or the process.

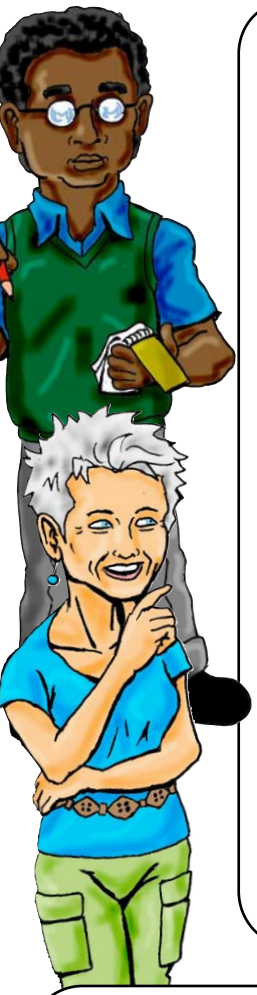
I have been wondering why some people appear on the page as a Skype conversation on the computer rather than as a drawing of a person?

Ah - a few reasons, actually. One is that some people, like Shanda, do a lot of their work online and some of us have had had a lot of our conversations on Skype so I thought it was most appropriate include that representation. Another is that someone might wanted to remain anonymous in terms of any identifying characteristics and this is one of many ways to do that. I thought having the diversity of face-to-face and electronic conversations was important to have (re)presented both because that's how these conversations unfolded and because that's how many of our conversations in general unfold these days. I'm also very interested in how some of the online conversations that are public and widely distributed or accessible have, in a relatively short time, contributed to significantly shifting long standing constructions. I won't go into that here but if you're interested, let me know. It's fascinating.

A tie in to your original dissertation topic about the cross-cultural nature of online work. Nice. :)



In participating in this, I was aware that I sometimes knew the people who entered into the conversation - sometimes identifying them by how they were drawn or references made to their names or their work - and other times I didn't know who someone was. At the beginning I wanted to know who everyone was so I had context for who is saying what. As I got further into the conversation though or more immersed in participating instead of reading I found I wasn't consciously thinking about who people were or what roles they held outside of this conversation. Was it an intentional decision not to introduce all of us and give us a framework from which to view people?

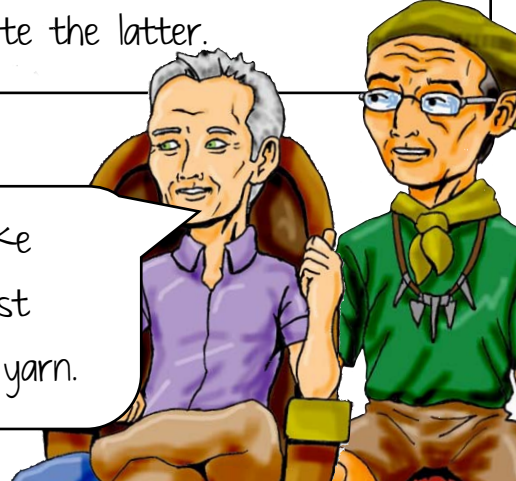


It was and it was a decision I played with/explored for a long time before choosing the option I did - practicing with being mindful of what I might be making/reinforcing/holding/opening/expanding etc. with that choice. For example, I thought introducing people when they took their first turn was a good thing to do as a host to help you all get to know each other thinking maybe some of each other's contexts would help bring richness to your stories (Imagine the Daisy Model!) and to invite a continual move away from the long standing construction some people in academia hold that researchers are unbiased/separated from context/location/the research etc. And I aware that for some people those introductions could also lend credibility or weight to some of the conversation in a similar way that citing a well respected source might in a traditional dissertation.

And I found that idea of increased credibility problematic in terms of what constructions I could be advancing or maintaining that are linked to expert models, whose knowledge is most valued etc. I could be reinforcing a system that grants more credibility to someone who has published within the community's preferred way of publishing (which showed up prominently as problematic in the prevailing narrative including that it can be constricting, closed to innovation and new ideas and competitive or even mean rather than supportive in a way that produces better work) than to ideas that haven't gone through that system. I thought of some of the PAR researchers, Paulo Freire and others who have talked about the politics of knowledge and publication/ownership and knew I didn't want to reinforce the story in our system that the more you publish by our guidelines, the more valuable your work is and that I did want to invite polyvocality and diversity. I played with what kind of turn or choice might be more likely to invite the latter.

I think it worked well. It was very conversational. And I like how people referred to each other by name.

Yes, it felt like we were all just having a little yarn.



I'm glad. I wanted this book to be rhyzomic - connecting but not unifying, about inviting the conversations, asking questions more than determining answers or making specific plans or recommendations and I hope that was a valuable experience for you. A future turn could be one that helps people who are interested form a community of practice, with practices/tools available, people sharing what they're working on etc. I can imagine many turns! Many things that could make this dissertation more powerful. It doesn't feel generative to think it could ever be "perfect." It's helped me and other people already and that's fabulous.

Also, if I continued with this I'd develop more community in the doctoral program. The community dynamic is important for many reasons. For me when I experienced it, it was so generative. It was also very sporadic. I often felt I was working alone in a way that is unusual for me (as I'm used to creating community across distances, geographies etc.) but it is a common story I heard from people. I'd love to spend time on how we can do that.

I recognize that story.

It was a gift to be able to talk this through with Jan - who has many relationships to Ph.D. ecologies including having completed a Ph.D. herself, being the partner of someone working towards theirs, partnering with universities as a scholar-practitioner... We would have loved to have been able to have more time this past year to have spent in conversation about this.

I'm curious how you and Jan experienced this project together? How has this shaped your relationship and how has the relationship shaped the process and practice of inquiry/ your Ph.D. ecology?

Can you share the border crossing story? I think it's a great example of the impermeable barriers of this context and the impact of this work.

Sure, Alex, I'm happy to. So...some of you know that for most of my doctoral process, I was living in Canada with my partner Jan with restrictions that I wasn't allowed to work, access the health care system, study etc. until (finally) my Permanent Residency application was approved. I could stay in the country but they couldn't guarantee that if I left I would be let back in. The dilemma was if I wanted to attend to go to workshops, earn income, see my family etc. I needed to leave. That was a stressful situation - knowing at any point they could deny me re-entry. Well one day, I was coming back to Canada from my Uncle's funeral in Chicago. I had just landed at the airport, a bit emotional from the funeral and glad to be going home to Jan who couldn't accompany me on the trip. The border agent whose desk I stepped up to, was very polite and professional. After asking a few questions, he put down my passport, looked at me and said that he wasn't going to let let me back in. Oh my gosh! I don't even have words for what that felt like and could mean for our lives! I knew he had his reasons - I had been told before that there was a fear that I was working under the table. Which I wasn't. Geesh - what to do??!!

I could have let myself get so caught up with the stress of the situation that I responded without mindfulness. Easy enough to do in any situation! But having been practicing everyday through my dissertation with mindfulness of what we're making together, with our communication practices, I remembered I had choices of what I invite in this episode, of how to be together. And I knew that in addition to really wanting to be allowed across the boarder, I also wanted to call forth or invite us to be better than we needed to be together/to make better worlds together - knowing the impact/ afterlives these kinds of experiences/conversations can have.

I wanted to co-create an episode with this border agent where instead of him representing or "being" a system and me representing or "being" an irritant to the system, we would be able to see each other as people - complex, responsible people who could be in conversation and honour our responsibilities in ways that included kindness, mindfulness, compassion. This reflection was all happening in the moment following his announcement of his decision. A lot of time goes by as we each take a number of turns. A lot of questions from him, explanations from me, questions from me... At the end of what turned out to be (or felt like) a fairly extensive conversation, this man said to me that he still didn't know if he should let me back into the country. That he probably shouldn't. BUT he thought I was acting out of good faith, being honest with him, not trying to screw him or the system and that because of the way I was being with him, he was going to take a chance and let me back in the country. And...he did!

Wow! That sounds so stressful! Good on you for being able to...create that! I don't know if I could have!

Good for you, Erin. Congratulations.

This strikes me as a good example of how what you learned to do or how you learned to "be" through how you engaged with your dissertation impacted other parts of your life. If you had been training in logical cause and effect, detachment, defence and criticism, you may have responded with that orientation and it's possible it might not have been as generative of a relational act.

Indeed.

One of the many things I appreciate about your dissertation, Erin, is your focus on how we are together as a means of creating change. There's a lot we know about creating change within organizations and one of the approaches we often miss or de-emphasize is this wisdom that how we are in relationship in our ecology can make such a difference. I believe that it is very significant.

What I have shared with you and want to share with everyone here is that participating in your dissertation has had a big impact on me personally. Most significantly, it's helped me think about how I am with my kids. It's been a wonderful reminder to be mindful of what I am making with them. I want to say thank you for this gift - the conversation helped me get out of the stream of my busy life and pay attention to this more than I have of late.

I appreciate our conversations as I find that various threads of the conversation resonate with my clinical and teaching practice and also in my personal life. One of the growing ideas that continues to resonate for me is the notion of practice. I find our conversations as being in a space of practice. Over the last year I have been writing a chapter on "Supervising Emergent Research" and my work with you (Erin) served both as a sounding ground and as a form of practice. While writing this chapter, I would reflect on our conversations and find myself cultivating the practice in writing and writing what we were cultivating together. This back and forth process serves as a reminder that we are all in this together and learning is bidirectional and created in the conversations and relationships that we form with an eye to the question: What are we creating together? And it is this question that my husband and I use often in our relationship.

I'm imagining how this could benefit my personal life, too.

This past weekend, my brother's step daughter got married (on my birthday!). It was a lovely occasion but also very bittersweet as my brother has brain cancer. He was diagnosed the day after Christmas and the prognosis is, on average, 11 months from diagnosis to death. It is an extremely aggressive cancer - the same that Ted Kennedy had. So, my attention for the past months and, more specifically, for this past week, has been on this.

But finishing up the last bit of the dissertation today was so helpful to me because I started to think about mindful practice, the communication perspective, bifurcation points, etc. in relation to the very difficult family dynamics that my brother's illness has invited. I will spare you the details of the dynamics but it has all been extremely difficult for me and also for most of my siblings.....all struggling to honor what our brother needs while feeling prohibited from doing what we "need" or want to do to be present. In the end, I honor what my brother wants but, of course, it is hard because no one is ever really sure what he wants! But I started thinking about this process in different ways as I read your dissertation. And, I also had to laugh at myself for not having this epiphany months ago! To be honest, I have also moved in and out of this revelation - it's just humbling to realize how often and how quickly we can lose the grip on seeing what we're making with others!

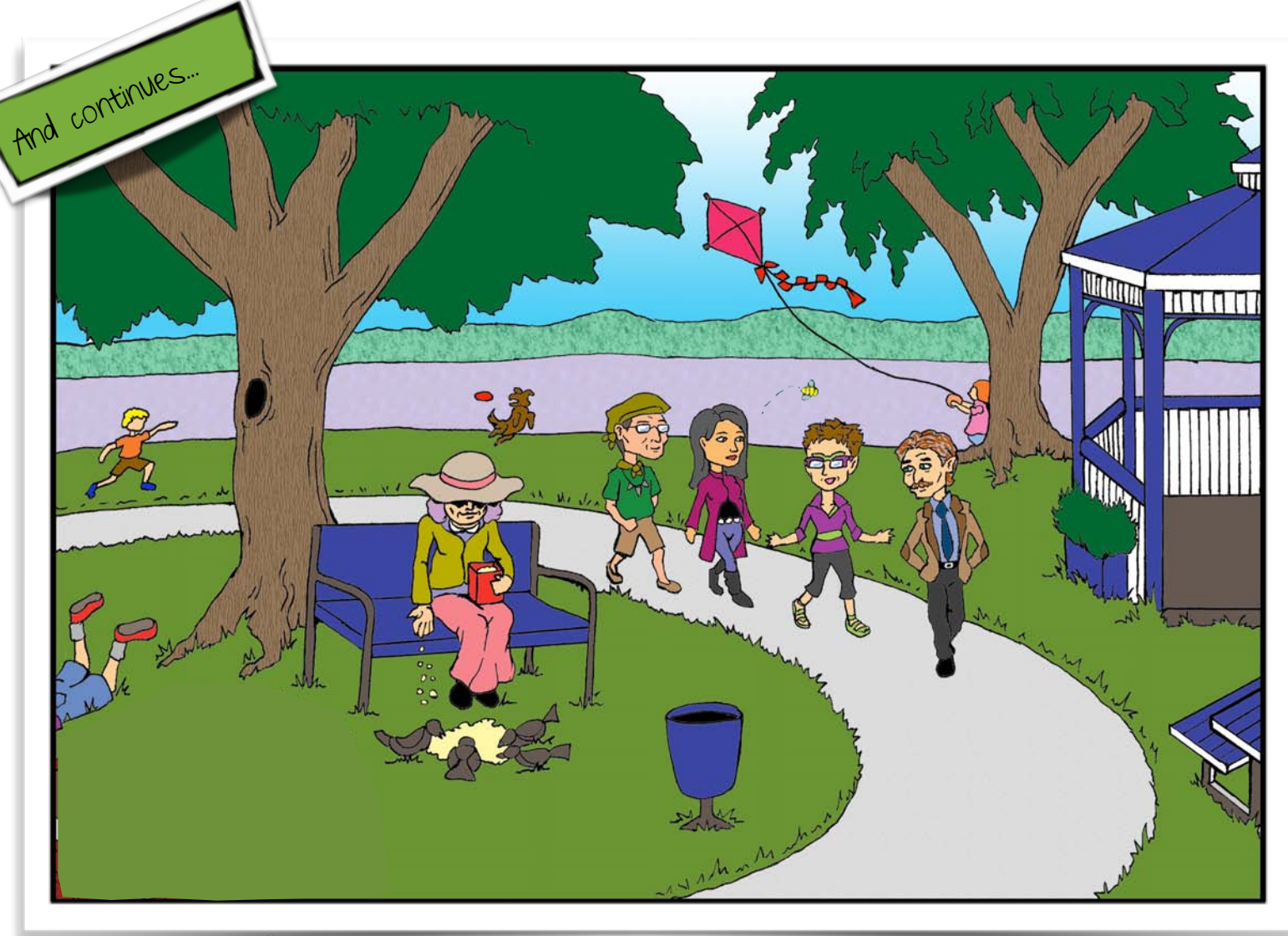
Gosh, thanks for sharing that, everyone. It IS humbling to realize how quickly we can lose sight of what we're making with others or to slip into old patterns. Elizabeth, you talk about habituating ourselves to openness. That's a great habit to cultivate. I tend to be very conscious of what we're making - it's part of how I engage in the world, seeing patterns and noticing nuances. It's acting into what I'd like to act into which takes practices and practice...and practice...Over and over again. Like coming back to your breath for those of you who have a meditation practice that includes that.....Impermanence...

