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Travels with a turtle: metaphors and the making of a professional identity

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This paper illustrates how metaphor can provide a vital link between the private and often idiosyncratic world of 'felt-reality' and the propositional world of theories and constructs in which most academic and professional discourses are conducted. Drawing on Schön's concept of reflection as 'seeing-as' and Heron's model of 'ways of knowing', it suggests that the exploration and articulation of an individual's use of metaphor is an important element in the process of demystifying the passage of 'intuitive' knowledge into professional practice. The author demonstrates how part of her professional identity has been constructed through reflective writing but questions whether work of this kind has any place in the current outcomes-driven climate of research assessment in academia.

Talking turtle

> … our argument is not simply that the artistic imagination could play a larger role in professional learning, but that it *should* do so. (Winter *et al.*, 1999, p. 2; original emphasis)

On top of my computer is a tiny hand-carved piece of jade in the shape of a turtle, bought in a First Nations craft shop in Vancouver. It is a tangible reminder of an enjoyable adult education conference I attended in 2000. It also speaks to me of the importance of myths and imagery in professional learning and related research—and of the need to assert this in the current outcomes-driven environment of universities. This is especially so in the UK where the spectre of the next Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) currently looms darkly over the choices academics need to make about what they write for potential publication. I will return to the RAE in conclusion as I think it has serious implications for papers such as this one.

At the heart of this paper are some personal reflections on the evolution of my own professional identity, including my orientation to both reflective practice and research. Its purpose is to illustrate how the creative impulses of the 'artistic imagination' (Winter *et al.*, 1999), in the particular form of metaphor, can provide a vital and

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much-neglected link between the personal and often idiosyncratic world of 'felt-reality' and the 'propositional' world (Heron, 1996) of theories and concepts in which most academic and professional discourses are located. Before I say more about that, however, let us linger with the turtle for a moment because, not only is this creature integral to the story I want to tell here, it is also inextricably linked to ideas about creation and creativity.

For example, many First Nations/Native American legends describe how the Earth was created on the back of a giant turtle (North America is still sometimes referred to as 'Turtle Island'); similarly, in the myths of ancient India, the world's creator took on the form of a turtle in order to hold up the land; in Japanese legend, *Horai,* the sacred mountain home of immortal beings, was carried on the back of a tortoise[1]; and Chinese folklore suggests that the patterns in tortoise shells are instructions for irrigation and agriculture from the creator of the world.

The title of the present paper derives from an anecdote I was once told about the influential psychologist, William James, and his encounter with an elderly client who, despite considerable scientific evidence to the contrary, firmly believed that the Earth really does rest on the back of a giant turtle. Respectful of his client's reality, James gently asked what held up the turtle. His client replied that it stood on the back of another turtle and, in response to his enquiry about what held *that* up, she witheringly retorted, 'Why surely you know, Professor, it's turtles, turtles, turtles *all the way down*!'.

According to the popular Internet encyclopaedia, *Wikipedia*,[2] this anecdote has become something of an urban myth: several versions now exist in which the 'expert' in the encounter is variously identified as, amongst others, Bertrand Russell (a suggestion made in *A brief history of time* by Stephen Hawking who situates the encounter in an astronomy lecture; Hawking, 1996), Carl Sagan or Thomas Huxley; William James was named in what seems to have been the first published account of the anecdote in 1967. In 1973, Clifford Geertz included a version in his influential *The interpretation of cultures* in which, with a nod towards ancient Indian mythology, the expert and what is usually 'a little old lady' are replaced by two gentlemen from England and India respectively.

A tale of two views

As *Wikipedia* points out, Hawking employs the tale of the turtles as one of two accounts of the nature of the universe, claiming that it is patently absurd but noting that his own theoretical account *could,* in the light of future evidence, eventually prove to be just as ridiculous; Geertz employs it as a metaphor to illustrate the impossibility of ever reaching the limits of our understanding and imagination. Thus, while Hawking dismisses the myth as unscientific and untrue, Geertz finds a creative wisdom in it that is associated with different ways of 'storying' the world both to express personal felt-reality and to encompass important cultural images and values. In very simplistic terms, these two approaches to the 'turtles all the way down' anecdote are characteristic of the apparent differences between 'positivist'

and 'interpretive' research traditions—and between traditions of teaching and learning in professional contexts, not least in relation to reflective practice.

The discourses of reflective practice have significantly shaped professional practices in a number of fields over the past twenty years, including education. However, as Ecclestone (1996, p. 159) argued a decade ago, the learning in which educators themselves engage, as well as that which they attempt to facilitate for others, seems in constant danger of being circumscribed by the positivist tendencies of 'the extensive, externally defined, increasingly detailed specifications and their attendant mind-numbing procedures' that continue to dominate much current thinking about education and how it can be 'measured'. Thus, although 'reflective practice' embodies a wealth of meaning and a wide range of different practices, as a form of professional development it is often approached from a technicist perspective.

This tends to emphasize the documentation of professional improvement rather than personal insight; it embodies a notion of how to get from A to B—a process of 'doing' rather than of 'being' which is characteristic of the way in which education, and educational research, has increasingly been commodified in pursuit of improved standards and greater professional accountability. Whilst not wishing to argue against the desirability of these objectives in theory, what concerns me is that, in practice, they may ignore what Bradbeer refers to as:

> … the teacher [or other professional] *as a consciousness rather than an informed intellect*—the teacher *as a person consciously and deeply within the myths and narratives of his or her own world* both as a person and a worker … [who] attends to … the intangible fabric of his or her own experience of life. (Bradbeer, 1998, pp. 47–48, my emphasis)

This paper is woven out of a particular strand of the 'intangible fabric' of my professional life and is the result of a recent personal experience which caused me to reflect upon the 'myths and narratives' that have shaped my consciousness over more than a decade: 'riding a turtle' as a metaphor for the processes of personal meaning-making has been a recurring theme.

