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University College Cork, Ireland

Pedagogy of the Interior: Awakening Beauty through Encounter

Thesis presented by

Anne Marie Moylan

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School of Education

Head of School: Prof. Nicola Ingram

Supervisors: Prof. Kathy Hall, Dr. Domnall Fleming

2023

PEDAGOGY OF
THE INTERIOR:
AWAKENING
BEAUTY THROUGH
ENCOUNTER

An abstract graphic consisting of several parallel diagonal lines in a light blue-grey color, extending from the bottom left towards the top right of the page.

Anne Marie Moylan

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Abstract

Leadership sustainability and professional development is the focus of this qualitative constructivist research. Reform of the leadership role is proposed through the new pedagogy of the interior, devised to effect intrinsic transformation and leadership actualisation. It is crucial that school leaders re-imagine an untenable role that has been expanding exponentially for decades in terms of task, responsibility, and complexity.

The pedagogy awakens the beauty of a new way of thinking, being and learning, achieved through encounter from the inside-out and bottom-up personal and interpersonal layers of the school community. The research evaluates the progression and beneficence of an embodied pedagogy of the interior and interrogates the psychological barriers of perfectionism and hegemony that restrict growth and change.

The scholarly personal narrative methodology (Nash, 2011) comprises a cathartic journey of subjective reflexivity, meaning-making, and renewal.

It is a befitting and rigorous methodology for encounter with theory, research, and leadership experience. It affords scope for the supplementary epistemologies of self-study and action research employed to deepen learning. It employs reflexive thematic analysis and crystallisation techniques of analysis through the media of arts. It accounts for the roots and trajectory of an embodied pedagogy of the interior, an essential complementary component of the Irish Primary Principal's Network (2022) sustainable leadership project.

Research finds i) how existing knowledge, experience and skillsets for restorative practice and nonviolent communication (Rosenberg, 2015) form the bedrock for systemic habitual encountering, ii) how philosophy of encounter and disruption creates aptitude for complexity, iii) how psychoeducation and self-understanding demystifies unconscious beliefs and practices that hinder the awakening of beauty.

In conclusion, the research reveals the pedagogy of the interior to be transformative and emancipatory. It cultivates a skillset for critical thinking and dialogue and illuminates the source of power. It reinstates inner peace, outer harmony, autonomy, and agency. It deserves a

prominent place in professional development. I attest that the personification of the leadership dilemma is an academic gap and a portal to the reconfiguration of professional identity.

Key words: pedagogy of the interior, school leadership, sustainability, scholarly personal narrative, professional identity, restorative practice, perfectionism, hegemony, power, professional development.

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I wish to thank my school community for the cooperation, collaboration, and trust in my endeavours. I appreciate the learning afforded through dialogue with pupils and staff. Together, they have deepened my understanding of my role as school leader. I am equally indebted to Margot and members of the board of management for years of ongoing support. Furthermore, I am very thankful for the authentic contributions of my principal colleagues.

I am and will be forever grateful to my incredible children for their unwavering love, limitless patience and interest in my evolving

learning. They continue to inspire me every day. I have been further blessed by the help of my sisters, my nieces and my friends. Their holistic, intellectual and emotional support will not be forgotten.