And this moment here is one of the best examples of how this dissertation is an ecology. The intention is not to reflect on how we do research and dissertations but to be in relationship with each other and how we create moments of change. As one of us said change and inquiry go hand in hand.

In Tibetan, the word ZOPA often translates as "patience", "endurance", or "tolerance." I don't think we have an English equivalent that describes the depth and meaning of this word - at least, I haven't found one yet. While zopa has many usages, the most provocative I've found is described by the nineteenth-century wandering yogi Patrul Rinpoche, in his text The Words of My Perfect Teacher. He describes zopa as "the ability to bear the truth of thinglessness or boundarylessness.

Thanks, Saliha and Elizabeth. Engaging in this inquiry has been a great experience and opportunity to examine habits and stories, construct practices and ways of being in relationship that can, more and more, live into boundarylessness, no self, relational being, inter-being and well-being. It's been a great space to engage in conversations with folks we might not usually. People are saying it's been valuable to them. It has been for me. Barnett, you once asked "What wisdom can we find or develop that will help us navigate the polysemic contingency of everyday life, where meanings transform and the next moment reconfigures all that has gone before?" Beautiful question. Some of the wisdom that I kept getting reminders about throughout this inquiry have to do with mindfulness, impermanence (including possibility) and practice. What we do together/how we do it matters. It makes our world.

So what is next? Where does this leave us?
Yes, *laugh* Well said!
Well said!
Where does this leave us? It doesn't leave us anywhere. I hope it TAKES us somewhere.
Standing before us is a vast spectrum of possibility - an endless invitation to innovation. We are not bound by the chains of either history or tradition. As we speak together, listen to new voices, raise questions, ponder alternative metaphors, and play at the edges of reason, we cross the threshold into new worlds of meaning. The future is ours - together - to create.
I think I'll be paying more attention to each turn I take and what I am making. I think I'll notice more choice points.
I'd like to know if anyone would be interested in being in developing a community of practice where we can share ideas and resources, talk through situations together, inspire each other...
I'd love to bring you in to work with our organization on noticing what assumptions we hold and what other possibilities there may be for how to do things so there is more alignment with what we are trying to create.
And the conversation continues...


And continues...

And continues...
And hopefully keeps continuing...

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Archbishop Desmond MpiloTutu has spent a lifetime co-enacting better worlds and I was inspired and humbled to think of him and his lived values of love, hope, tolerance and courage as I engaged in these conversations. His turns in this conversation came out of his book Made for Goodness.

Barnett Pearce was, with every word and breath, dedicated to making better social worlds. He is the founder of CMM and his work provided the scaffolding for this dissertation. I admired him as a scholar, practitioner, teacher, mentor and friend. His turns in this conversation came from the blog that he kept at the end of his life and from his book Making Social Worlds: A Communication Perspective

Amongst other things, Benjamin Zander is the conductor of the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra and the Boston Philharmonic Youth Orchestra. Rosamund Stone Zander has a private practice in family therapy. Together they wrote The Art of Possibility and their turns came from this book. Roz, my apologies for how you are drawn sans your relaxed, caring gaze, vibrant energy and warm smile!

Eden Charles says of himself "I hold a strong personal value about our ability, as human beings, to create societies and organisations 'fit to house the human spirit'." His doctoral thesis at the University of Bath (2007) inspired me early on in my doctoral inquiry and his quotes are taken from there.

Elizabeth Mattis-Namgyel has studied and practiced the Buddhadharma for over 25 years. Her book The Power of an Open Question: The Buddha's Path to Freedom was incredibly valuable as I engaged with this inquiry and practiced to habituate myself to openness. Her turns are from here.

Four Arrows (Wahinkpe Topa) also known as Don Trent Jacobs has many relationships to our Ph.D. ecology (prolifically published author, Ph.D, Ed.D, faculty in Educational Leadership & Change, former tenured associate professor, former Dean of Education at Oglala Lakota College on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota.) His turns came from his book The Authentic Dissertation: Alternative Ways of Knowing, Research and Representation as well as from real time feedback he gave me on this dissertation.

Gil Fronsdal is co-teacher at the Insight Meditation Center and the Insight Retreat Center. He has been training in/practicing in the Japanese Soto Zen tradition and the Insight Meditation lineage of Theravada Buddhism since 1975, teaching since 1990 and has a Ph.D. in Buddhist Studies from Stanford. Although he's not quoted frequently, his Audio Dharma podcasts were important teachings for me during this inquiry and many insights about how to be with this work came while I was listening to them. They can be found at: www.audiodharma.org

Jan Elliott is my partner in a all senses of the term - my life partner, my work partner, my spiritual practice partner... She has extensive experience in public policy, boundary-spanning dialogue work and public innovation, a long standing Zen practice, and a blossoming contemplative photography practice. She provided much support - it's no surprise that so many people seek her out for her wisdom, conversation, mentoring, work partnerships and community. Her turns were from real time conversations.

Judi Marshall and Peter Reason are very much part of this conversation through turns that come before these pages/earlier in the conversation. I learned a lot over the years from them/the University of Bath Center for Action Research in Professional Practice and I wanted to honour that here. The one voiced turn I have Peter taking came from his blog at www.peterreason.eu Judy's turns come from her article Living Life as Inquiry. More of her work in ecological sustainability, social justice, corporate sustainability and educational engagement can be found throughwww.lums.lancs.ac.uk/profiles/judi-marshall

Ken Gergen's book Relational Being: Beyond Self and Community speaks to me in many ways and I see this dissertation as a turn in the conversation he has invited us all into. His turns come from here and from his and Mary Gergen's Social Construction: Entering the Dialogue. My practice during/through this dissertation has transformed my relationship with Ken and his work. Thank you, Ken.

Kim Pearce co-enacts better worlds in each moment and has been a beautiful model, teacher, inspiration and support in the practices I have been engaged in during this inquiry. She is such a gift. Though she has written wonderful books, her turns in this conversation were taken real time. Thank you, Kim for all you gave to this work!

Mary Gergen popped into my thoughts a number of times during this dissertation - from the inspiring way she talked about the Taos-Tilburg program to her suggestion of an island retreat at the end of the dissertation writing process. Her turns come from a very accessible book she wrote with Ken Gergen called Social Construction: Entering the Dialogue.

Margi Brown Ash lives just a couple hours drive from where I lived in Australia when I started my doctorate though it wasn't until I was in Canada that we met. A brilliant woman, writer, performer, theatre maker, educator, therapist, coach, friend...she's been important to me on this journey. Her poem was written real time.

Pema Chödrön is an extremely well respected teacher and practitioner of Tibetan Buddhism, known for helping is cultivate peace and kindness in ourselves/our families/our communities - especially in difficult times. Her teachings helped me practice with (among other things) groundlessness and ego in the context of doctoral work. Her quotes came from a variety of books including Start Where You Are, No Time to Lose: A Timely Guide to the Way of the Bodhisattva and Living Beautifully: With Uncertainty and Change.

Peter Block is working to co-enact communities and workspaces that are for all if us - bringing about change through relational acts including of connectedness, empowerment, stewardship, chosen accountability, and the reconciliation of community. Though I draw from a great deal of his work, in this dissertation I kept coming back to "the answer to how is yes: acting on what matters." His turns came from here and from his book Community: The structure of belonging.

Rabindranath Tagore inspires me. I could talk about his Nobel Prize, his poetry, politics, teaching, cross-cultural work - many things. Part of what I'd like to honour here is his book Sadhana The Realization of Life, written in 1916. Sadhana is Sanskrit for spiritual practice. This is where his turns come from. When I first read it, I thought he'd make a fascinating (and wise) conversational partner for many of us with social relational constructionist orientations/understandings of the world and its his ideas here that stayed with me throughout the dialogue.

Rich Harwood works to enrich public life with great conviction and as part of a spiritual practice. The Harwood Institute's value proposition is if you turn outward and become more intentional in the judgements and choices you make in creating change, you will produce greater impact and relevance in your community. Working through some of their frameworks influenced the framing some of my dissertation. His turns come from his book The Work of Hope.

Richard Feynman would be done a disservice to just be introduced as a nobel prize winning physicist (or as a musician.) His observations about his work and about the world delight me and inspire me in so many ways! In this conversation I have used quotes from many lectures, interviews, books etc. as credited to Surely You're Joking Mr. Feynman, The Feynman Lectures on Physics, What Do You Care What Other People Think? Remarks at a Caltech YMCA lunch forum, New Textbooks for the "New" Mathematics, the Uncertainty of Values, and the Value of Science. If you want to access his work, I recommend watching videos of him on the internet and reading Surely You're Joking Mr. Feynman.

Saliha Bava had a unique relationship with this dissertation in that she was my advisor and so was hearing about my ideas and progress throughout different stages of the work. Each of her turns in this conversation were ones she added in directly onto the page through different iterations of the work rather than being from published works.

Sheila McNamee generously offered clear, quick, candid, astute observations in a way that left me feeling I had community and that I could do this work from where I was in a way that would make it better. Though I cite her books in other parts of this dissertation, her turns in the dialogue were real time contributions.

Thich Nhất Hạnh (affectionately known as Thầy (teacher) by his students has dedicated his life to the art of mindful living - co-enacting peace and wellbeing in every breath, with every step. He teaches that through mindfulness we can learn to live in the present moment - and thus truly develop peace, in one's self/in the world. He is one of the best known and most respected Zen masters in the world today, a poet, a peace and human rights activist and his work is the best example I know of how every day, in every small, simple, practical way we can make better worlds. Though he is not often on quoted, his presence on the page reminds me to practice with each step.

Eric Booth is an actor, businessman, author, teacher...There are a lot of great ideas in The Everyday Work of Art and his turns come fem here. One that stuck with me throughout this dissertation is that art (like this dissertation) is a verb - it's about the journey not the artifact as separate from that journey.

Alex, Dorte, Friedrich, James, John, Katharina, Nong and Shanda each played really important roles in this conversation/inquiry. They are amalgamated characters based on real people who shared their stories and experiences with me. Sometimes those people wanted to remain anonymous, other times I felt it made sense to combine their stories and observations into fewer characters. The stories they tell come from real lives lived - for example Chris's story about his evaluation process is someone real story who wished to remain anonymous. I also created turns for these characters that I would have otherwise spoken myself so as to help create dialogue (as opposed to too much monologue) before there were many turns on the page to engage with. In addition, each one of them, in beautiful, mysterious ways seemed to take on lives of their own - they "wrote themselves" - taking turns I hadn't planned for or expected in ways that opened up ideas, benefited the conversations and led to interesting insights. I've heard fiction writers say that the characters wrote themselves, they as the author just held the pen. I was amazed and in awe when that happened here.

Coda

Every act counts.
Every thought and emotion counts too.
This is all the path we have.
This is where we apply the teachings.
- Pema Chödrön

Another Turn Together

Thank you for meeting me here in this Coda! It is with great humility that I near what can be punctuated as the end of this dissertation. As I mentioned in the Preface, though, this dissertation is intended to be more of a comma than a full-stop, more of an ongoing conversation and practice space than a closed book and that is how I approach this chapter. I have constructed it as an opening as much as a closing with room for questions, dialogue and future turns. What we make here together is not just about the inquiry, but part of it.

Part of my intent with this chapter is to talk about what you just read - to share and reflect on some of the patterns and stories I lived, choices I made and patterns of communication I intended to call into being as I constructed this dissertation as well as some of the intended or unintended consequences or afterlives (Pearce, 2007) of these choices. I'm calling this section of the coda "How this was made."[36] I'm offering these examples in the hopes of helping to create additional coherence and meaning for my inquiry and to foreground the complexity, multiplicity and

[36] The choices I made had many motivating or contributing factors (experiences, relationships, aspirations etc.) and at each choice point or bifurcation point, I found CMM inspired questions such as 'what do I want to be making?', 'what is my highest level of context', or what would I like to invite or call forth?' helpful in choosing what kind of communicative turn to try (Pearce, 2007).

polyvocality of the relational processes by which it was made.[37] I also hope that through these examples and reflections, I am adding to the credibility of emergent, relational, social constructionist inquiry practices and to the expansion of what we value and imagine to be legitimate research practices. There already exists a rich discourse of ways of inquiring in our Ph.D. Ecologies — of how we "do research" and what makes it coherent and meaning-full or generative — and this coda is a turn in those conversations. It is, in part, through these conversations that we create awareness, encourage mindfulness and change our Ecology to help support future evolutions. Reflections on 'How this Was Made' make up the longest section of this chapter so for ease of reading and navigating, I have grouped these under subheadings: Form and Architecture; Co-Creation and Working with Multiple Communities; Touchstones for Guidance; The Importance of Possibility and Emergence in Process which is further subdivided into: Inquiry as Spiritual Practice; Relationship with "Data"; and Binding the Inquiry.

In addition to attending to how this was made, I will also attend to two other important and interrelated CMM queries: "What We are Making Together" and "How this Inquiry is Contributing to "Making Better Worlds" — specifically, contributing to understanding our Ph.D. Ecologies (and our greater ecology) in a way that enables us to co-enact well-being with greater and greater frequency. The rest of this chapter will be divided into sections based on these queries.