The paper is itself partly in narrative story-form because, as Didion (1979, p. 11) notes, 'We live … by the imposition of a narrative line upon disparate images, by the "ideas" with which we have learned to freeze the shifting phantasmagoria which is our actual experience'. It is also heavily influenced by Schön's (1983) concept of reflection as 'seeing-as' (a phrase borrowed from Wittgenstein to denote the simultaneous process of seeing and thinking). In Schön's words, this 'suggests a direction of inquiry into processes which tend otherwise to be mystified and dismissed with the terms "intuition" or "creativity"'—and, therefore, to be ignored by the technicists (1983, p. 187).

For myself, as well as in facilitating reflective practice for others, I have found that the exploration and articulation of one's use of metaphor is an important element in the process of demystifying the passage of personal 'intuitive' knowledge into professional practice.[3] In my experience, metaphor is a vehicle uniquely well-designed to negotiate and make sense of the creative space between what is personal and what becomes public.

I realized a long time ago that I grasp ideas better as pictures and shapes rather than as words or sounds so I usually try, literally, to 'give shape' to theories and debates. This happens in my head as I think, read or listen to discussions but sometimes I 'doodle' an image onto paper.[4] Figure 1 is a sketch from a notebook in which I first played with the metaphor/vehicle/creative space idea and may help to illustrate both how I envisage it and, alongside Figure 4, how it relates to Heron's (1996) model of ways of knowing.

Freezing the phantasmagoria

Scene-setting

John Heron's work has had a significant influence on my understanding of, and approach to, learning teaching and research but, in the interests of 'freezing the shifting

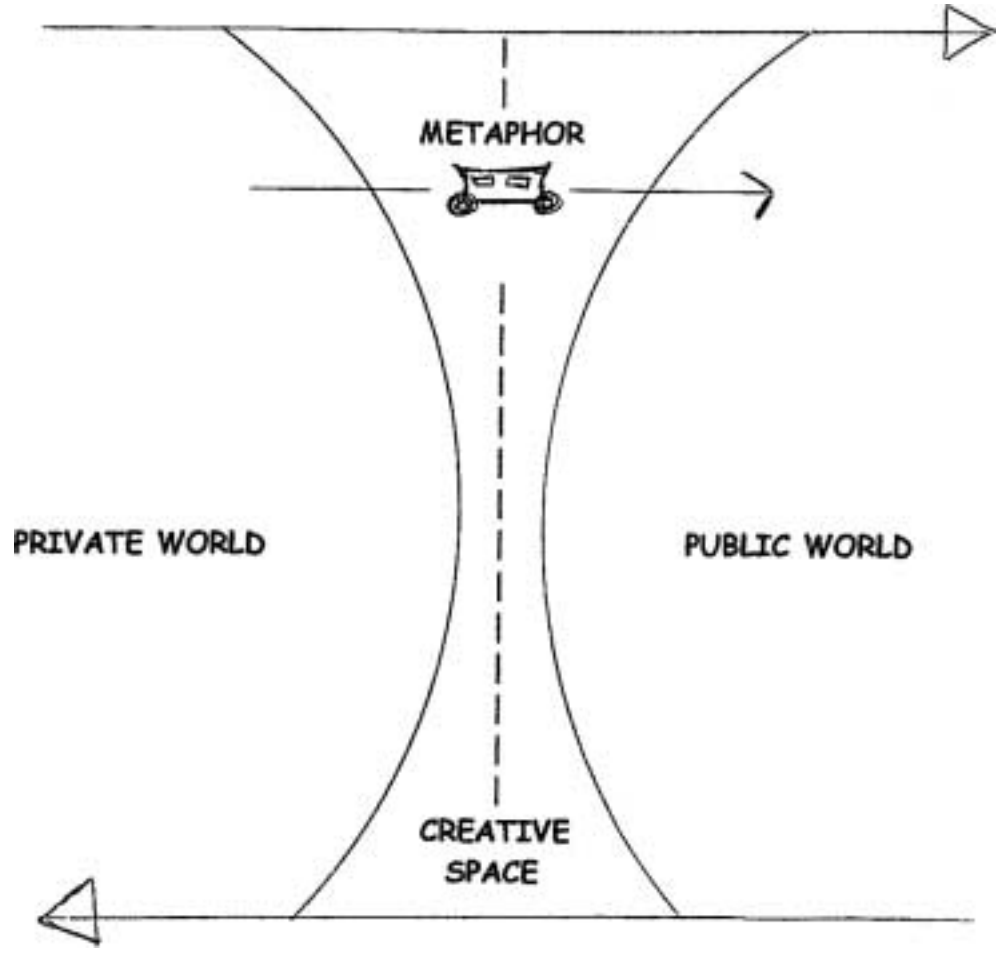

Figure 1. Metaphor as a vehicle operating in the creative space between private and public worlds

phantasmagoria' of the experiences and images that I want to relate here, I shall begin my story with an account of the experience that brought them all together.

I recently moved to a different part of the UK and a new job. I had anticipated the trips to charity shops and the hire of a large skip in order to dispose of things that would no longer be needed; and I had realized that our old arrangements of furniture and fabrics would have to be reconfigured to suit the layout of our new home. What took me rather more by surprise was the way in which reviewing and deciding what to do with the contents of numerous old folders at work brought into sharp focus how my priorities, interests and concerns have shifted over the years; and how, in retrospect, preoccupations that once seemed unconnected both assume a new coherence and shed some light on how I have constructed a significant aspect of my professional identity.