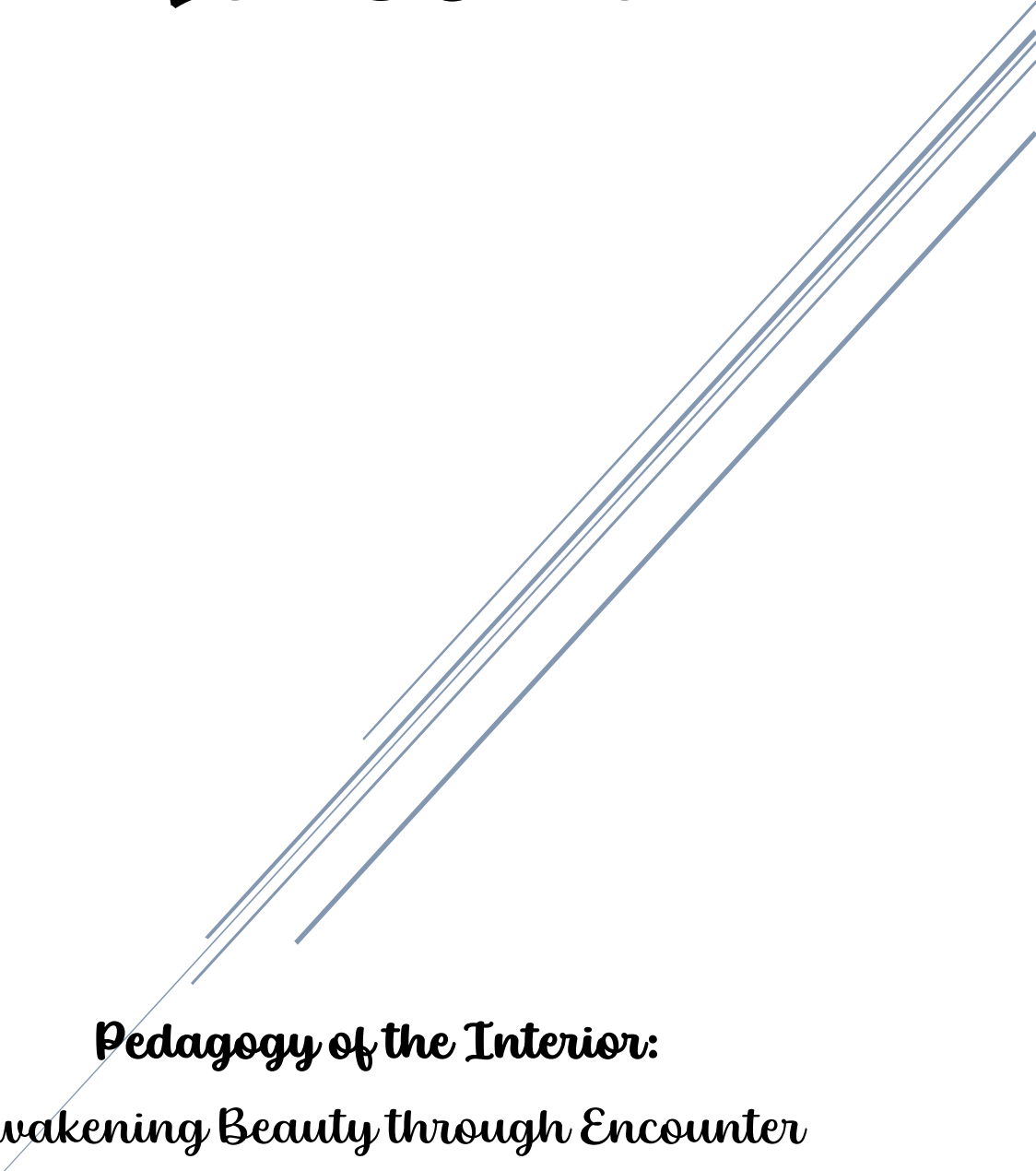
I wish to dedicate my thesis to my sister Mary, my phoenix rising, who soared to shine like a hundred thousand suns just before the final edits. As champion of my writing for as long as I can remember, her faith in my tenacity and determination to deliver this piece has sustained my every breath and every step along the way.

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CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION



Pedagogy of the Interior:
Awakening Beauty through Encounter

1.1 Prelude

Encounter with the terrible beauty of COVID schooling comprises the backdrop to my awakening. Although Covid does not pertain to the context of the current school leadership crisis in Ireland, it nevertheless exemplifies overwhelm of excessive duty and responsibility, depletion of resilience and self-protection, and a dearth of critical consciousness in an era of constant change. I now set the scene metaphorically to create a sense of the professional dilemma which is at the heart of this research.

The story opens onto a scene of an abandoned silent earth onto which a lone leader appears. The burn out, scarcely visible behind a habitual mask of calm composure, is evident in her hyper vigilance. Intermittent sniper 'bulletins' land without warning into her new reality of vanished people. Armed with 'trial and error' technology, surprisingly effective thanks to her creative adjustments, she battles complexity and rescues her pupils and staff, carefully positioning them within a phantom new terrain. Injuries are sustained in the resistance she encounters, as familiar collides with unfamiliar. Consoling, restoring and empowering, she re-establishes

connections and tunes in the online school, a lighthouse in the tumble weed. She is witness to fallen comrades, whose respite and needed support go unaccounted for. Leadership of the innovative schooling of the time was not easily distributed. Delivery of efficiency and standards of excellence, against the circumstantial odds, were fuelled on cortisone and 'deadline'. Levels of depletion were high.

The school leader splutters to a halt like many leaders do on the day of holidays where, upon locking up their emptied schools, they begin the slow slide down the wall into which they have driven at full force. Few are witness to these recurring private moments as there were to witness or tangibly support leaders post COVID. Little or no respite or recovery has been afforded in its aftermath as is the case at all other peaks overwhelm, of which there are many. The light at the end of the tunnel always seems to morph into the light of another train. It is this which led me, and others, to the door of premature resignation.