[37] It is interesting to choose a verb tense here as what was made is not static and in the process of constructing this coda, something new (including what I understand and how I understand it) *is* created - is still being made. For more on this, see McNamee & Hosking, 2012.

How This Was Made

Throughout this dissertation, I have been framing our research and inquiry practices as patterns of communication. There are countless possibilities for how a particular inquiry can be made and as the designers, architects, facilitators, funders and reviewers of academic inquiry we are constantly making choices - choices which contribute to how coherent, compelling, useful and valuable the inquiry is for different communities. For example, we make choices around the design for the inquiry (e.g. who is involved, what their roles and relationships are (ourselves included), what narrative we present, what vocabulary we use), about how we collect, analyse, interpret and (re)present data (e.g. what gets left out, put in, foregrounded, how it is categorised, what relationships are recognised, how it is punctuated, what form we use for presentation and to whom we present) and about how we critique, assess, and evaluate inquiry (e.g. for dissertations, peer reviews, IRBs/Ethics Reviews, funding applications.) With these choices, we are calling into being particular patterns of communication.[38] Our choices, those patterns of communication, are substantive. They make something. That "something" is different than if other communication patterns had been called into being through alternative (also valid and valuable) choices.[39] In this inquiry, I sustained a focus on noticing or discerning and reflecting on choice points and then making choices with an orientation towards co-enacting well-being. I do not look to put mine or other people's dissertation

[38] Barnett Pearce (Pearce, 2009, pp. 7-8) offers more on how researchers are architects and managers of communication patterns by connecting Kaplan's distinction between 'logic-in-use' and 'reconstructed logic' (1964) and Ricoeur's concept of 'emplotment' (1984-1988).

[39] This is one idea behind Appreciative Inquiry (AI) -- that you get more of what you pay attention to. In the case of AI, focusing on what we do well and what we want to learn more about helps bring it into being.

choices into a dualistic model of good or bad, right or wrong, but look at them in relational, constructionist terms of what they call forth or make in the inquiry, in our Ph.D. Ecologies more broadly and, connected to that, in our broader worlds.

Form and Architecture

An important and very significant choice I made in this inquiry was about the form this book — this dissertation or phase in the inquiry — takes. My initial ideas for what it might look like reflected my work in dialogue and community engagement. I envisioned something TED-like ("TED: Ideas Worth Spreading," n.d.) which shared examples and raised questions with other curious and inquiring folks and/or something World Café-like ("Welcome to the World Café!," n.d.) that included synchronous and asynchronous conversations that cross-pollinated and built on each other. Those initial ideas evolved to look very different but what stayed from those was an emphasis on dialogue and conversation as a form of action (Block, 2002/2003; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Pearce, 2007; Hurley & Brown, 2010). As dialogue was at the centre of my inquiry, I was interested in a presentational form that would reflect the conversations and dialogic turns that had been part of my broader inquiry and that would also invite new or continual dialogue and exploration of our Ph.D. ecologies. I wanted the dissertation to not only be a reflection or interpretation of what *had* happened (perhaps oriented towards the past) but also a performative or practice-led space for inviting and hosting *ongoing* dialogue (oriented towards collectively making our present and inviting pathways for our futures.)

Many of us who facilitate face-to-face dialogues pay attention to the physical space we are in as a way of inviting particular communication patterns. For example, rows of chairs facing the front of the room may invite a different kind of

conversational space than circles of tables and chairs[40]. In offering my dissertation to all of you I knew we would not all be gathered in the same place at the same time but I still wanted to attend to the architecture or form (like we might a physical space) and what kind of communication patterns it invites. Participants in my inquiry highlighted that in our Ph.D. Ecology the dominant communication pattern that goes with reading dissertations is not open or curious dialogue intended to be about learning but harsh, narrow critique and debate centred around “proving.” So I considered what I might be able to do to help shift that logical force of critique to one where those of us who care to can explore possible practices and futures together. One way I tried doing this was choosing a form where I shifted from standard prose (rows of chairs facing forward, if you will) to illustrating the conversations themselves with the use of figures and talk bubbles. Among other things, this was a way of offering you a chair around a virtual table or an invitation into someone’s living room, courtyard, garden or another conversational space as a way of helping shift the sense of “oughtness” from one of critique into a pattern of communication that includes curiosity and participation in an open dialogue. I was aware that with this invitation, this form, I was also offering an invitation to join me in practising with explicit intention and attention to how we are making our worlds together and what we are making, and want to make, together.

I knew that this form could be very challenging and uncomfortable for people, that many people might not like it and that I was taking a big risk in experimenting with it. The practice of taking that risk, in some ways of letting go of ideas of control, seemed important though. In part, it is an element of practicing with putting aside ego so as to remain open to what happens — including discomfort and potentially

[40] See (Brown, 2005) for more conversation on this.

great rejection (Chödron,1994.) It also seemed like a very valuable experiment to see what we make when we shift the center of gravity (Hudson, 2010) from a single speaker to a space where we are all contributing in unscripted way — what new learning, practices, orientations etc. arise from this emergence. In his chapter *Candlepower: the intimate flow of online collaborative learning* (2010), Barclay Hudson talks about the importance of the emergence (as it is used in complexity theory) of a "third voice" that is much more than the sum of its parts:

> There is a tradition of hermeneutic inquiry which aims at engaging this "third voice," rooted in "upward epistemology." Specifically, Heidegger thought that hermeneutic understanding was not aimed at re-experiencing another's experience, but rather held the power to grasp one's own possibilities for being in the world through engagement with others. In this way, conversation becomes a space where individuals have the possibility of creating a third voice, one in which subject-other becomes subject-subject and then inter-subjective in which the conversation itself becomes a part of collective being (Gadamer, 1997, p. 23). As Gadamer puts it, "In every true conversation each person opens himself/herself to the other, truly accepts his/her point of view as valid and transposes himself into the other to such an extent that he understands not the particular individual but what he says (p. 385)." Conversation is alive and is the opening to greater understanding and knowledge. In this moving, changing relationship, a reflective moment of understanding emerges. (Rogers & Hudson 2007)… What can we do to strike a match to light this phenomenon of candlepower? (Hudson, 2009, p. 277-280.)

In using this format, I hoped to be striking one of those matches. As much as I knew I may face a lot of resistance to this form, as it turned out, the feedback I received was by and large very positive. Not from everyone of course, but the majority of people, said that this graphic, dialogic form worked well for them and they really enjoyed it. The consistency with which I was getting that feedback surprised me and though I was trying to practice with "giving people an A" (Zander & Zander, 2002), I realized I had less trust in what might happen with this innovation in this Ph.D Ecology than I would in other work I was engaged in in other ecologies and communities. For Academia to be about learning, knowledge, innovation etc. I was struck that I was

more fearful of trying something new than in other fields or institutions. This experience was consistent with what I heard in many people's stories about their experiences with academia.

Something else emerged around responses to this for that was also fascinating. I had thought I was creating my inquiry with people held some overlapping but also vert different and often contentious ideas about what is acceptable or what I ought to be constructing and how or why. How it played out, however, is that with many people being accepting enough of the style or delighted by it, one criticism I received was that the people who appeared on the page were *too* supportive or congenial — often this was presented as not being "real life." I had an interesting choice point of how to address this discomfort people had with how supportive the characters seemed. Do I add in fictitious debates and contentions in order to show more textured options, additionally valid viewpoints and/or to story that my scholarship was "robust" enough to be shot down and still stand? What am I making if I do? What communication patterns am I privileging and reinforcing and what do those then make? How does that fit with co-enacting well-being? How does it align with what what we theorize about how change gets going (there are numerous theories to consider), about the importance of sanghas or communities where people are practicing with similar aspirations or intentions, about honouring that 'whoever shows up are the right people'? How does it work with the values of authentic representation and honouring people's stories and participation that come from my background with action research — particularly participatory action research (PAR)? What am I making if I say that more polarity, debate and or critique are essential in a dissertation? What assumptions does that make about knowledge generation and systemic evolution? About emergence? These are some examples of

questions I asked myself. There are many ways to address any of these questions and many other questions to ask. One of the things I did was to make choices to add in more dissenting thoughts. Two dominant patterns appeared. One was that adding in this fictitious debate never felt good and I needed to then ask what was happening in terms of making well-being — where was that in terms of levels of context? Part of why it felt bad was that it felt dishonouring to a relationally generative communication pattern I knew was possible and I knew it was possible, in part, because it was showing up. Another implication was that when I continued with the choice even when it didn't feel good, the additional turns people kept taking diluted the more contentious turns in the conversation. After playing with numerous choices at different points in the dissertation, I eventually made the choice to honour what emerged. Part of that is honouring surprise in dissertation research — what happens when what we find in our research is different than we expected or hoped etc. (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998; Pearce, 2006; Hudson, 2010) and to see what it makes if I offer a communication pattern that is more open, curious and dialogic than one of debate.

Part of what that choice made was that this dialogue impacted and inspired a diverse group of people in delightful ways I had not expected. People shared beautiful stories about how they were going to practice with the themes and concepts they were engaged with here in other parts of their lives. All of that said about people's support and delight, I also added a Preface and Coda in a prose format as a response to a couple of specific requests or mandates for a more traditional academic presentation that frames or bookends the dialogic graphic narrative form. Something different was made by requiring these chapters. These choices to add that more traditional academic voice are not right or wrong, good or

bad but they make something different. I feel they add richness. In deviating less from the dominant community's grammar and rhetoric, I hope these prose chapters add to the coherence and value of this (re)presentation in ways that invite even more people in to this "polylingual"[41], polysemic dissertation.

Another form related choice I made was about how I wanted to use the communication pattern of citations. In the Preface and Coda, I used a standard form of academic citation. In the body of the dissertation, I chose to limit my use of either direct citations (when published quotes became talk bubbles) or of biographical introductions for the characters. I will highlight three of the reasons why I chose this conversation pattern for the dialogue.

One intent behind my choice was to try to keep the flow of living, synchronous dialogue. I was attempting to support people in staying in the conversational space like they might be in a face-to-face dialogue. In steering away from citations, I was removing one cue that it was an Academic piece and trying to mimic more closely an emergent dialogue people might have together in someone's living room or another space where they felt comfortable. I hoped this would contribute to the shift in logical force I was looking to call forth[42].

Another factor in making those choices around citations and introductions had to do with what some people might name as the sociopolitical action inherent in research (Fals Borda & Rahman, 1991; Selener, 1997). This dialogue was full of

[41] I am playing here with Wittgenstein's notion of grammar and language games as I was working in and out of a variety of conversations and communities -- each community with its own language games, grammar and rhetoric.

[42] Though I understood this could be challenging for some people used to classic citations, it could also increase accessibility for other people who often feel alienated by academic culture.

vivencias, or lived stories, from a variety of people[43] and I wanted those stories to be interwoven in ways they could all be heard. I did not want to visually differentiate between the published and unpublished ones or to add (unwanted) layers of meaning or context to certain conversational turns by highlighting them as coming from someone famous versus someone less known. I also did not want to reinforce a communication pattern that gives special privilege, value, and power to published conversations (Chaudhary, 1997; Heron, 1996; Burns, 2007) over other ways people were sharing their experiences. This was, for me, a way of practicing communication patterns that come from and help call forth a) an orientation towards Inter-being (we are all part of each other), b) a participatory worldview that is concerned with, among other things, Paulo Freire's (1970) concept of *conscientização* [44], and c) a valuing of our collective knowledge that includes valuing various ways of knowing.

An additional contributor or motivator for making this choice is that I was working from a context where much of what is published is accessible electronically which has interesting implications for citing page numbers. The actual page a quote can be found on varies in electronic formats depending on, among other things, the device (mobile or desktop for example) and the chosen font or font size. I have paper books on my bookshelf that are 300 pages, but may have over 1000 pages when read electronically. Sometimes I found it faster to type the gist of a quote into Google to look for the page number so I could more easily find my notes than to just start flipping pages. Though people were often quoting someone without references

[43] Some of them were published, others unpublished, some were included conditional upon anonymity. Some of the turns took place in real time where the authors inserted a turn in response to other turns already on the page and some of them I wove together where the author had previously been speaking into a different context altogether.

[44] Conscientização is often talked about in participatory Action Research. It is sometimes translated as critical consciousness or an ongoing process where people become aware of factors and conditions that cause oppression and repression.

on the internet (and sometimes mis-quoting), when I added in that internet search, I found benefits beyond speed, efficiency or even accuracy or attribution. Among other things, I often discovered how other people were using and interpreting the reference and what else they were reading or writing about. In many ways, searching by quote or concept rather than looking for a page number introduced me to a lot of other conversations. This electronic, internet context invited me to play with what a shift in standard citation based on paper references to one that works with our emerging virtual electronic knowledge management and conversational functions might look like or invite. In submitting this dissertation as a paper book, I was not able to hyperlink quotes and references for easy but unobtrusive access as I would have liked but at the very least, I hoped to inspire conversation about how we think about citations and what practices might be useful. In adding the “Cast of Characters” and a bibliography, I was looking to provide an introduction to some of the characters after the fact so people would be able to connect in other ways and follow-up with conversation threads if they wanted to. In doing so I recognized that many people whose stories are (re)presented would not be included in that list either because of their preferences for anonymity or because I made a choice to blend different people’s stories into single characters. I also hoped this would honour people’s quotes and provide context for where they said them if their turns came from somewhere other than opting into this dissertation conversation. The cost of printing this dissertation is unusually high compared to other people in the same program and so based on resources, I had another choice point around how valuable the extra pages of character introductions and links to books and articles were. I made the choice to streamline those and rely more on the traditional bibliography to reduce

pages and so make my out of pocket financial cost more manageable and thus impacting my and my family's well-being in other ways.

In the form and architecture, I was looking to play with choices that might create communication patterns that felt dialogic, appreciative of a diversity of lived experiences, or *vivencias,* and which were responsive to the technological times we are living in. I was trying to do that within the resources I had available at the time. The feedback I received from most people is that this worked well for them and that it inspired new ways of thinking about and practicing in their various relationships within and outside of academia.