There is nothing remarkable in this, of course: to some extent our lives are constantly 're-storied' in the light of new events and, as Van Manen (1991, p. 369) notes, the stories we tell ourselves and others are 'a form of everyday theorizing'. The theorizing inherent in this story centres on the way in which reflection on a particular manifestation of my professional identity—as defined through presentations at a series of annual conferences—raises questions about different ways of knowing, the extent to which these have a legitimate existence within the theorizing that characterizes academia, and whether a concern with them is misplaced in the present outcomes-driven environment of many universities. It has been prompted by my re-reading of papers that I presented at the annual conferences of the Standing Conference on University Teaching and Research in the Education of Adults (SCUTREA) every year between 1993 and 1999.

SCUTREA[5] was established in the 1970s with membership initially drawn from academics working in departments of adult education in British universities. It now has a much broader international constituency but continues to act as a focal point for research in adult education in the UK, both inside and outside the university sector. The annual conferences are designed on adult learning principles (which include positive regard and constructive criticism) and I have always looked upon them as a 'safe' environment in which to test ideas.

I presented my first academic paper at the 1993 conference, having not long been appointed to a full time post in a university adult education department. I had already worked in the department on a non-contractual but expanding part time basis during the previous 10 years when childcare had been my first priority. By 1999, changing political imperatives had resulted in a drastic restructuring and downsizing of the department and my own enforced transfer to the 'mainstream' education department of the same university, necessitating a change in the focus of my work.

Emptying filing cabinets before I finally left the institution caused me to gather my old SCUTREA papers together for the first time as a set, including the preliminary notes and doodles that had gone into their preparation. Seeing them all together made me realize that, though ostensibly about quite different topics, they actually represent way-markers on an ontological journey. In essence, this story is about that journey although its primary focus is on the vehicle—the use of metaphor—that continues to facilitate my travels.

It may be helpful if I contextualize the metaphors I have just used. The physical way-markers that came to mind as I wrote the last paragraph are large upright stones, about waist-high and situated at irregular intervals along the coastal path across the south of England. The name of, and distance to, the nearest town or village is carved into them above an arrow pointing in the appropriate direction. If one does not have a map they provide reassurance about one's location, particularly where nothing can be seen beyond the nearest hedgerow. Sometimes, usually at a point where the path curves over a headland affording panoramic views of the surrounding countryside and sea, there is a more sophisticated marker. These look like high stone tables with a metal plaque on top. Etched into the plaque is a sketch of what can be seen from that point, with an indication of how far it is to various significant features. Occasionally, the direction and distance is also given to mainland Europe or the US, though the existence of these places has to be taken on trust since they lie beyond the immediate horizon.

I have written some papers for conferences and journals at times when, metaphorically speaking, the hedgerows seemed very close; when I was struggling, without an adequate map, to make sense of the territory in which I stood, and where I should go next. Because I have generally adopted a reflective approach, though, the act of writing has often become a way-marker in itself, highlighting a position hitherto unarticulated or pointing in a new direction. However, the existence of one plaque-stone in particular has been especially useful in clarifying and enabling me to name various features and pathways on my personal/professional landscape. To be precise, it is a combination of two things: the work of Wellington and Austin (1996) on orientations to reflective practice, and Heron's (1996) 'pyramid of fourfold knowing'. I shall return to this point later because, long before I encountered that particular way-marker, I was playing with the turtles.

I mentioned the 'turtles all the way down' anecdote in my very first SCUTREA paper in 1993 in order to introduce a discussion about worldviews and their implications for meaning-making and professional practice. I contrasted two worldviews: one shaped by Newton's mechanistic and reductionist imagery of a 'clockwork universe'; the other, newly-emerging, holistic, and given impetus by Lovelock's (1979) *Gaia hypothesis* (*Gaia* is the name of the ancient Earth goddess). I noted that, though western society was dominated by Newtonian imagery, I had become captivated by that of *Gaia*. Its acknowledgement of the fundamental interconnectedness of all things resonated with my then practice in community education where the removal of barriers and the quality of relationships were paramount.

Moreover, it seemed that the Gaian worldview was beginning to pose a challenge to the Newtonian, machine-like, practices of western society. Adding another layer of imagery (derived from Toffler's 1980 notion of the industrial age as the 'Second Wave' of human evolution), I likened what I called the western 'society machine' to a vast wave in the ocean which has reached its peak and begun to disintegrate. I suggested that the new Gaian ideas represented the emergence of a new wave which might ultimately give rise to a society shaped by different values and principles—provided they could pull clear of the massive undertow of 'machine-think'. I

envisaged this 'undertow' creating a turbulent patch of muddy water as the reductionist ideas embedded in many of the outcomes-driven requirements of central Governments furiously try to reassert a fading power and prevent the emergence of a different way of thinking and being.

Acknowledging the influence of these worldviews on the way I understood and conducted my own professional practice, I concluded my 1993 paper with the statement: 'I may be alone in this ocean on the back of my turtle—but the "reality" encapsulated by the new wave looks attractive'. (Figure 2 is the sketch I did on an overhead transparency at the conference to illustrate the imagery used in the paper.)