Our noble leader sits and rests a while. In the ensuing pause to ponder, an unanticipated conscious encounter with vista, role and purpose begins to unfold. COVID, part of the immediate reality, is

not significant to the ensuing awakening. Instead, it is the pause that it affords that is pertinent. This becomes the catalyst for a new pathway and the birth of the pedagogy of the interior, which I have devised, developed, and established through the learning afforded in this research.

1.2 Research Objectives

- To outline the generative trajectory of the Pedagogy of the Interior as it evolved from an inside-out and bottom-up subjective interrogation of leadership and life experience, scholarship and 'I-Thou' (Buber, 1996) encounter.
- To explore barriers to transformation and emancipation posed by an outdated perspectives and uncontested practice.
- To initiate new and varied ways of thinking, being and learning in the educational field.

1.3 Research Context

Decades of wilful blindness to the urgent and overdue task of clarification and definition of the role and duties of the Primary School principal, coupled with perpetually accumulating and ever-accelerating demands and responsibilities, have made school

leadership an untenable role. Early retirement, premature resignation, and an outsider negative view of the role have led to a recruitment crisis. It is evident that heartening progress is underway in the proposals contained within 'The Sustainable Leadership Project', undertaken by The Irish Primary Principal Network (IPPN, 2022) and in the model of leadership education, mentoring and coaching afforded by The Centre for School Leadership. However, in the meantime, the struggle and bar of expectation is relentless and unresolved in the current climate of personnel shortage and internalised pressure. Leaders are exceeding human limitations. There is negligible ethical accountability for impact on their wellbeing. Opportunities for renewal and restoration are scarce and we have become overwhelmed and depleted by habitual compliancy that takes utterly no account of capacity.

School leaders, as the gatekeepers and boundary spanners between the internal school community, its immediate context and wider policy environment are continuously positioned on the threshold of change—a lonely borderland of turbulence that requires considerable navigational nous accompanied by instant decision-making. (Sugrue, 2015, p.24)

As a school leader, I have grappled between the poles of dictates and obsequiousness for over a decade, running unquestioningly between the 'powers that be' and the 'powerless'. Time for pause, ponder and wonder about the senselessness of this approach and the reconfiguration of leadership identity is well overdue. This is the purpose of the research. The dire need for the pedagogy of the interior, a new way of being and the identified gap, is illuminated against the contextual layers comprising the backdrop of the dilemma of leadership.

1.4 Research Field

My research seeks to contribute to leadership sustainability and professional development in the field of Education, specifically within the Primary School leadership context. It aims to complement the progression of school-led continuous professional learning and reflection so that we can prepare for the flexibility and autonomy incorporated in the New Primary Curriculum Framework (Department of Education, 2023)

The research is also cognisant of the overarching universal context to our educational one. Contemporary life is saturated with content. We risk becoming seduced with information and unconsciously

indoctrinated by the endless feed through our phones and devices. It is a world of multiple-choice realities and constant comparison. Our sense of self is under perpetual bombardment. I aver we are unknowingly inducing cumulative self-trauma to identity by our mindless assent to 'It-world' (Buber, 1996), discussed in more detail in chapter three. Our education systems and personal life activities unconsciously feed into this distortion with allegiance to efficient accessibility, uncontested knowledge, and the pressures of productivity and perfectionism. When we consider that identity is the culmination of on-going experience, and the values and beliefs that we bring to it, unfolding and evolving within the dialectic of internal and external forces, then it never too soon and almost always too late to pause and grapple in the rubble of all the interference to locate core purpose and identity.

1.5 Research Themes

1.5.1 Leadership Identity

I contend that leadership identity is concealed in the confusion of opposing external and internal forces. External forces comprise the unnegotiated tension that exists between traditional and progressive notions of leadership alongside unrealistic performative

expectations of the role. Internal forces speak to a disposition of compliancy, conformity, and reactive attentiveness to the relentless and urgent. In an uncontested growing penalty culture that induces fear and shame, and that coexists with hegemonic tendencies that blind, bind and blame, we have lost sight of core purpose. The elastic band of human limitation is over-stretched. Leaders must prioritise and continuously ground their evolving sense of self within community.