Co-Creation and Working with Multiple Communities

I positioned this inquiry as a multi-turned, flexibly punctuated, multiply interpreted and unfinished dialogue. I was not attempting to represent "all" opinions, stories or possibilities[45] but to give a sense that new conversational turns and multiple approaches or perspectives exist and are possible. I was oriented towards openness and spaciousness for exploring possibilities, where questions and conversation are both inquiry and intervention and where there is power in open questions, practice and lived experiences (Marshall, 1999; McNamee & Gergen, 1998; Mattis-Namgyel, 2010; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Wilson, 2009). One set of choices was about how to help create a sense of all this on the page.

One of the decisions I made to try to foreground that complexity and extendable punctuation was to leave conversational threads hanging. I used a graphic novel inspired technique of dangling a conversation with "to be continued" and picking up the conversation with a time lapsed indicator of "later." I hoped to

[45] New stories, options and possibilities are being created all the time

create a sense that more was happening, more was possible than just what was on the page. Towards the end of the body, I also included frames where people who had appeared on earlier pages were continuing the conversations with people we had not seen before — taking the conversations we had been having into different relationships and contexts (the park and the coffee shop — with an image of the park conversation appearing in the subsequent coffee shop turn.) Part of my intent with that was to show the potential ripple effects of our conversations and their afterlives or how they continue to unfold. Relatedly, I used the image of a bee in the scene where we took a break in the courtyard to represent the potential for cross-pollination of conversations and ideas both in this conversation and in other areas of our lives.

What may not be obvious on the page is how different asynchronous turns were integrated into already existing pages. As I said earlier in the dissertation, it is through people's participation — the stories they told, the dialogic turns they took, etc. — that this dissertation took shape. Some of you who are reading this right now have shared stories, reflections, questions, and aspirations for our Ph.D. Ecologies with me and I made changes to how I inquired based on those conversational turns. I also wove many of them onto the page in a way that had a significant impact on subsequent conversational turns and explorations. For example, when I first drafted the dialogue I — as the author and early participant — was choosing what was important to cover (conscious of the power of that first turn.) As more and more of you engaged with those early dialogic turns, and included your own turns, the conversations often went in directions I had not planned or anticipated. To make room for this and to be able to benefit from it, I needed to keep my process flexible and emergent in a way that differs from the story many people hold about research methodologies and program expectations around needing to have everything

planned out in advance. Different conversational participants' interests, stories and curiosities, the emphasis of topics, the questions asked, explored, and left unexplored and the relationships and connections formed shifted from what it would have been if I was writing this dissertation in a less collaborative and responsive way.[46] For example I originally intended to spend a lot of time in conversation about IRB/Ethics Reviews, around publication and around binding inquiries (when to stop or how to know they are finished) but because of the the participants' interest and participation throughout the dissertation, those topics are not explored on the page the way some other threads are. And again, I often put in more contentious ideas which sometimes were pushed out to make room for what people were actually contributing. Also, topics I originally introduced at the beginning were moved to the middle or closer to the end because of the way the conversational turns unfolded. For example, I was very interested in exploring Evaluation Criteria or Touchstones. I kept putting these at the beginning thinking they would be important for the conversational participants to have upfront. Instead,this topic kept getting shifted further into the dissertation based on the turns people were taking; every time I moved them back to the front, participants would take turns that pushed them later in the conversation. The emergence of conversation meant having a research process that was non-linear. It would not have served me well to have spent a single chunk of time on a literature review, another on data gathering and another on analysis. From the very beginning I needed to be reading, inquiring, interpreting, writing and more all simultaneously, or at least all cyclically, in order to really benefit from what was

[46] People participated from a variety of national, cultural and geographical contexts and the time span in these conversations is over 100 years. A few examples of the fields of disciplines or communities these conversations came from and/or contributed to include physics, social work, public policy, public health, communication studies, organizational development, artistic practice, Buddhist practice and family life.

emerging. It was labour intensive and wonderfully rewarding. This dissertation truly was co-created. What readers experience with this dissertation is shaped and made possible by the “third voice” (Hudson, 2010) that came through the participation of many.

In addition to the more overt participation where participants’ conversational turns appear in text bubbles, I see people participating in other more discrete ways as well. Readers and evaluators shape how this inquiry looks, what is foregrounded, what constructions are expanded, upheld, created, etc. and what we are making together in many ways. In a broad sense, all of the ideas, constructions, hopes and experiences people bring into reading this dissertation and the ones they may be developing or transforming as they engage with it are part of that participation. They are important for how we make meaning together and what our futures look like. Being able to work relationally and with this kind of emergence is an important part of working within the world more generally including in complex relational change work.

We have been talking about how this dissertation is “polylingual” in that I am working in multiple communities with different constructions -- including different vocabularies, grammars and rhetorics (Pearce, 2006). Many of them have different relationships to ideas, concepts, and knowledge. They also have different structures of meaning and action or rules for what tends to provide coherence (e.g. in this case what indicates something is acceptable as research) and what tends to be persuasive (e.g. that indicates it is “good” research or a “good” dissertation) (Heron, 1996; Pearce, 2006; Jacobs, 2008; Pearce, 2009; Gergen, 2009; Wilson, 2009). The diversity of people who engaged in this inquiry is terrific. Conversational participants from a variety of communities have told me they “get” and have learned something from the inquiry which they will apply to their lives. This is another part of what made

this inquiry satisfying for me. However, writing this as a *dissertation* rather than as some other kind of inquiry was challenging due to the narrow constructions from most Ph.D. programs of what "counts as a dissertation" [47]. Participating in so many different communities was part of what brought me to this inquiry — it was part of what formed the nexus — and throughout the inquiry I continued to be in conversation with and learning from people from many communities. I wanted what showed up on the page to exemplify the many petaled (Pearce, 2012) relational existence[48] and to be in service to continuing and expanding conversations in various communities. One reality of inviting polyvocality into the conversation about Ph.D. Ecologies is that what helps people from certain communities feel welcomed, heard, understood, literate etc. does not necessarily work for people from other communities. One of the ways I tried to work with this complexity was in attending to vocabulary.[49]

Knowing that conflict often comes from a difference in how we define things, I invited people to hold the words I used lightly — to think of them as signposts for where to look rather than objects with reified meanings. I also tried using multiple words or terms for a single concept — pulling on vocabulary from different communities and weaving them together. That turned out to be really helpful in expanding or clarifying how I was thinking about and living into different concepts. However some readers found it laborious or confusing, so I eliminated much of that. How Fascinating (Zander & Zander, 2002)! I knew I could not meet everyone's needs

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[47] As a written, printed document, as an expert led representation, as something to be formally evaluated for the purpose of granting a degree etc.

[48] See the petals on the daisy model in the preface for examples of these many communities.

[49] There is a Wittgenstein quote "a whole cloud of philosophy condensed into a single drop of grammar" (Wittgenstein, 1953, p. 222). That is how I felt sometimes with how I was playing with vocabulary and what weight I put on that -- especially early on.

though and that I was not interested in trying. What I also knew is that I had to feel good about what I was doing and that it had to be acceptable enough to a particular subset of academic communities within which I would be granted my Ph.D. I heard a lot about tensions and even angst that other Ph.D. candidates experienced around balancing what feels right for them and their inquiry with what will be acceptable to the committee or the granting institution. I experienced some of this tension myself. This all pointed me towards a great opportunity to practice awareness of what I was making and how I could co-enact well-being within contexts of multivocality and plurality. What helped me the most was continually foregrounding my dissertation as a practice for co-enacting well-being. To me, that meant, among other things, working from a place of compassion, practicing with non-judgement, and holding it all lightly and with what Ben and Roz Zander call “Giving people an A” (ibid) and practicing the paradox that every decision was important and none of the decisions were important. Mahatma Gandhi is reported to have said, "Almost everything you do will be insignificant, but it is very important that you DO IT." Pema Chödrön offers:

> Don’t worry about achieving. Don’t worry about perfection. Just be there each moment as best you can. When you realize you’ve wandered off again, simply very lightly acknowledge that. This light touch is the golden key to reuniting with our openness (Chödrön, 2005, p. 15).

That all helps. When I could do that, my dissertation came together in much more generative ways and with less stress. When I “wandered off” I felt the lack of well-being in my body, my creativity, and my relationships with other people. I used this dissertation as one way to practice with that “coming back” and to habituate myself to ways of being in relationship and conversation patterns that are more likely to co-enact well-being.

While practicing with lightness, non-attachment and compassionate non-judgement, I continued to make choices that were very intentionally about living into particular constructions and communication patterns and altering other ones as ways of co-enacting well-being in and through our Ph.D. Ecology. For example, if I can return for a minute to the topic of vocabulary, one of the choices I made early on that was helpful has to do with paying attention to what constructions inform our use of research related terms and what constructions using those terms call forth or reinforce (Gergen, 2009). I chose, for example, to not use common distinctions that seemed to come from a more bounded orientation towards inquiry than the relationally constructionist one I approached this with, e.g. not drawing distinctions between topic of inquiry, data gathering, (re)presentation and form, researcher and researched (subject-object) or inquiry and intervention. I saw these as deeply interconnected and did not find it useful to have more bounded conceptions of them. It was, however, helpful to call forth other terms, for example to acknowledge that this inquiry was simultaneously intended to be descriptive, interpretive, facilitative, reflexive and practice-based. Also helpful, was naming it as multi-turned along a non linear path, relationally layered, polylingual in that those terms helped guide me into relational doctoral practices.

Touchstones for Guidance

With the diversity of preferences for ways of being together that I was surrounded with, what was also really helpful in continuous and ongoing ways, was to create a list of what was important to me in my life and work. This list provided guidance for living into my roles in our Ph.D. Ecology — and specifically this dissertation — in a way that was helping to create well-being for myself and those I

was in conversation with. This list came out of listening to and learning from the wisdom and voices of people I respected in a way that would bring coherence to the inquiry for me, would indicate that it was on-track and would help me stay grounded in making choices that live into the kind of world I was trying to call forth. These are what I have referred to as Touchstones. These touchstones helped me keep foregrounding my intentions and what I want to be making in any turn and they enrich and expand my story of Ph.D. Ecologies. In particular, working with them in an ongoing way helped me shift stories I heard or held about Ph.D. ecologies that don't support our well-being and well-being in the world (for example, the story I kept hearing, and that I sometimes experienced, of making decisions based on the fear of rejection) and instead, nurtured the stories that were more likely to be generative. This practice of continually coming back to the Touchstones combined with holding open spaces for new possibilities and new imaginings or constructions helped make my dissertation stronger and more generative.

I kept trying to introduce these Touchstones at the beginning of my dissertation thinking that in addition to the guidance I found in them, they might also provide a useful frame for the diverse community of people engaging with this inquiry (including examiners) for coordinating and managing meaning together and developing greater understanding of how or why I was making the choices I was. Based on how people engaged in the conversation, introducing and describing these Touchstones kept moving further and further back into the conversation from the perspective of how the conversation might be viewed as a written document. This was a delightful lesson in assumptions and working with emergence. Regardless of where they showed up on the page, though, these Touchstones always remained

foregrounded in my mind. At each bifurcation point and with each turn in the inquiry, I regularly asked myself:

- Am I, or in what ways am I, being mindful that I am participating in a multi-turn and multi-storied process?
- Am I, or in what ways am I, tapping into the wisdom of our collective intelligence? Am I, or in what ways am I, tapping into my own wisdom and knowledge from a variety of sources not just cognitive or intellectual but paying attention whole body-mindfully? Am I, or in what ways am I, developing new capacities/practices for working with multiple ways of knowing which help me enter into generative relationships with others, even under less than optimal conditions?
- Am I, or in what ways am I, opening up possibilities with the turns I take? Being proactively compassionate - constructing opportunities where people can be more open/ inviting a particular kind of response? Saying no when appropriate and in ways which open doors and pathways/inviting conversations over ending them?
- Am I, or in what ways am I, embracing all stories as incomplete, unfinished, dynamic (even inconsistent), relational, complex and valid? Am I, or in what ways am I, able to welcome and relax into wonderment, expansiveness, paradox, playfulness, movement?
- Am I, or in what ways am I, making a positive or generative difference in other people's lives? Am I, or in what ways am I, getting that feedback?
- Am I, or in what ways am I, honouring the notion of relational responsibility with others who have been or will be engaging in this inquiry - including reviewers/examiners? Am I, or in what ways am I, being generous and gentle with myself and others, giving people an "A" when imagining or anticipating their responses? Staying excited?!?!
- Am I, or in what ways am I, developing practices and skills of listening deeply/with curiosity while also standing tall (Buber's standing my ground while remaining profoundly open to the other) in ways which foster inquiry and invite others to engage in creative conversations based in genuine inquiry?
- Am I, or in what ways am I, acting on what I love in service to something else? Working in ways/creating something that reflects and feeds into my commitments to fostering well-being/improving existing social worlds (what some may call liberation of all beings) and calling into being better social worlds?
- Am I, or in what ways am I, working with emergence in generative ways - seeing evolving choices and shifts in perspective as signposts

of learning? Am I, or in what ways am I, practicing with mindfulness, impermanence and non-attachment (including allowing ideas, approaches, methods, petals on the daisy flower (CMM) to drop away?)

- Am I, or in what ways am I, practicing Ben and Roz Zander's "one butt playing"? Going for it with passion and enthusiasm? Am I, or in what ways am I, going beyond where I would usually stop? Am I, or in what ways, am I singing with my unique voice?

- Am I, or in what ways am I, staying present with living into the open questions/the conversations? Feeling curious? Am I, or in what ways am I, embracing boundarylessness? Am I, or in what ways am I, able to be with the fullness of an experience without needing to come to conclusions/reify things? Was I allowing room (stillness, space) for things to arise/emerge?