Over a decade later, I am not sure whether I should admit to still hanging on to this same turtle! However, the imagery of the two competing waves/worldviews does continue to help me to make sense of the many contradictions in values and practices that I see everywhere, and to make choices about what I prioritize within, and how I go about, my own practice. I think there is a difference, though, in that nowadays I move with more confidence and a better understanding of my 'turtle'—of my own processes of meaning-making.[6] I now recognize that much of this understanding has been derived from discussions following the presentation of SCUTREA conference papers, and a growing sense of intra- and inter-personal connection associated with them. In order to explain that statement, I need to comment on the content of the papers.

Recollecting

Three papers focused specifically on reflective practice (see Hunt, 2001a). The first, in 1994, was written with colleagues with whom I was beginning to develop reflective practice as a major component of a masters degree. We entitled the paper 'Dance of

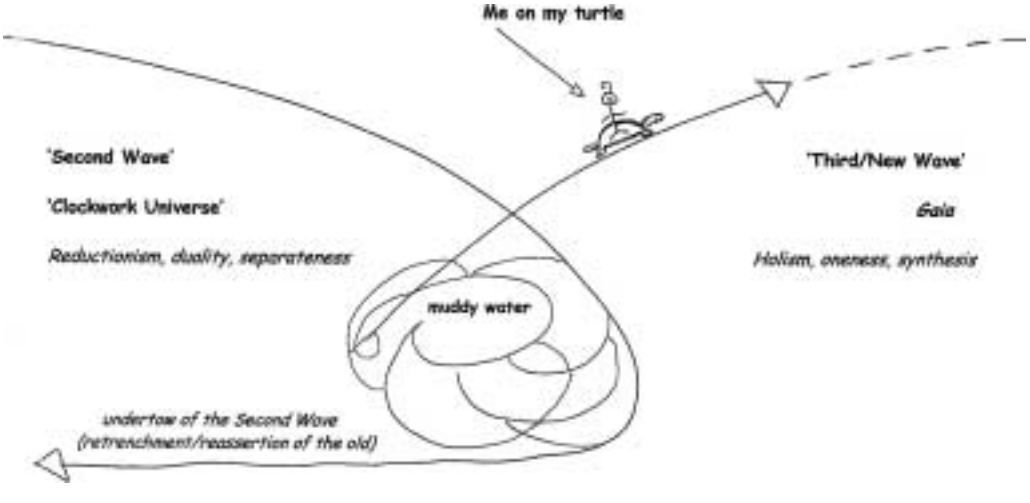

Figure 2. How I place myself in relation to two competing worldviews

the tumbleweed' after an image that had emerged in our discussions. The tumbleweed represented the jumbled strands of ideas/experiences that surrounded and shaped us as we each rolled along our respective professional/life paths. The 'dance' occurred in our coming together for meetings when we would deliberately untangle and look at the implications of some of these strands for our shared professional practice. In the process we might change positions, entwine our respective thought-patterns and sometimes collectively create new ones—before eventually moving off, often in previously unanticipated directions and with new ideas as a result of our encounter.

In 1996, I revisited the same theme, noting that, in order to facilitate reflective practice for others, it seemed essential to engage in it oneself and to be very open with students about the nature of one's work with them, including its limitations. The paper was 'inspired' by the Lerner and Loewe musical *Paint your wagon*. At one point in this the leading female character sings 'What's going on? What's in the air? What's going on here? What's going on?': it seemed to epitomize my struggles both to 'do' and to facilitate reflective practice at that time (see Hunt, 1998a).

I drew two sketches to accompany my presentation of the conference paper (see Figures 3(a) and 3(b)). 3(b) is an attempt to illustrate reflective practice as a temporary resting-place on a journey where one's accompanying 'wagonload' of ideas/experiences can be temporarily removed, checked and reordered (or, to continue with the analogy, 'repainted' in patterns which make sense to oneself and can be made clearly visible to others); a place where one can look back along the road already traveled and at possible ways forward, and exchange stories with fellow travelers. I located this resting-place on a bridge at a crossroads. The image I had in mind was Oakeshott's (1975) 'platform of conditional understanding', a place of both consolidation and preparation. Sadly, the time to congregate at such resting places and share travelers' tales with colleagues seems increasingly to be eroded by other institutionally-determined priorities.

My concern in 1997 was about the advisability or otherwise of allowing reflective practice to lead into the 'shadowed territories of the mind', the places where inadequately-formed 'sensings', images, memories and associations lie hidden.