Identity is an elusive construct, often fully or partially hidden for many reasons that will be unpacked in chapter five, like the sun in a sky awash with clouds. Our perspective of 'fixed star' is a misnomer in the first place, for stars orbit in slow motion. The illusion of constancy in a universe of flux is one of the paradoxes of the human predicament, a lens that propels resistance and much discontent. People spend their lives grappling with the scourge of change, experiencing surprise and discombobulation at its manifestation. The sun, viewed as a singularity, is a guiding light and a predictable essence. However, if we broaden the horizon, we see how the sun interacts in relationship with a collective of elements, it's positionality and relativity to other elements are paramount in

perpetually changing cycles of life and growth. In its singular sense, it is significant as a guiding star whilst, at the same time, it is crucially part of a constellation of movement and unpredictability. Whilst the position of the sun essentially changes to a far lesser degree in the fluctuating swirl, nevertheless it does change.

Identity comprises a collection of experience, beliefs and values that grounds us within the complex and the change. Yet, it constantly evolves in a process of eternal encounter. It is both separate to and part of the flux of living systems. True encounter is in itself a two-fold process. Encounter is i) an inward reflexive self-learning intertwined in a process with ii) outward reciprocal relational encounter. Both conjoined aspects of the interplay of intrinsic and extrinsic realities are essential for evolvment of identity so that we can negotiate life on life's terms, not as the constant we would have it be.

I refer to it as a process of identity and identification, a perpetual cycle of grounding within self and within community that is ever evolving. I contend that, regardless of context, role or system, this process should always comprise of vulnerable self-reveal and self-compassion, alongside a reverence in approach to other. There is

real intrinsic connection and personal growth in reciprocal give and take. I attest it aligns purpose, empowers and imbues passion. In this sense, as we awaken to identity and identification, we become conscious agents of our living systems. Buber's (1996) concept of 'living-centre' is aligned with the concept of a semi-fixed star. The 'living-centre' enacts reciprocal 'I-Thou' encounter with members of community and also facilitates systems where 'I-Thou' encounter thrives within community, thus allowing identity to unfold.

The research explores the concept of evolving identity, and thus it follows the personal trajectory of my own unfolding identity as Primary School principal. It spans a decade of perfection-fuelled conformity that eventually led to burn out and a desire to leave the profession, until I paused and surrendered to the work of the interior. Fallibility was present at the beginning, middle and end. The fear of fallibility, my masking of it and the near defeat experience, were replaced by joy in the creative collective of encountering and the homecoming to self that the research entailed.

1.5.2 Humble and Fallible Leadership

An important component of the research is disposition to fallibility and to change as it both unearths and generates complexity. I

propose that we learn to see complexity as a blessing, not a curse, through the establishment of a culture of curiosity, innovation, and experimentation, in so far as it is interrogated within safe protocols. Safety was established in this research when participants were encouraged to perceive fallibility from the vantage point of fallow ground and a space where error and uncertainty provided opportunity for growth. In this way, complexity becomes a cycle of re-visioning and reintegration that allows leaders to become agents of change and facilitators of risk.

The research demonstrates how a previous quest for certitude and perfection becomes superseded by a new style of leadership that embraces humility and fallibility. Perhaps this is the birthplace of a truth, which is transient, evolving, and as long lasting as the best current collaborative analysis to hand at the time. The pathway of awakening necessitates adoption of a disposition of curiosity and compassionate inquiry.

In this research, I advocate for professional practice and growth that flows along with the current of complexity and flux, one that places intrinsic empowerment, passion, and shared purpose as priority. I subscribe to diverse perspectives, a negotiation of barriers and a

flexible brave growth mind-set. I believe that reconciliation of individual and collective identity is shaped by subjective interpretation and the reciprocal exchange of alternate realities.

1.5.3 Awakening Beauty through Encounter

I propose that we may learn to awaken inner beauty through conscious encounter with beauty, as it is defined by O' Donohue (2003). He contests that beauty comprises everything and anything which provokes and stirs the soul, instigates pause and presence, and the reciprocity of authentic encounter. Beauty, as a disruptor is embraced in the research to instigate a new skillset that initiates a pause to habitual ways of being and change in the manner to which we encounter. Beauty arises in many shapes and guises and is fully explored in chapter three as the cornerstone of my pedagogy of the interior. Ontologically, I believe that our ever-evolving self is beauty, necessarily imperfect, fallible and vulnerable to allow for the ongoing process of awakening and reawakening through encounter with life, complexity, and change. Epistemologically, I believe that personal growth occurs through encounter with self and other, that it is relational and participatory.