- Am I, or in what ways am I, having fun? Experiencing joy, nourishment and growth? Am I, or in what ways am I, engaged? If I am not, am I, or in what ways am I, discovering what I need to change so that I am?

- Am I, or in what ways am I, engaging the five core strategies of appreciative leadership? The wisdom of inquiry - leading with positively powerful questions/the art of illumination - bringing out the best of people and situations/the genius of inclusion; engaging with people to co-create the future/the courage of inspiration; awakening the creative spirit/the path of integrity; making choices for the good of the whole?

- Am I, or in what ways am I, becoming more intimate with this ecology? Am I, or in what ways am I, bringing my intimacy to the surface of this inquiry/(re)presentation (letting people into personal parts of my journey in service to/as part of this work?)

- Am I, or in what ways am I, being gentle with myself and others? Am I, or in what ways am I, I including "mistakes" in my definition of performance?

- Am I, or in what ways am I, being both an attractor of and generator of possibility?

- What am I doing/are my practices helping habituate me to openness and mindfulness? Helping co-create better worlds?

Part way through my inquiry, I added in additional assessment criteria linked to creating better worlds or co-enacting well-being in and through my dissertation and my participation in this Ph.D. Ecology. These additions come from Four Arrow's work

(2008) and are oriented towards a more research specific or academic specific context than the first list. Is this dissertation am I:

- Focusing more on important questions than on research methodologies per se?
- Seeking to make the world a better place?
- Moving away from an over-emphasis on academic writing if it tended to stifle my creativity or my voice?
- Reflecting an awareness of shortcomings of the English language?
- Embrasing interdisciplinarity?
- Not falling for the myth of “objectivity”?
- Not just relying on external authorities?
- Revealing or inviting virtues (generosity, patience, courage, respect, humility, fortitude etc.)?
- Aligned with my sustainability priorities?
- Not overly anthropocentric?
- Reflecting that art, music and storytelling are living information systems?
- Situated in experience?
- Respecting multiple culturally determined ways of thinking and living?
- Caring about and contributing to social and ecological justice?
- Comprehending the value of diversity?
- “Regarding the people’s vision of reality?”
- Challenging all forms of oppression?
- Critical of cultural and educational hegemony?
- Appreciating dreaming and visions as potentially valid resources for knowledge?
- Recognising the pitfalls of a male-dominated, white-western world?
- Honouring traditional Indigenous ways of knowing?
- Integrating knowledge, scholarship, research, reflection and practice?

- Understanding the power of stories, music and other forms of art as a source of wisdom?
- Revealing mindfulness each step of the way?
- Appreciating the role of sacrifice in the journey?
- Paying attention to perennial cycles and wisdom in nature?
- Remembering to look for life's beauty and joy?

This list are examples of descriptions or orientations which helped me align my choices with my aspirations in ways that helped co-enact well-being throughout the dissertation process. As I was practicing in each moment or with each turn, these touchstones helped me assess and make choices about what is likely to help co-create well-being. As an example, let me describe choices I made around what I will refer to as "spiritual practice."[50]

When I say *spiritual practice*, I am using that term to refer to an intention and set of practices. One set of practices includes Buddhist notions of mindfulness and presence, compassion, non-judgement, non-attachment and impermanence, and inter-connectedness[51]. A second set of practices is about doing whatever it is I am doing with the intent of creating better worlds. People have named this as a commitment to the liberation of suffering for all beings, developing bodhichitta (Chödrön, 2005), developing "an awakened mind that expresses itself in compassionate action to alleviate suffering to keep the door open to all sentient beings for the rest of our life" (Chödrön, 2012, p. 71), choosing to do something with full presence, mindfulness and concentration (Nhat Hanh, 2011), the practice of

[50] I am using lowercase letters for spiritual practice -- for me this is not one thing or a prescription but a general term I offer as an indicator of where to look to get a sense of what I mean.

[51] Among other teacher's work, I am greatly influenced by Thích Nhất Hạnh's work here. Some very accessible books which help describe his orientation towards practice are his books Peace in Every Step (1991) and Peace in Every Breath (2011). Also useful is Plum Village's 14 Mindfulness Trainings (Plum Village, n.d.-b).

touching “the nature of interbeing in everything that is, and to see that our happiness is not separate from the happiness of others” (Plum Village, n.d.-a). Another practice was learning to trust in, and willing to talk in, an academic environment about what CMM names as Mystery (Pearce & Pearce, 2011; Pearce, 2012), and what I referred to in my Touchstones as appreciating dreaming and visions as potentially valid and important resources for knowledge in doctoral inquiry (Jacobs, 2008). I also kept my Āyurvedic practice in mind with practicing moderation and the kinds of activities which would bring balance to my constitution.

In an earlier draft of the Preface, I talked about knowledge that comes about through what I will refer to as visions or dreams, for lack of a better word. Those conversations got cut from the preface though I do touch on them in the dialogue. I’m tentative to include these conversations in an academic setting however, I do include them because they draw attention to one way I learned and evolved through engaging with my dissertation. When I started the dissertation, I had not considered including these knowings or ways of knowing at all. But they were important geographies and part of why I made choices the way I did. Arriving at a comfortable place of including “non-traditional data” was a journey and a process. Practicing with the touchstones were indispensable to this process. Let me take a minute to talk more about this.

Early on in my dissertation journey, I found myself with new learnings, openings, insights, understandings and relationships. These were wonderful results of my inquiry, you could say. They did not come while I was sitting at the computer or in dialogue with someone. Instead, they came as sort of “aha moments” when I was sleeping or meditating. Though I could not describe in words how these differed from what or how I understood before, I knew there was a qualitative difference. It

was transformative. It felt really good until I realised I was faced with the choice of whether or not to reference those insights or transformations in my inquiry. I hesitated because these insights and understandings — these moments of awakenings or kenshō — came in non-discursive or pre-discursive ways. And although they were important, I felt there were real risks to bringing them up within a fairly discursive-centric community. I was concerned people might dismiss me, my work or the insight and understanding that came through these pre-discursive openings. And if that occurred, opportunities for engaging with people and these ideas would close rather open. This led to stress; I felt heavy and overly serious, twisted up with headaches and neck pain, I had difficulty concentrating and my creativity seemed to fizzle. This was not a state that was co-enacting well-being! So I turned to my touchstones and saw these questions from wise elders -- many of whom would identify as part of our Ph.D. Ecology and so presumably have faced similar choices. These questions are: Am I, or in what ways am I...

- Tapping into my own wisdom and knowledge from a variety of sources not just cognitive or intellectual but paying attention whole body-mindfully?
- Developing new capacities/practices for working with multiple ways of knowing which help me enter into generative relationships with others, even under less than optimal conditions?
- Embracing all stories as incomplete, unfinished, dynamic (even inconsistent), relational, complex and valid?
- Able to welcome and relax into wonderment, expansiveness, paradox, playfulness, movement?
- Honouring the notion of relational responsibility with others who have been or will be engaging in this inquiry - including reviewers/ examiners partly by being generous and gentle with myself and others and giving people an “A” when imagining or anticipating their responses?

- Staying excited? Going beyond where I would usually stop? Singing with my unique voice?
- Becoming more intimate with this ecology? Bringing my intimacy to the surface of this inquiry/(re)presentation (letting people into personal parts of my journey in service to/as part of this work?)
- Habituating myself to openness and mindfulness?
- Respecting multiple culturally determined ways of thinking and living? Challenging all forms of oppression - critical of cultural and educational hegemony?
- Appreciating dreaming and visions as potentially valid resources for knowledge?
- Recognising the pitfalls of a male-dominated, white-western world?
- Honouring traditional Indigenous ways of knowing?

I realised that in my list of Touchstones, I had a lot of questions or resources for guiding me in making the choice. In this case, the choice was to include the dimension of spiritual practice and different ways of knowing as part of the whole Daisy of my dissertation (Pearce, 2012; Pearce, 2009; Lorde, 1984). Acknowledging the diversity of communities, I know people will respond to this choice in various ways — some more supportive than others. What helps me stay comfortable in my choice — knowing that some people may find *dis*-comfort with it — is that in making it, I began to relax and hold the decision more lightly in a way that transformed what I was feeling whole body-mindfully. It helped me to continue in a more open, confident, relationally generative, and creative state which is more conducive to the co-enacting of well-being. That's significant. Ultimately, for me in this inquiry, it is all about well-being, eh?

The Importance of Possibility

As I am exploring some examples of how this dissertation was made, I think it is important to highlight that out of all of the potential ways this dissertation could have been constructed and played out, all the potential patterns of communication I could have invoked or tried to create, what helped make what you see here, including what helped make it coherent, compelling and valuable to a wide variety of people[52], has to do with embracing possibility and emergence and with seeing this inquiry as a practice space. Emergence, possibility and practice are prominent themes in my inquiry and though I have already provided examples where each of them are important for how things came together, I also want to attend to them from a more meta-perspective. I'll start with possibility.

In their book *The Art of Possibility* (2000), Ben and Roz Zander offer the idea that "It's all invented anyway, so we might as well invent a story or a framework of meaning that enhances our quality of life and the life of those around us." (p.12) Another way to say this is: *everything is socially constructed and new worlds of meaning are possible*[53] so we may as well make ones that enhance our quality of life and the lives of those around us. We are not reified in relationships or locked into one way of being in them (in our Ph.D. Ecologies or elsewhere). We may dissolve or

[52] Their direct feedback indicates that it was coherent, compelling and valuable.

[53] Often, new worlds of meaning are not only possible in theory but already in existence in practice in different cultures and communities. Having had the opportunity to live in so many different communities has been a wonderful reinforcer of possibility and how our ways of being are not reified but constructed in relationship and can be re-constructed to make something else.

evolve current ways of relating and co-create or co-enact other ways[54] (Taos Institute, n.d.). There are many possibilities for how we are in relationship, for our practices and how we go on together.

With how I perceive and engage in the world, I excel at seeing possibilities where people feel they do not exist. It is part of what has helped me support organisations who are trying to change but feel stuck in their current state — feeling as if they have tried all they could possibly try. I have found that noticing that there are choice points is important for feeling like we can get "unstuck" and that we can create or call forth worlds in intentional ways. We can author and not just be authored by our stories. My focus in this inquiry was as much about noticing and discerning possibilities and bringing choice points into view as it was playing with how I or someone else might act into them and what that calls forth.

Zander & Zander (2002) use a puzzle to illustrate how unseen possibilities often exist for how we approach something. When we change our frame and our stories (our construction of reality), we expand what is possible. You may have seen this puzzle before. If not, please give it a try. You need to join all nine of these dots with four straight lines, without taking your pen off of the paper:

. . .

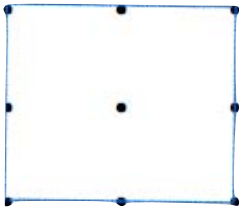
. . .

. . .

(I'll pause while you try.)

[54] This could include being mindful of, and upholding, altering or expanding as appropriate our policies, procedures, expectations and assumptions about what is considered "good" or "valued" in research practices including, for example, with our engagement with those participating in the inquiry, what traditions of inquiry we value, how we (re)present research, how we cite, what our ethics reviews/IRBs focus on and how we review and evaluate peer and student work.

How was that for you? Many people find themselves struggling to join all nine of the dots with just the four straight lines and without taking their pen off of the paper. Often people leave one dot unconnected, coming up with something like this:

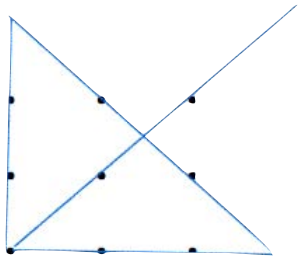


What had you come up with?

The Zanders point out that one of the assumptions or stories people often *add* to the instructions is that you have to work within the square created by the four outer dots. Working from the construction of this square, people often feel like this is an impossible puzzle (p.14). Similarly, in Ph.D. Ecologies (among faculty, students and others) people often feel frustrated by the constraints they are given (or that they assume) for their research and other academic work. This constricts the options for doing what might be useful given their specific inquiry or their unique relationship with the world. At times the logical force or gravitational pull of these assumptions can be so great that they can even trump permission someone may have been given to do something else.

However, we do not live and work in a stagnant ecology. New assumptions, constructions and instructions are not only possible, they may be particularly generative. In terms of the nine-dot puzzle rather than leave one dot disconnected, what happens if we attend to and try to shift assumptions people hold about the instructions (completing it within the imaginary square) and invite them to explore a

different way of approaching the puzzle? The Zanders invite this by adding the suggestion: “Feel free to use the whole sheet of paper.” For many people, this shift in expectations about the instructions, or permission for how to approach the task, enables new possibilities to appear:



My inquiry included exploring what this kind of invitation might look like in Ph.D. Ecologies: what could happen when constructions about how to do a dissertation or how to inquire within the context of a dissertation change? What happens if in my inquiry, for example, I use “the whole sheet of paper,” so to speak? What happens if I draw from what I know from other parts of my work? From organisational and community change, from dialogue, from Buddhist, Āyurvedic and artistic practices? What new possibilities are created? In taking this approach to my inquiry, my whole dissertation became a practice in creating possibilities which could co-enact well-being. It was a space to not only explore the dominant story of what Ph.D. Ecologies are like and how they can evolve to better meet our changing needs as a society (inquiring into possibility) but also a space to simultaneously create changes -- creating new constructions through practice.

Throughout the inquiry, one of my on-going practices was to examine the turns I was taking, looking at (among other things) what I was making, how I was making it, and whether/how it was co-enacting well-being. When it was not feeling like the trajectory I was on, nor the practices I was engaged in, were as generative

as they could be I looked at what other choices were possible which might create greater well-being. Over and over again, I experienced this process of identifying and then acting into choice points leading to enhancements in my overall inquiry (what I was learning from it and potentially what other people experienced from it) and in my overall well-being. This was generative but not always easy. There was a tension among working with what I could imagine might be valuable for this inquiry, what I had the resources (financial, time, knowledge based, physical and geographical) to undertake, the logical force I felt about how things "ought" to be done to be acceptable, and the explicit instructions I was given. That tension was sometimes very strong.