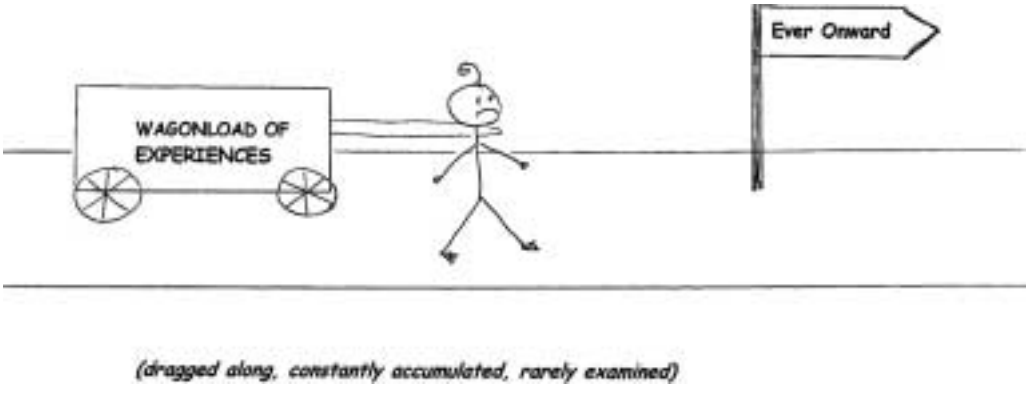

Figure 3(a). 'Ordinary' work practices

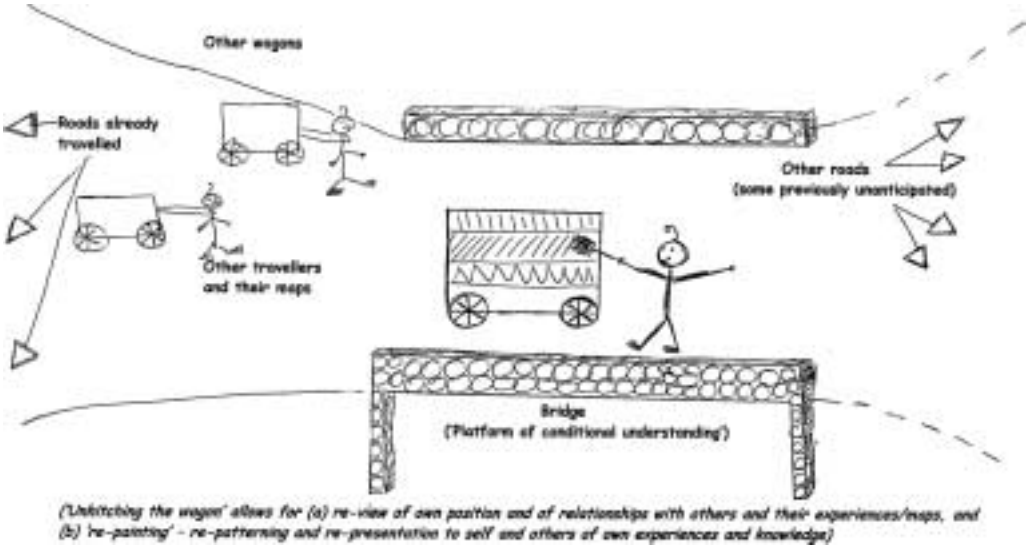

Figure 3(b). Reflective practice: a 'bridge of conditional understanding'

Other papers had a different focus. In 1995, I wrote about my attempts to come to terms with 'crossing the divide' between community and higher education and what that meant for my sense of self. I noted:

> … my journey from community education to academe [has] taken me through a looking glass into another world where priorities are different. [Here] the written word tends to be more highly valued than the activity it describes and I have not found that entirely comfortable. [Nevertheless,] there appears to be a possibility of encapsulating the practices and processes of education in the community within a broader, theoretical context, and of reflecting this back into the 'real' world in a form which has the potential both to celebrate and to change practice. (Hunt, 1995, p. 80)

In my 1998 and 1999 papers, I began to explore the concept of spirituality. First in terms of personal understanding and then as a framework for community education theory.

Connecting

Reflecting on this small set of conference papers has created another 'platform of conditional understanding'. Looking from it back along the road labeled 'SCUTREA Conferences', connections have become visible that I did not recognize as I pursued, at different conferences, the apparently separate themes of reflective practice, community education and spirituality. For example, I now recognize that, with the exception of the 1999 paper, the imagery of traveling was always present. (It is perhaps significant that, in 1999, I completed a Ph.D. thesis that had been a very long and difficult time in gestation and the paper I presented that year did contain some sense of 'journey's end'; see Hunt, 2001b) Also present, in all the papers, was the

notion of interconnectedness—amongst tutors and between tutors and students; across educational sectors and between different working practices; between private psychological processes and professional practices; and between what is considered 'material' and 'spiritual'.

In 1999, I made brief reference again to the Machine/*Gaia* worldviews that had underpinned my first paper, linking them to Skolimowski's (1994, p. xv) influential work on 'the participatory mind' which argues for a new philosophy 'for our times' that 'must help us to understand the universe in a new way and help us to live in it. It must address itself to the total person, his [sic] quests for understanding, for meaning, for consolation'.

Central to Skolimowski's (1994, pp. 75–90) work is a model of expanding consciousness: he calls it a 'spiral of understanding'. I was about to write that my return in the SCUTREA conference paper series to worldview imagery, after a gap of several years during which I had explored a number of different themes, would appear to have brought me full circle back to my starting point. However, Skolimowski's spiral notion is better since it implies not merely a return to an earlier position but the possibility of reviewing that position from another, 'higher', place which affords a broader perspective.

Indeed, Mary Catherine Bateson (1994) refers specifically to the concept of 'spiral learning' which is particularly relevant to the reviewing of earlier, apparently separate, interests that I have engaged in here. Bateson suggests that when attention is narrowly focused it can hamper our ability to make meaningful connections between different experiences and ideas. However, through the exercise of 'peripheral vision' we may take in aspects of experiences that are ambiguous or not immediately applicable but which, when revisited in the light of later events, can provide a hitherto unrecognized coherence in the patterning of our lives.

Karpiak (1992, p. 53) uses the metaphor of a ladder to express a similar idea: 'From each rung the individual gains a broader view of self and the world. The earlier views are still there, but now they are reinterpreted and transformed into a more inclusive view'. Significantly, in transpersonal psychology, as Karpiak goes on to note, it is accepted that personal development may encompass a view, an understanding, not just of the physical, cognitive and affective dimensions of the individual self but of an identity 'extending beyond the skin boundary' to include 'unconscious, collective and spiritual dimensions' (p. 54).

This transpersonal perspective is assumed in the works to which I referred earlier as my 'plaque-stone': the way-marker which has helped me to take a panoramic view of, and to identify various features and pathways within, my personal/professional landscape—and how this informs my understanding not simply of where I am but of who I am, at least in terms of a significant aspect of my professional identity.