I entered this inquiry with certain resources for working in ambiguous, complex and changing environments. For example, much of my career has been full of experiences working with shifting assumptions and creating new possibilities in ways that served people and organisations really well. I also have years of experience as an adult moving into and out of different cultures, countries and other contexts -- adapting to new assumptions, constructions, languages and possible ways of engaging in the world. Another resource I tapped into was allowing myself to use and appreciate (as opposed to work against) the way I typically engage with and understand the world[55] I am constantly seeing situations from numerous perspectives simultaneously and do well with holding many of those at the same time. I also had my Buddhist mindfulness practice, my CMM experience, my Āyurvedic practice and other resources to support me. However, even with these

[55] This was actually an aha moment for me. It came when I was participating in an Appreciative Leadership Development Program Diana Whitney and Carlos Aguilera Muga were leading. It was then that I realized that in working with my dissertation, I was editing out some of my strengths (ones I storied people could find disconcerting) rather than living into them. Deciding to work with rather than hold back my strengths and make this dissertation uniquely mine was a very positive experience.

resources and with my experience and comfort with change and possibility, I found holding well-being in the foreground each day as I moved through my inquiry was sometimes challenged by stories that exist about our Ph.D. Ecology right now — including stories about how things ought to be and what is *not* possible. Stories are powerful (Wilson, 2009; Mattis-Namgyel, 2010; Whitney, Trosten-Bloom, & Rader, 2010; Creede, Gallegos, & Fisher-Yoshida, 2012) and I realised that the stories I was surrounded by crept in to influence my own constructions. Being told what "isn't possible" in terms of my dissertation often had a far greater influence on my process than being told what "isn't possible" in other contexts or organisations I have worked in. In addition, when I was advised to prepare for people rejecting my work and to attend to the critics, I found myself in positions where well-being was no longer foregrounded and, ironically, my work suffered in a way that could have made it less, rather than more, inviting to people who might be challenged by it. Keeping well-being foregrounded as a highest level of context really was a *practice* - something to do over and over again. Some days I felt more grounded and practiced than others. In some meditation practices, when you notice your mind drifting, you come back to your breath. The noticing is as much a part of the practice as the coming back and comes from paying attention to what is actually going on with the whole body-mind and then being intentional about practising. The same could be said for mindfulness of co-enacting well-being. It's a practice of noticing, being intentional and coming back.

When I foregrounded well-being, it really helped me be mindful in choosing how to proceed at any given moment. For example, when I developed back and neck problems from so much time sitting at the computer (reading, typing etc.), when conversations were stymied or stilted, when I felt myself feeling heavy, or when I felt

isolated in ways that weren't generative or weren't contributing to well-being or productive inquiry, I'd come back to the questions of what I was making, how it was made and how I could contribute to well-being. I would look for possibilities and choices that would shift my experience in qualitatively significant ways. At each of those bifurcation points, the choices I made did actually create those shifts. I began to experience a healthier body, a sense of curiosity, more generative communication turns and joy and excitement in the dissertation process. I say "joy and excitement" because practicing with discerning even small bifurcation points and making wise(r) choices can enable significant shifts. You may call this part of my theory of change as personal practice creating large-scale change.[56]

In giving ourselves permission to evolve how we do things in our Ph.D. Ecologies, we have an invitation to notice or discern bifurcation points with increased frequency. Noticing those choice points can then lead us to consider which choices are likely to help create better worlds and help co-enact well-being within our Ph.D. ecologies. With the interconnectedness that I talked about earlier in my dissertation, that means we can make better worlds more broadly. I found that through on-going (what some might name as *rigorous or disciplined*[57]*)* practice, I was able to do this with increased frequency. As I mentioned above, this is not a linear progressive process; somedays and in some contexts I felt more practiced than others. Buddhist practice talks about and helps guide us in noticing and allowing for this without

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[56] In community change and organisational development practice in complex systems, a theory of change is an articulation of the way we think we will get from where we are now to where we want to go. It is used as both a planning and an assessment tool during the actual change process that enables course correction and a recursive modification of our theory of change. This invites a learning orientation and the possibility of shared learning with others who want to create change in other complex systems. (Patten, 2009). For more on this particular theory of change, see the teachings and collected works of Maya Angelou, Mahatma Gandhi, Thich Nhat Hahn, Vasant Lad and Margaret Mead.

[57] *Disciplined* here in the way Ven. Anzan Hoshin roshi uses it meaning willingness to learn.

judgement[58]. The more I was able to notice without judging (the more I was able to develop compassion and non-judgement for myself) the more the practices evoked or co-created discernible feelings of well-being. I felt better whole body-mindfully and in other relationships (with people, with my dissertation, with knowledge generation etc.)

My mission in life is not merely to survive,
but to thrive;
and to do so with some passion, some compassion,
some humor, and some style"
- Maya Angelou

Emergence in Process and Procedure: Inquiry as Spiritual Practice

One of the ways emergence played out is in what people might be inclined to name as a research process or methodology. I began with an aspiration and an orientation rather than a set methodology.[59] For some people or some inquiries, having a set methodology helps guide them in thinking about what to do as well as helping to connect them to particular communities. This is one way my dissertation process differed from many people I encountered along the way. For me, I anticipated a continual unfolding and emergent changes in how I worked with my aspirations and with what was arising. I allowed for that and my advisor supported that process. It meant being able to sit with what Pema Chödrön refers to as *groundlessness* (Chödrön, 2005, 2012) which can be an uncomfortable space for many people. It also meant practicing with trusting my process or what I brought to

[58] See for example the collected works of Pema Chödrön for her reminders of how human we are. She encourages us to develop compassion for ourselves and to see all of our responses and the ebb and flow of them as part of our practice rather than being "acceptable practice or not."

[59] See S. McNamee and D.M. Hosking's conversations about method in their 2012 book Research and Social Change: A Relational Constructionist Approach and B. Hudson's chapter *Candlepower* (2010) on the biologic and scientific merits of surprise and mystery.

this inquiry from my previous experiences (Chaudhary, 1997; McTaggart, 1997; Selener, 1997) including what I know from my social constructionist, Āyurvedic and Buddhist practices about how things are made in relationship. This had to take priority over getting caught up in ego and what people might think about me not "having it all planned out in advance" (Mattis-Namgyel, 2010) (something which did concern some people along the way and could have been a story I tried to live into.) Allowing for changes and being able to improvise and work with emergence of process or procedure, helped draw attention to a number of constructions about my dissertation and doctoral inquiry in general and helped this inquiry unfold in generative ways. Working this way influenced everything from how I participated in a variety of conversations to shifting how I worked with "data", to compassionately holding the stories and experiences I was entrusted with, to evaluating at any point what was and was not working well. This changed how I approached my inquiry, how I talked about it, what conversations were included, what new openings I saw and what I learned. This takes me back to "spiritual practice" as a way of knowing.

When I was first imagining my dissertation and how to approach what I was looking to do, I never imagined spiritual practice being an integral part of the inquiry. With the emergence of thinking of this inquiry in that way (and potentially naming it as such), I explored questions such as: Is it useful to try to describe important parts of what I have learned even if in the process of describing it, I seem to move further away from the learnings/the openings? What difference does it make in my life and work (including my reasons for engaging in this dissertation) and in the life and work of my colleagues and community if I name and include, don't name or include, how I name and include it etc.? What is this contributing to?

Throughout my inquiry, I met a number of people who talked (often discretely) about their work being something larger than themselves. Some of them specifically name spiritual practice[60]. They primarily identify themselves as practitioners or scholar-practitioners (with an emphasis on work outside academic institutions.) However, I am becoming more and more aware of people talking about it within the context of their work in the Academy, too. One example comes from Barnett Pearce in his chapter “Evolution and Transformation: A Brief History of CMM and a Meditation on What Using it Does to Us” (W.B. Pearce, in Creede et al, 2012). He wrote that candidate names for the next evolution of CMM include “transformational,” “spiritual practice,” “the coordinated enactment of compassion,” and “personal and social evolution.” He explains that “there is now good evidence that using CMM changes the minds of those of us who use it. Among other things, that changes the questions to which we are drawn and our understanding of what might be acceptable answers to them. (Ibid p. 4)

> Perhaps we should have realized sooner that CMM is (among other things) a tool and, like other tools, is not neutral. Not only does a tool prefigure its use (what Kaplan 1964, 28, called “the law of the instrument”) but it shapes those who use it. As we developed and used CMM’s heuristic models and concepts, they not only cast light on the patterns of communication that we were consciously describing and interpreting, but they were working on us. It has taken me a long time to realize just how, and how profoundly, the use of CMM’s tools shape those who use them (Ibid p. 10)”.

Peter Reason is another person connected to the Academy who talks about our work needing to be “something larger than ourselves”. In his blog he talks about “the devastating and unsustainable impact of human activities on the biosphere” ("Peter Reason Home Page," n.d.). He offers “I believe any significant

[60] These are mostly personal conversations, unpublished conversational turns which I am intentionally choosing to leave un-cited as ways of respecting the conversational contexts in which these turns emerged.

change toward sustainability requires a fundamental shift in our sense of who we humans are in relation to the planet that sustains us...I am seeking to explore and articulate how we might create an in-depth and almost taken-for-granted experience of ourselves as participants in the fabric and process of the planet (Ibid.).” He separates his academic articles and his blog pertaining to this concern and, in the latter, goes on to say that:

> Living as part of the whole starts from the essential insight that we are already participants: we are part of the cosmos, always in relation with each other and the more than human world, glorious and flawed yet temporary centres of awareness and action in an interconnected whole. In a sense this is close to the idea that we are already Buddha mind, yet somehow we have forgotten this ("Peter Reason Writing the World," n.d.).

This all resonates with me and I know there are many, many other scholars who are working with an increased integration and valuing of their ways of being in the universe into academic work and I will not try to cite all of them. However, with all the great evolutionary work out there, there are still many people who hold stories that Ph.D. Ecologies are hostile to these kinds of orientations towards inquiry and (re)presentation. I wondered what it could be like to work within an academic setting that expands, enriches and nourishes its attention to and value of practices coming from cosmologies, ontologies, epistemologies, methodologies, forms, practices and ways of being that are consistent with spiritual practices. Embracing different cultures requires an understanding that cultures of knowing, of inquiry, and of ways of being in relationship, are inseparable from or deeply inspired by, their spirituality or spiritual practice (Charles, 2007; Jacobs, 2008; Wilson, 2009; Collins, 2000; Heron & Reason, 1997; Smith, 1999). I wondered what am I creating if I talk about this in my dissertation? What am I making if I choose to stay silent?

Audre Lorde talks about the importance of breaking the silence(s) as a critical step for mobilisation and empowerment in her poem The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action (1984):

> I have come to believe over and over again, that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood...What are the words that you do not have? What do you need to say? What are the tyrannies that you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you will sicken and die of them, still in silence?...[O]f course I am afraid, because the transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self-revelation, and that always seems fraught with danger... (Lorde, 1984, pp. 40-41)

I think there is great wisdom in what she is saying. One challenge for me with making this verbal was that some of the understandings or knowings I am talking about in regard to my inquiry were significant and had important implications for innovation and new connections or understandings but came through dreams, while meditating and in other non-verbal and non-cognitively centred ways. Trying to put them into words as a way of sharing them or enhancing the conversation seemed to take me further from the experience or the learning and insights. In that case, I wondered, who was it serving and how could I do that in a way that serves conversation without being counter-productive? I also encountered the questions of if, and how, these non-discursive openings should be included in a dissertation as many people would consider these sources unacceptable in doctoral research. Though I realised many people have a story of empirical and data-driven scientists experiencing (acceptable) “Eureka!” moments, I was concerned that my speaking of these things might cause people to shut me out and dismiss my work. And yet, as Audre Lorde talks about, how generative was it to keep silent on these things? As I was working with these questions, I began hearing a number of other colleagues,

including ones located in academia, talking quietly about their work as a spiritual practice in the various ways they thought about that. Going back to CMM's LUUUUTT model and the untold, unheard and untellable stories (Pearce, 2007), I wondered what might shift for me, for my inquiry, for well-being in general if I, as some other people are, contributed to the telling of spiritual practice in doctoral work and ways of knowing that are non-discursive?[61]

This was a bifurcation not just in my inquiry but in my life more broadly. In theory, trusting in the ineffable — in Mystery and knowledge or insights that come from non- cognitively centred or discursive places — and naming my work as a spiritual practice was not a challenge for me. In talking about the development of CMM, Pearce said of himself and Vern Cronen:

> We introduced the ideas of ineffability, mystery, and wonder as ways of giving positive acknowledgement to the limits of possibility in description and interpretation, and proposed friendship with paradox, confusion and uncertainty. We saw ourselves as participants rather than (just) observers in a pluralistic, unfinished social world in which our most appropriate stance is continuing curiosity rather than some degree of certainty (Pearce 1993). (W. B. Pearce, in Creede et al, 2012 p. 10)

This really resonates with me. However, being comfortable with orienting myself this way in an Academic context was something I was still practicing and trying to honour in different ways. So I was faced with an exciting opportunity for alignment between my doctoral studies (in a context or within a community that is historically discursive) and the rest of my life (where many people I engage with honour other ways of knowing.)

Alignment of this sort between what people value or how they live and work in general and what they feel they need to conform to in academia was a common

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[61] I want to thank those who came before me, like Four Arrows and Maya Angelou, for helping directly and indirectly and being a conversation partner about this through your writings.

theme I heard in people's dissatisfaction with Ph.D. Ecologies and with other parts of their lives. One of the stories I routinely heard is that what is important to them/what influences their lives is often at odds with, or unwelcome in, academia. This not only impacts their satisfaction and willingness to participate in the system but also how much their well-being is enhanced as well as the extent to which they feel that academic culture serves the greater good. I anticipated alignment of this sort could be powerful for my life in general and that is the way it played out. I *felt* different after choosing that integration. It helped me evolve in my work and relationships in very positive ways.

Attending to the alignment between espoused aspirations and our practices and what we support as a community is one way to help our ecologies thrive. Though the idea of living our values was present for me early on in the inquiry, allowing for the emergence of exploring this as spiritual practice contributed to my way of being in the world (my relationships and practices) in a way that added great richness to this inquiry.

Emergence in Process and Procedure: Relationship with "Data"

Another emergent question I held and worked with in this inquiry also has to do with what gets included. It was about how and what "data" we collect in a relational, lived inquiry. In talking about relational beings (Gergen, 2009) and Inter-being (Hanh, 1998), we are recognising and highlighting the complexity and interconnectedness of our relational worlds. A linear cause and effect model was less valuable in this conversation than it may be in positivist research. I wondered then, what might a relational orientation mean for what "data" is relevant to the inquiry? Is there a kind of binding/boundary setting that is useful? Sometimes you may not

know what is relevant until it reveals itself later but at the same time it is not possible to record everything just in case. For me in this situation, I initially felt a sense of oughtness about “capturing” all the data I could. I had been trained that way over and over again which was reinforced when I would tell people about what was surfacing or coming into being in my inquiry and the most common response by far, the advice almost everyone gave, was “make sure I capture and record that” (that conversation, that idea, that observation, that aha, that remark etc.) Though that made sense based on my training, I was faced with a conundrum. This was a lived, relational inquiry. To capture all of what could be valuable or all of what was happening in the inquiry, that I saw or observed or otherwise noticed, I would be documenting much of what happened every day. At one point I tried doing that. As I progressed in the inquiry, through, not only did that feel like an unreasonable expectation in terms of time, energy and focus, but also I knew that if I kept recording as I was, I would wind up with an un-usefully exorbitant amount of data to sort through. I realised that my capturing (my journaling and blog posts that talked about what I was experiencing, observing, hearing, learning and wondering about) was, in theory a useful activity but in practice was somehow getting in the way of the work I was really looking to do and the learning that was yet to take place. It did not feel good, I had a strong sense that it was counter-productive and that it would be more generative for me and more a co-enactment of well-being to stop recording than to keep going as is or to keep going in another fashion. That included to stop blogging. I had planned to blog throughout my inquiry. I imagined the conversations that came through those blogs would play a significant role in my inquiry so stopping blogging would change my “research design.” Though the sense of “knowing” I had around the importance of this was very strong, I could not explain logically or discursively

why I felt it would be valuable to stop. I had a hard time talking about it. As Barnett Pearce once said about his experience with cancer, “It isn’t in words. I have no story for it. I can subsequently make up a story about it (as I’m doing now), but that’s not the same thing as having had the experience, and I’m very aware that any ‘telling’ of the story mis-represents it” (Pearce & Pearce, 2011, p. 41). I wondered, is focusing on “capturing data” more useful in positivist research designs than social constructionist ones?

In a different conversation, Barnett Pearce suggested “Every time we collect and analyse data, we call into being a particular pattern of communication that could have been otherwise, and if it were different, would have different effects” (Pearce, 2009, p. 7). What pattern of communication was I calling into being if I accepted the construction that I had to document everything and worked to that end? Each time I tried, it felt like a pattern of defensiveness — covering your self, being able to defend what you say — was called into being more than a pattern connected to relational generativity (Creede et al., 2012) or well-being. What pattern of communication, then, what constructions around “data” and the “capturing of it” might help call into being or co-enact well-being/better worlds?

Again, to consider changing something this significant about my inquiry (how I was recording, what vehicle I was using to be in conversation with others), took comfort with emergence, a willingness to paying attention to what was emerging whole-body-mindfully. It also took a willingness to give less priority to what I had learned and more to what seemed important even if it did not fit into the logic I had been trained in or much of the industry calls for and respects.[62] Again, I found it

[62] It took being willing to step outside of recent tradition and possibly move into older traditions. My sense of knowing whole-body-mindfully and trying to listen to and act on that may not have fit with the grammar and rhetoric of some research communities but it did fit with other traditions I was a part of or exposed to including the wisdom traditions I was a part of (my Buddhist and Āyurvedic practices.)

useful to re-ground in my touchstones and what I was trying to make with this dissertation. I decided to trust in and explore that feeling of something generative coming with stopping the blogs and the excessive recording. Fairly immediately, it did turn out to be very generative and a clear enactment of well-being. I felt a sense of opening, flow and joy that had been missing until then. My learning and the way I made sense of what I saw blossomed in ways I had been hoping for with this inquiry. That choice means that there is a lot that happened that may have made a difference in people's worlds which is not represented on the page[63] and a lot of learning that happened which might not have otherwise.

Emergence in Process and Procedure: Binding the inquiry

An additional example of the importance of emergence has to do with noticing and attending to when this inquiry felt "finished." As a lived (Marshall, 1999), practice-led (Mattis-Namgyel, 2010; Nhat Hanh, 1991) and relational inquiry (McNamee & Hosking, 2012) filled with complexity and continuously unfolding relationships and dialogic episodes (Pearce & Pearce, 2011), I did not look at this dissertation as having a pre-determined concluding point or ending with a "finished" product. There was not a single experiment I was conducting, a program I was designing or implementing or some other cues which might name it as finished. However, there were many other ways to bind or punctuate it.

After a lot of consideration in my initial planning, I decided that it might make sense to bind this particular inquiry by *time*. I set a date for punctuating the conclusion of the inquiry knowing that there would be an unending series of turns (Pearce, 2007). What happened was that some time well before that date arrived, I

[63] That said, I believe this would have been the case even if I had continued with the emphasis on capturing -- that much is not represented in any dissertation or research narrative whether we acknowledge it or not.

felt as though I had enough rich data and understandings that I could produce a very strong, valuable and useful dissertation. However, I decided to stay with the timeline I had initially decided upon, wondering if something new might emerge. This is an interesting bifurcation point in terms of emergence and trusting in knowing. On the one hand, I genuinely believed I could produce something valuable well within my initial timeline. However I also had a feeling that if I allowed myself to use the allotted time I had set for the inquiry, I might come to a place of greater transformation and insight (Zander & Zander, 2002.) That said, I had personal examples where what I produced from this kind of place was valuable for me but was sometimes not comprehensible to other people. I had to reground in what was most important and how to practice with coherent communication.

This choice took courage (or letting go of ego) because what I expected I would produce if I had stopped fit more of what we as a community have valued in doctoral work. But who knew where I would come to if I continued the inquiry? Would it be as acceptable? In addition, in deciding to continue, I was deciding to spend extra resources (money for tuition, time and other resources) on my dissertation when they could be invested in other ways. Was continuing with my inquiry and pushing beyond where I probably could stop, worth the investment of resources (and the anxiety)?

I decided to continue on. As a consequence of making that choice, I did experience great additional transformational learning and growth. That has been wonderful. Ben and Roz Zander talk about the benefits of riding the wave, one-butt playing and ”going “beyond the ‘*fock* it’” which is a story they share about going beyond where you might otherwise stop into a different kind of participation and

engagement, a place of spirited possibility (Ibid., p. 120). This is what happened when I left behind what I could have done and continued on into new areas.

So with that decision, time went on and the date I had set for punctuating the inquiry finally came. I found myself in the ironical situation that though I had previously felt finished (more than once), I no longer felt finished. I was mid-cycle in some ways. There was so much more I wanted to do with my inquiry. So, do I stay with the planned timeline, or risk what I know happens to countless students whose dissertations continue on and unfinished for years. Do I trust this emergent sense of now is not the time to stop while trusting that there will come a natural stopping point? I chose the path of continuing and, again, it was generative. For a while. Then when I actually did feel ready to stop — feeling like the ripeness in the fruit was starting to turn and ready to fall and be composted — based on where I was, there was still work I needed to do and that others were requesting I do. What then? How do I make generative choices on my dissertation — choices which will co-enact well-being — when what feels like it could be most generative is to be finished and heading in a different direction with my resources? I did continue with the dissertation and with the added steps people requested. During that time I found myself in a dramatically different life position regarding the time and resources I had available to spend on my inquiry — one where I became the primary care giver for a relative with dementia who needed 24hour/day support. Many of us go through life changes while working on our inquiries (e.g. marriages, divorce, births, illnesses, deaths, changes in jobs…) and the question of how to continue in ways that co-enact and support our well-being becomes especially important. Even without these life changes, stories about doctoral work are filled with students feeling like they are working beyond a ripeness. Many never finish (King, 2008). So looking at what we're

learning through our ecology about how to co-enact well-being *throughout* the life-cycle of our inquiries is another important topic it would be useful to attend to.

As a way of punctuating this section on “How was this dissertation made”, I would like to suggest that for inquiries conducted within a social constructionist or relational paradigm, it can be very useful to be grounded in a fundamental and on-going question of “what are we constructing (making) together?” If our world is created relationally, we have a constant opportunity to practice shaping our worlds in the many choices we make as we interact in an inquiry.

What I have offered in this section are some of my reflections on how this inquiry and dissertation was made and some of how I practiced with co-enacting well-being in and through this work. There are many other choice points I could talk about and many other ways to look at the patterns of communication and what contributed to them. This is yet another example of the “unending conversation” and the need to punctuate the end of some reflections and the inquiry with the acknowledgement that there is always something more that can be said. I will save some of those turns for another conversation and hope that this section and the turns that I have taken will lead to generative “afterlives”.

Our freedom begins with knowing our intentions, knowing what matters to us, knowing which values will guide our actions. The question, then, is what are we willing to commit to?
-Peter Block

What Are We Making Together?

In addition to how it was made, another important question is what am “I” and what are “we” doing now that contributes to the unfolding pattern? What are we making together? This is an expansive question for broad discussion as it involves

multiple interpretations. As Ken Gergen has said when talking about what it means to carry out work from a social constructionist frame, “It is important to resist the temptation of a conclusion”. (Taos Institute, n.d.)

One way to respond into this question though is that together, as we engage in relationships, we are making ourselves, our Ph.D. Ecology, and our greater ecology (Pearce, 2009.) In our Ph.D. Ecologies we can get more specific in saying that in this inquiry, we are (re)making what we consider to be appropriate and valuable practices for engaging with people and knowledge (practices for dissertations or for academic inquiry but also which we may bring into other areas of our lives.) We are (re)making precedence, hope, compassionate disruptions and supports for practicing mindfulness in each on-going opportunity so that what we make overall are better worlds. The way I have framed this here is that we are co-enacting greater well-being in, through and because of our Ph.D. Ecologies.

Another of the many possible ways to approach this question is by talking about what people have said this inquiry has made for them by way of how we have been together throughout the inquiry — making trust, making inspiration, making possibility, making practices etc. It is about helping us realise or remember that we have choices all the time and these choices contribute to something. They do make our worlds. So if we practice noticing our choice points, being intentional about making better worlds and choosing turns we think might do that, we are more likely to create better worlds in and through our Ph.D. Ecologies. For some people this helped them think specifically about our Ph.D. Ecologies and their roles and practices in it. For others it helped them in other parts of their lives and in other ecologies. Some said this inquiry helped them unlock inspiration for how to approach writing that next book, another talked about an insight into constructing a

relationship with a father so that it could be more compassionate, yet another talked about the inquiry contributing to changes in food consumption and what we put on our bodies in order to cultivate well-being. Each example is different and I am humbled and excited to say that there have been many.

Another way to approach this question is to talk about my experiences with this inquiry. As I mentioned before, this is sometimes challenging as some of the most profound learnings can't be concisely and clearly said in words. I can, however, offer that the *vivencia* of this inquiry has, as I have noted, become part of my spiritual practice — living into well-being in ways that have the potential to help me live into each day in relationally generative ways. Thich Nhat Hanh reminds us that when we wake up we have all these hours ahead of us to live. And what a precious gift! We have the capacity to live in a way that will — with each step we take, each breath — bring peace, joy, and happiness to ourselves and others (Nhat Hanh, 1991). This is a *practice;* and that means it is something to commit to over and over. In supporting my practice, this inquiry has served as a kind of bell of mindfulness (Plum Village, n.d.) to help me pause, become more aware and get back on track when I have drifted from my practice and become less mindful. And I do drift.

It has also helped me in a way I would never have anticipated; it has helped bring me back in touch with my earlier visions regarding well-being. This impacts me in many ways including how I feel each day and how I engage in the world. It has been profound. This inquiry has also helped me work through and dispense with the embarrassment that for years I felt when people associated me with Academia – most of the people I know have not associated the world of Academia with "better social worlds". Doing this inquiry has helped me stand tall in all of the petals (my communities) that make up my daisy, and to notice which petals I am ready to have

fall away and which ones I want to nurture or cultivate (Pearce, 2012). It has helped me become intimate with CMM and to use it in ways that tap into new creative practices. And through this inquiry I have had insights or openings, moments of awareness that, though ineffable, are very profound and contribute to my ways of going on in relationship. Participating in this has helped my development as a person. It has contributed to shaping how I think about and approach interactions and relationships in ways I believe will help me go on to do good work in the world in wiser or more resourced ways.

When I use “I” and “it” in these ways, it is with recognition that I, and this inquiry, are not separate from those around me and in recognition that what we make, we make in relationship. What has been made — and continues to be — we have made together. It is a co-creation. So another way to attend to the question of what has been made or we are making together is to turn to you and your experiences thus far. I am genuinely interested in including your voices in this conversation. I will offer these questions as a starting point for that conversation. I would really like to know:

- How would you describe your experience with this dissertation?
- Have you experienced something similar or noticed a similar response to the one(s) you had here even if the prior context was quite different?
- What might the topics “what we’re making together, how we’re making it, and how we can create better worlds” mean for you and your practices? For your team or institution?
- What unexpected openings are you seeing as a result of reading this dissertation? What excites you?

- What's emerging or taking shape that you are interested in and want further conversation around?
- What or who would you like to invite into this conversation and what might that invitation look like?
- How would *you* describe or story what we're making here together?
- And what would you *like* to be making together?