Finding a way-marker

I have written elsewhere about my reaction on first reading Wellington and Austin's (1996) work on 'orientations to reflective practice': 'It is not often I feel the urge to

cheer when I am in the library, but I wanted to give three for this' (Hunt, 1998b, p. 335). This reaction was occasioned by arriving at a descriptor at the end of a 'critical pathway' devised by Wellington and Austin which suddenly put into perspective a number of issues that I had struggled with, and to write about, over a long time.

The critical pathway poses questions about one's view of education (should it be 'domesticating or liberating?') and whether one is 'systems- or people-oriented?'. My answers (the second of the choices given in each question) led me to a position where my 'orientation' to reflection on my professional practice is described as 'Transpersonal':

> [This] centres on universal personal liberation. … practitioners resist the imposed constraints of authorized organizational structures [but] … accept working with them. They tend to be inner-directed and to focus on self-development and the relationship of internal to external. They question educational ends, content and means from a personal, inner perspective. Their pedagogy is typically individualized and holistic. … They contemplate questions such as: 'how can I integrate my personal/spiritual growth with my vocation? What is my personal responsibility to myself and others?' Depth psychology and spiritual teachings underpin the theoretical and research literature associated with [this] orientation. (Wellington & Austin, 1996, p. 311)

In describing my response to reading this, I used similar imagery to that which introduces the present paper:

> I feel like a lost traveller suddenly encountering a large arrow which says 'You Are Here'! I also feel an unexpected sense of security that my 'way of being', sustained as it is by spiritual teachings and endeavours, is actually recognisable, acceptable to, and shared by, others. (Hunt, 1998b, p. 335)

Incredibly, a number of the things I had struggled with not only fitted together but had a name—and a place on someone else's map! Traversing various rocky roads, I had attempted to articulate ideas about spirituality and its relationship with 'community', and had gradually developed a reflective, inner-directed writing style and approach to pedagogy. However, until I arrived at this particular way-marker, it had all seemed fairly fragmented and largely peripheral to a professional world increasingly dominated by the reductionist, outcomes-driven rationality to which I have already referred. Essentially, it was lacking in both intra- and inter-personal connectivity.

Although I had been encouraged by the interest shown in it by colleagues at SCUTREA conferences, I had hitherto regarded much of my writing as fairly idiosyncratic; important for my own personal development and understanding but not necessarily of much interest or use to anyone else. However, I suddenly had living proof of Brookfield's (1995, p. 36) argument that 'Theory can help us "name" our practice by illuminating the general elements of what we think are idiosyncratic experiences'. Courtesy of Wellington and Austin's theory, I could now identify myself professionally as having a 'transpersonal orientation'. I could lift much of what I think and do out of the idiosyncratic and into the general: it placed me alongside, and provided vital *inter*-connection with, others who think and do similar things.

As is evident, my writing is heavily and consciously dependent upon metaphor: it is often the only means by which I feel able to bring my personal 'felt-reality' into the

shared, public world of language and discourse. Heron's (1996) work has helped both to make me aware of the significance of this transition and to appreciate Schön's notion of 'seeing-as'. Thus, Heron's 'pyramid of fourfold knowing' constitutes the second aspect of the panoramic way-marker from which I have been able to review and better understand my own practice, including the *intra*-personal connections between my different ways of knowing, as I shall now explain.

Ways of knowing

Heron postulates four kinds of knowledge: 'Experiential', 'Presentational', 'Propositional' and 'Practical'. He depicts their relationship as a pyramid within which 'Experiential' knowledge is the base, 'Practical' the apex. Practical knowledge is knowing related to doing; propositional knowledge operates at the level of language/concepts; presentational knowing encompasses art, music and imagery of various kinds; experiential knowing is that in which something is sensed but not yet grasped. In Heron's (1996, p. 165) terms:

> Experiential knowledge and unrestricted perceiving is the ground of fourfold knowing, intentional action is the consummation of it, with presentational and propositional knowing mediating between them. Each kind of knowing both emerges from its ground and has its own relatively autonomous form.

Heron's model also includes a 'dimension' which he calls 'a delicious void … an infinitude within' (p. 188). It is the locus of creation from which everything we understand of the world derives, including ourselves as created beings. In essence, Heron's 'void' and Skolimowski's 'participatory mind', with its promise of the creation of a new world order, would seem to be descriptions of the same thing.

I first encountered these ideas when I was exploring a possible relationship between the concepts of 'community' and 'spirituality' in the final stages of writing my Ph.D. thesis. I was struggling with the problem that 'community' is a notoriously slippery concept, not least because there is an elusive, abstract quality to the *experience* of community that is difficult to describe other than as a sense of deep interconnectedness within and beyond the limits of the immediate group.[7] This was not the easiest thing to articulate within the confines of a thesis. Much of what I felt, and wanted to write about, seemed to lie beyond the realm of words and outside the arena of the intellectual and often adversarial approach that characterizes most academic debate (Hunt, 2001b).

However, it was as I tried to explore the interface between community as a theoretical construct and as an dimension of my own felt-reality that Heron's model turned into a way-marker. I realized that it helped me to name, and to illustrate the relationships between, various features on the inner landscape of thoughts, images and feelings that inform my professional practice but which, like the individual SCUTREA papers under review here, had hitherto appeared unconnected and/or lacking in particular significance. Figure 4 is an attempt to map some of these relationships; the final part of this section puts key elements of the map into words.

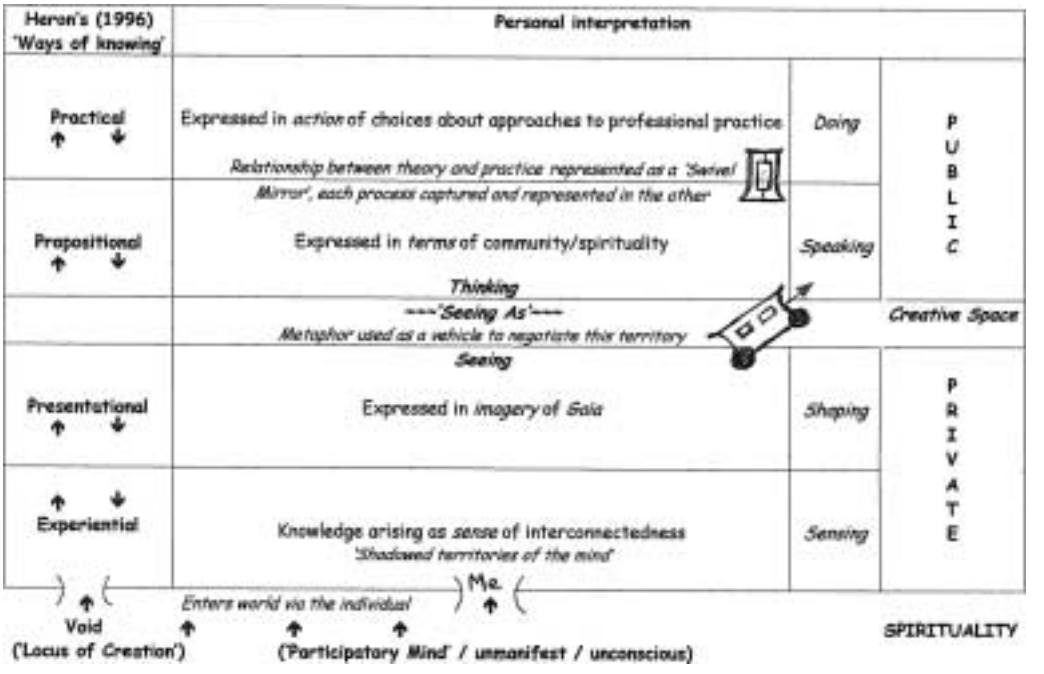

Figure 4. Heron's (1996) 'ways of knowing' applied to a personal process of sense-making

Most of my students are also professional educators. What I now often describe as a 'pivotal' part of my practice is to provide encouragement to them to identify and articulate the 'theories-in-use' within their own practice by reviewing these in the light of the 'espoused theories' (Schön, 1983) embodied in established academic texts, and *vice versa*. This idea was clearly implicit in my 1995 SCUTREA paper when I tried to allay my concerns about crossing the community/higher education divide with the possibility of 'encapsulating the practices and processes of education in the community within a broader, theoretical context, and of reflecting this back into the "real" world in a form which has the potential both to celebrate and to change practice'. At that time, I had in mind a metaphorical swivel-mirror positioned between academia and the everyday practices of educators in local communities. Using Heron's model I would now place that mirror on the boundary between propositional and practical knowledge.

Similarly, I can now situate my earlier interest in *Gaia* as a form of presentational knowing. It was—is—an image that allows me to encapsulate my wordless experiential knowing about the presence of the 'delicious void' and all that it implies about interconnectedness/spirituality—and to mediate between it and the academic arena of propositional knowing.

The subsequent 'wave' imagery that I developed of competing worldviews (*'Gaia' v.* 'the clockwork universe/society machine') has since become a familiar feature of the 'creative space' between my 'private' and 'public' worlds and continues to help

me to make choices about what I want to prioritize within my professional practice. In Wellington and Austin's terms, which I quoted earlier, I may not always be able to 'resist the imposed constraints of authorized organizational structures' but that does not mean that I do not 'question educational ends, content and means from a personal, inner perspective'. *Most* of the time (some days present more difficulties than others!) I believe, as Skolimowski suggests, that we participate in a world of our own choosing by first envisioning it and then making choices which literally help to 'real-ize' the vision.

I now also believe that this constitutes a crucial element of 'seeing-as' and of the 'artistic imagination': envisioning something that belongs to an essentially wordless domain whilst simultaneously expressing it in words and/or actions. It is why I suggested earlier in this paper that reflection which involves the exploration and articulation of an individual's use of metaphor is an important element in the process of demystifying the passage of personal 'felt' or 'intuitive' knowledge into professional practice.

Engaging in the processes of reflective practice has certainly given me what might be termed an 'embodied recognition' (i.e., directly experienced and not simply acknowledged intellectually) of the importance of metaphors/visual images and the 'sensings' from which they emerge. For better or worse, my professional identity has now self-evidently been shaped by my attempts to make these processes public.

So what?

I set out to illustrate how, by reviewing papers that I had presented at a series of annual conferences, it was possible both to find coherence in what had seemed to be a fairly disparate collection of ideas and to shed some light on how, without consciously deciding to do it in this way, I have constructed a significant aspect of my professional identity. Having left the job in which most of that construction took place, I am now faced with the kind of decision I had to make about my other belongings when I moved: should I put this particular element of my identity into a metaphorical skip and leave it behind?; should I retain it but try to reconfigure it to suit better the 'layout' of my new professional home?; or try to hold onto, and maybe even strengthen it in what seem to be increasingly hostile circumstances?