The question of what we have made is a broad, relationally dynamic one and one that keeps expanding with time (What have we made now? How about now? How about now?) What we are making has evolved over the course of this inquiry and will continue to evolve as we take further turns and bring this inquiry into different engagements. As I said, I see this coda as more of a comma than a full stop and much of what is being made or has been made is yet to unfold. The next section — How Can We Make Better Worlds? — speaks a bit into that unfolding.

To be at home in the universe is to know the universe as well as we can,
to know our place in the universe as well as we can,
and to be, as fully as we can, what we are –
the seventh miracle;
the makers of better social worlds through
the coordinated enactment of compassion, empathy and mindfulness.
And that's why we should mindfully attend to and promote
our personal and social evolution.
- Barnett Pearce

How Can We Make Better Worlds?

One way I think about this question as it pertains to my dissertation is to ask: In what ways is this inquiry contributing to an understanding of our Ph.D. Ecology, or how we make our worlds, that enables us to co-enact well-being more frequently in, through and because of our Ph.D. Ecologies? What openings exist and what is possible now that these conversational turns have occurred? What now? What is to

be done collectively? These are important questions. I have already spoken into some of them including awareness that we have choices and the choices that we make will make something. That includes choices we have as a community. What we construct together in community (Gergen, 2009) makes our ecology. So how has this inquiry contributed to an understanding of what we can collectively do as a community to make an ecology of well-being?

If I were to suggest one entry point or one place to begin to collectively and systemically evolve Ph.D. Ecologies, it would be attending to and being mindful of the relational practices we are engaged in around evaluation and assessment. Many of us live in cultures where formal assessment and evaluation are common and there is a great deal of conversation in the fields of education, organizational development, human resources, community development and public innovation about how to do it or what we make through those practices[64].

There were two strong patterns that emerged in this inquiry around this theme. One is that what researchers and scholars think will be acceptable regarding the assessment or evaluation of their work drives the majority of decisions that they make around their research. This is not necessarily problematic in itself. However, in considering overall approach, orientation, research paradigm, methodology, ways of engaging, forms of (re)presenting, where, how and what to publish and other choices, people said they prioritized what they felt would be amenable to examiners (what would help them get their degree, get published and in some cases what

[64] Some of the people I think may be interesting to be in conversation with about this include Relational Construction scholar-practitioners, Action Researchers, Developmental Evaluators, educators, organizational/community development leaders, Buddhist scholars, Indigenous scholars and other authors. An interesting and very un-comprehensive list of names of people to look into include Sheila McNamee and Dian Marie Hosking, Peter Reason, Judi Marshall, John Heron, Bob Dick, Daniel Selner, Michael Quinn Patton, Sir Ken Robinson, Margaret Wheatley, Brenda Zimmerman, Frances Westley, Elizabeth Mattis-Namgyel, Gil Fronsdale, Four Arrows (Don Trent Jacobs) and Shawn Wilson.

would help bring esteem or other credentials beyond the degree) *over* what they felt was most suitable, valuable, beneficial or useful for the specific situation they were working in, the integrity of the inquiry, the people involved and their own learning goals. People indicated their highest level of context (Pearce, 2007) (Pearce, 2012) was often positive assessment rather than learning, personal or community development, or making better worlds. I did not hear stories that the examiners are wise elders and trusting in their knowledge leading to great generativity. I also didn't hear stories that evaluation and assessment can provide valuable guidance that helps them act with phronesis. What I did hear was a dissatisfaction and reduced benefits and learning for the inquirer and other relevant parties, including participants.

The other strong pattern that Ph.D. students discussed is that the way evaluation and assessment occurs often shifts from loving their inquiries, feeling like they are learning and contributing a lot and that they are doing good work, to experiences of deep dissatisfaction, frustration and discouragement with the system. At that point, people often started replacing phrases like "I loved it" with "it was a soul-depleting experience." Adult learners and scholar-practitioners often felt like they were no longer full people with rich, valuable experiences and perspectives but someone being crushed into a system of conformity.

Again, not everyone finds the culture or practices of evaluation and assessment in Ph.D. Ecologies to be problematic. However, I realised a very strong theme throughout the inquiry where evaluation and assessment practices and culture were *the* primary factors that perpetuates unhealthy experiences in Ph.D. Ecologies. Part of what makes it so important is how precedent or what has happened in the past drives new evaluations or what happens in the future. If the

past was not satisfactory (or did not contribute to well-being), what are we creating if we repeat that cycle again and again? A common story told was that people with doctorates who have had terrible experiences with their evaluations (ones where they may have been “bullied” even) go on to evaluate other students and replicate those bullying patterns of communication — putting new students through what they went through (almost like initiation or rites of passage). People often gave the advice that you never want a recent graduate on your committee or review panel because they are the hardest and least generative reviewers -- that they have been so recently through painful experiences themselves and also have something to prove to others and that both of these are manifested by being overly critical of other people’s work.

Some questions I began exploring, and would love to see us continue to explore together are: What are we making in the ways we assess and evaluate work? If we evaluate based on what we have found desirable in the past, how do we invite and nurture innovations? Working from ecological, complex or relationally constructionist orientations or understanding of the world, we often need to work with openness, patience, and a willingness to set aside preconceived ideas about “final outcomes” or how things “ought to be.” If, as the pattern in people’s stories suggests, our current assumptions about assessment and evaluation are not supporting that, what might? People’s stories indicate that we may be perpetuating ideas of bounded beings and Self, of reification and permanence. If we are inquiring in relationally responsible ways where we respond into the moment with mindfulness and presence, where notions of Self give way to relational beings, where we respect what arises whole body-mindfully and in community, what might that look like and

how might we engage in meaning-full conversations about what evolved and how we can learn from it?

In my undertaking of this inquiry, I realised that discourse about how things “ought” to be done (and how that connected to assessment and evaluation) could have a strong gravitational force on choices I was making. In some cases that could be useful and in other cases there could have been more generative options. What I hoped to do was devise a system to support me in reflecting on each choice point, discerning choices that helped forward the inquiry and acting with increased phronesis — acting in ways that helped co-enact well-being rather than acting out of fear of rejection or out of a feeling of needing to “prove” and “defend” something. My Touchstones became part of that system.

We make or co-create our worlds in each (relational) turn we take. Some turns are especially significant; they are critical moments with important bifurcation points where making a particular choice may lead to something profoundly different than another choice. What surfaced in my inquiry could be storied as our culture and practices around assessment and evaluation being significant contributors to the prevailing narrative of our Ph.D. Ecologies and a place that offers significant bifurcating choices with regards to what we make in the future. Assessment of doctoral level work is often linked to upholding traditions or maintaining and reinforcing patterns of communication already in existence. If people are making decisions towards the assessment/evaluation and that is often based on senses or assumptions about ways we have done things needing to be upheld, it leaves little room for evolving or expanding how things are or can be done. However, creating and nurturing additional, expanded stories about what is possible in Ph.D. Ecologies can open opportunities for creating new, more generative communication patterns —

patterns that positively contribute to our co-enactment of well-being in and through our Ph.D. Ecologies.

In addition to looking at what the culture of assessment can help support in making choices throughout our inquiries, it may also be valuable to look at what we think of as knowledge (John Heron 1996, 2001; Four Arrows 2008), and the results or impact of doctoral inquiries and how we attend to those in our inquires[65]. The practice of "presenting or delivering results" is often part of our rhetoric — what we consider to be good, bad, dismissible or attention worthy research. It is often tied to determining the significance of the work and the researcher's level of "expertise" or "authority." In terms of opportunities to look at what kind of communication patterns we are habituating ourselves to, what these are making and how we can make better social worlds, this "results" dimension — and how we punctuate when those results happen (whether what we did made a difference) of assessment and evaluation is one place we can attend to.

In my own inquiry, I came to places where my constructions and orientation to this inquiry were mis-aligned with stories about our dominant community's constructions of what is "good" doctoral research. I asked questions such as: How can I talk about impact in ways which are useful for conversation and still acknowledge that so much of the impact I will not know or is yet to unfold? How can I take turns that do not suggest judgement about the number of people who say they have been impacted (quantitative) or what they say has been impactful (qualitative) and whether this is a "significant enough impact?" How do I take turns which do not sound wishy washy or "unsuccessful" if I do not claim cause-effect types of impact or

[65] Impact from wherever and however it was we decided to punctuate "results" knowing that more is unseen and may yet unfold.

sound arrogant and relationally unsophisticated if I do? What turns would be useful for continuing conversation and inquiry?

Other areas for exploration in “making better Ph.D. Ecologies” are vocabulary and writing styles, (re)presentation of the inquiry, and the orientation towards knowledge and learning. I heard many stories that researchers are often expected to (re)present results in a generalizable way, one that takes a linear causal orientation where relationships (variables) are seen as something controlled for in ways that are intended to make them not relevant for the study, thus increasing the reliability and authority of the research. There is often a privileging of immediate or short-term changes observed and interpreted by a single person; that one person is asked to notice or determine (from their expert point of view) what has happened (in a finite way), or been discovered and what they attribute that to. They may be living in and working with a multitude of stories and contexts which are continually unfolding and evolving (Pearce, 2006; Pearce, 2009; Wilson, 2009), but are asked to create or choose a single story to present that often assumes a single (sometimes arbitrary) punctuation. Though many people write about areas for further study, they also indicated that they feel that what they studied needs to in some ways have *conclusions*. From the social constructionist and CMMish orientation I approach inquiry from, all of our inquires are complex. They have expansive, complex, dynamic relational horizons. There is much we know about the results or impact of our work but also much we do not know. There is much we have seen or heard and also much that we have not seen or heard about the impacts of our work (the intended and unintended consequences.) And all of this can be interpreted in various

ways.[66] Attending to one story, one set of results or a fixed punctuation where we expect to have already seen results are common communication patterns which have served people well in certain ways and circumstances. It is also a communication pattern that has been problematic for others.[67] It is another site to attend to as we evolve our Ph.D.. Ecologies.

While there are other entry points we can focus on as a community in terms of evolving our Ph.D. Ecology, I have been asked to recommend one major take away from this inquiry that can guide our next steps as a community. I am offering an invitation to attend to evaluation and assessment. As I previously stated, it is a prominent theme that keeps showing up over and over in my research as being a large driver of people's choices for how they engage in and with their inquiries. It is also a large contributor to stories of unsatisfying and unhealthy Ph.D. Ecologies and a desire for them to evolve.

Another note on how this dissertation may contribute to an understanding of our social worlds that enables us to make better ones has to do with the relational connectedness of this inquiry. It is not only about who participated in this inquiry directly, not only about our Ph.D. Ecologies and is not only research or practice. It is, as I said in the beginning, one turn in a multi-turned conversation that began well before me and will continue well after me. People are participating from many different entry points, geographies and orientations. In framing the conversational

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[66] CMM's LUUUUTT and Daisy models may help frame this expansiveness and the context of knowing and not knowing.

[67] There are many extended conversations (published and unpublished) which attend to the topic of (re)presentation and the impact our paradigms have on people not considered a part of the dominant group or who hold and live into other paradigms, orientations and ways of engaging with the world. A few published examples include books written or edited by Freire (1970), M. Fonow and J. Cook (1991), S. Harding (1991), R. Chambers (1997), A. Chaudhary (1997), D. Selener (1997), L.T. Smith (1999), C. Truman, D. Mertens and B. Humphries (2000), W. Easterly (2006), D. T. Jacobs (Four Arrows) (2008), and Shawn Wilson (2008).

threads in this inquiry as incomplete or “to be continued” I hope to create a feeling that there is not one answer to any question and that the conversations are continually unfolding, with many conversations yet to be had. That said, I hope what I have included in this dissertation helps support other people in their inquiries, practices and ways of being and going on together in our Ph.D. Ecologies and the greater Ecologies of which we are a part. I hope that something here inspires people, sparks a curiosity and perhaps influences their practices and development, their ways of approaching relationships and change. It certainly has for me.

Many people have asked me to summarize what tools, techniques or practise have helped me in this inquiry so that they may be able to take these with them into their work. One that I would highlight is the triplicate of CMM questions: What are we making, how are we making it and how can we make better social worlds. Another was looking towards people and resources I trust and want to live into and then creating the touchstone list that I could keep using to help remind me of my intentions and be mindful of the choices I was making. Some people have said the lists of questions I have throughout the dissertation were valuable enough that they wanted to use those. Certainly my Buddhist practice in mindfulness has been invaluable. As well as keeping in mind that new constructions are possible: we make our world choice by choice, day by day in relationship. If we change our choices, we change our worlds. Relationships include being around people who we find inspiring — who help support our relational generativity. If people do not have that kind of community, I would recommend developing it — even structuring it in some way like a community of practice. I hope this is useful. What do you think? What choices or practices do you bring that you would like to add?

Pausing for Punctuation

An important theme in this inquiry is about mindfulness of our social worlds — what we are making through our relational processes. It is through these processes that we create the worlds we live in. New worlds are possible so if we want to make "better ones", attention to our practices, what we are making and how, is critical. We have an opportunity for Ph.D. Ecologies to make a considerable positive difference in our worlds not just through what we research but also how we go on together. Everything we do can be a part of the practice of making better worlds.

I entered into this inquiry because I care deeply about our Ecology. Everything I offer here I offer with respect, compassion and an excitement about our future steps together. There are parts of this story that were spilling onto the page and parts that were hard for me to tell. I did that telling as a way of living into my commitment to relationship, including respecting the people who participated in the inquiry. I look forward to additional turns including ones where we explore some of the questions I have raised here as well as some of the ones yet to be asked! I also look forward to on-going opportunities to practice and apply what we learn in additional contexts.

As I (at least for now) punctuate this turn in the inquiry, I want to again extend my thanks to all of the people who have participated in its creation. You are too numerous to name and I feel honoured, excited and humbled to be making meaning/ making worlds with you! I invite you to take the next turn.

As we speak together now,
so do we give shape to the future world.
- Ken Gergen

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