These are not rhetorical questions. As I wrote the first draft of this paper (January 2005), local financial issues within my institution were being compounded by the pressures of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) in such a way that the justification for writing a paper like this was rendered highly questionable. The RAE is the mechanism through which Government funding for research is allocated to British universities. Currently, the next assessment is due to take place in 2008 when the quality of up to four publications (published between 2001–2007) from each individual academic involved in the exercise will be classified on a star rating from 1 (*low*) to 4 (*high*). A significantly greater percentage of funding is expected to be allocated to departments where the majority of publications receive a high rating. My discipline, education, will be assessed alongside psychology and sports science.

In January 2005, the final detailed guidelines for assessment had not yet been published but there was speculation and much concern that, within such a sub-grouping, large-scale empirical studies might be taken as the norm by which 'high' quality can/should be judged—and that small-scale qualitative studies could receive a lower rating. It seemed to be anybody's guess how a paper like this one might be rated—or whether it should be entered for assessment at all. To compound the issue, my institution was undergoing a major restructuring exercise involving a significant number of job losses: individuals' current and potential research profiles were a key feature in 'recommendations' that were being made about the advisability or otherwise of applying for voluntary severance. In that context, a colleague helpfully suggested that it might be advisable to move 'up' from the immediacy of trying to connect with direct experience in my writing to a kind of second order analysis of the validity and legitimacy of this kind of writing—and to present it in propositional terms in a 'journal that people automatically associate with 4* work'.

A year later, as I make the final revisions to this paper, that particular institutional crisis has passed and guidelines have recently been published by the RAE Panels.[8] The Education Panel has clearly stated that it 'welcomes the submission of all forms of research output and will treat them equally'. The question of whether one is publishing in the 'right place' is therefore averted but the question of whether one is writing the 'right thing' remains. Within my own department, a preliminary 'dummy-run' for the RAE indicates that a paper like this—in which reflection is presented as a form of research—is unlikely to be 'rated' as highly as one drawing more heavily on theory and/or a more conventional empirical study. In terms of developing my academic career and standing, therefore, the message is clear: it would be better for me to engage in other forms of writing and research.

However, this seems to me to be a message saturated in 'Second Wave' thinking: it focuses on outputs, prioritizes a world 'out there' over the processes of articulating personal ways of knowing—and thus affords the development of the 'artistic imagination' low status in a hierarchy of what is 'good' within/for the academy. It is bad news for turtles—for engaging directly with one's processes of meaning-making and making this public. Indirectly, I think this is also bad news for courses within the academy purporting to support professional learning, especially in education: it provides no incentive to publish reflective writing or to draw on the artistic imagination in ways which might serve as alternative models to more conventional academic papers for students who are writing assignments and theses.

Still afloat on a Gaian wave on the back of my turtle, I am reluctant to heed the message. I want, instead, to heed the voice of the turtle that speaks to me of the importance of admitting myths and imagery into professional learning and related research. In the context of professional learning, I think 'reflection-as-research' can be justified in terms of Carr's (1995, p. 118) claims for an educational science that reveals to practitioners 'the unquestioned beliefs and unstated assumptions in terms of which their practice [is] sustained'. And, in the context of what is justifiable as 'proper' research, I concur with Atkinson's view that research does not simply lie in:

> … what I did or what I found, or even how I interpreted what I found, but in the shifting and transforming knowledge engendered by the process of critical thought and writing. At the point of writing, it is the critical dialogue with myself and within myself which drives my knowledge forward. And it is in the act of making that dialogue explicit that, in Stenhouse's sense of 'systematic inquiry made public' … this reflective process has become research. (Atkinson, 2000, p. 160)

Earlier in this paper I used an image of way-markers that can show directions to places whose existence one has to take on trust because they lie beyond the immediate horizon. Perhaps those of us who currently seem to be riding turtles beyond the immediate horizon of those seeking to reconfigure the map of what is acceptable as 'good' educational research and practice should simply take comfort from the fact that the map is *not* the territory; indeed, their map may not even be *of* our territory. We need to continue to trust in, and define for ourselves, the territory that sustains, and has a tested legitimacy within, our own practice and research. If we bring the turtles of our individual meaning-making together, they may yet go all the way down.

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Notes

1. As I understand the distinction, tortoises are land-based turtles.
2. www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/turtles_all_the_way_down (accessed 3 February 2006). *The Independent* (13 February 2006, pp. 12–13) notes that Wikipedia contains 'some 3.3 million entries … is available in more than 100 languages, and thousands of new entries are added everyday … [it] is one of the biggest experiments in the web's democracy, communality and usefulness'. However, 'there has been controversy over its reliability'.
3. See Morgan (1997) on the nature of metaphor and its practical application in organisational contexts. Hunt (1998a, 2001a) discusses metaphor in the facilitation of reflective practice.
4. During my writing of this paper a colleague has drawn my attention to one by Orland (2000) on the use of line-drawing as a tool for both research and reflection. It cites Weber and Mitchell's (1996, pp. 110–111) reference to visual images as 'compelling sources of data that can express that which is not easily put into words: the ineffable, the elusive, the not yet-thought-through, the subconscious' and (echoing much of my own thinking here about the way in which metaphor can facilitate the expression of a personal 'felt-reality' within the public domain) as 'repositories of meaning as well as *mediators of meaning between the social and the personal*' (Orland, 2000, p. 199, my emphasis).
5. See www.scutrea.ac.uk. Hunt (2004, pp. 1–6) summarises changes which have taken place in the nature of university adult education departments and, correspondingly, in SCUTREA.
6. Hunt (2006) sets the worldview imagery in the context of *mythopoesis* and *mythogenesis*.
7. M. Scott Peck (1990) explores a felt-reality of being 'in community' in his classic text, *The different drum*. It resonates closely with much of my own experience.
8. www.RAE.ac.uk.

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