Encounter is a resource I bring to bear, both as a theme of itself, and as a conduit of themes, a skillset, a mindset, and a way of being, professionally and personally. Ontologically, it epitomizes the interchange and refinement of values, ideals and practice. This research tracks the evolution of the pedagogy through the enactment of applied 'I-Thou' (Buber, 1996) encounter, fully outlined in chapter three, and evaluates its intrinsic and extrinsic value. Thorough understanding of 'I-Thou' encounter is necessary alongside consistent and conscious practice of its components. The pedagogy aims to awaken and transform leadership through encounter that is not confined to verbal encounter, which only accounts for 7% of communication (Mehrabian, 1967). Culture, values, belief systems and approach all co-contribute to the quality of encounter. It is evident in the timbre of daily exchange. It is apparent in our body language at a meeting. It is conveyed in the way we respond to the unexpected and complex.

Awakening through encounter and beauty is a portal to the inside and to emancipation from the indoctrination and exploitation of the outside world. It grounds us in the language of soul and the full embodied fused intellect of the senses, head, heart, and gut.

1.6 Overview of Methodology

Research of the interior domain belongs in the interpretative paradigm and demands a subjective generative methodology. The scholarly personal narrative (SPN), an unconventional and non-traditional model of research devised by Nash (2011), provides the scope needed. Its name suggests its nature. It analyses the unfolding narrative arc of the application of the proposed pedagogy through the intersecting lenses of personal experience and scholarship. It places value on the expertise and authenticity of the experience. I argue for space to be carved out within the academic field for the SPN methodology amongst more traditional research. It personifies research and statistics (IPPN, 2022) discussed in chapter four. It complements the prominence accorded to voice, minority groups, wellbeing, and agency, by providing the channel for authentic restorative advocacy, critical consciousness, and encounter. I aver that the blend of traditional and non-traditional research methodologies can deepen learning and co-exist in harmony.

I am cast in the leading role of the SPN. Thus, the main body of data presented comprises the events and people that have culminated

the examination of personal beliefs and values. Supporting actors arise from the body of people in my professional and personal life. These include family members, colleague principals, teachers, pupils, educational stakeholders, scholars, and artists who have all influenced the trajectory of the pedagogy of the interior. All actors have afforded me opportunity for growth in my encounter of highs and lows of experience and my accounting for the dissonance, contradiction and awakening on the pathway of identity and identification.

The narrative, as a relational entity, is not wholly predetermined. As such, many actors have joined the cast organically and generatively along the open-ended way in my aim to unlock transformative potential. Multi-modal methods are employed to interrogate the modern-day malaise of alienated identity, induced by the siege of extrinsic and internalised suggestion and expectation. The SPN enacts re-visioning and re-integration with its broad scope for subjective inquiry and hybrid methods. It incorporates action research which I employ as an embodied philosophy of co-generative learning and a reflective emancipatory approach to leading and learning. This was undertaken in my own school with

colleague pupils and staff members and integrated purposefully for validity and extra layers of criticality. A subjective exploration of leadership necessitates inclusion of other perspectives. As such, encounter with school participants will be given prominence to demonstrate how leadership identity involves fluid communal negotiation.

Complexity, as it manifests personally and upon which I will expound in chapter six, shows itself to be a fortuitous disruptor and catalyst for cyclical deconstruction and reconstruction of vision and identity. In the final phases of my research, I expanded my learning and strengthened validity with a self-study conducted through the free Employee Assistance Service (EAS), provided by the Department of Education and Skills (DES). The service allows for access to six sessions of confidential counselling to all school staff, yearly. My aim was two-fold. Firstly, I wanted to trial the available support and secondly, I saw it as an opportunity to retrospectively interrogate the roots of the intrinsic barriers to transformation and emancipation that contributed to my own experience of burn-out, described in chapter five. Self-encounter of this nature provided opportunity for enlightenment, psychoeducation, and renewal of

identity. Furthermore, the new self-understanding proved to be a valuable contribution to supported self-encounter, meaning making and change.

The SPN methodology complements the nature of this research. It is conducted through the lens of personal experience, critical encounter with others and relevant literature. It is a subjective honest reveal of the arc of personal transformation, a private story made public with intent to resonate and inspire leaders of all levels. Whilst it does not strive to be a tale of woe, woe will necessarily be part thereof. The narrative personifies the figurehead of principal, humanises the statistics (IPPN, 2022) and differentiates intrinsic power from the power we relinquish to external influences and demands .

In the SPN, complexity, critical reflection, multi-perspectives, personal experiences, the arts, and scholarship, are fore fronted as portals to awakening, self-understanding and new integrated way of seeing and being. The methodology prompts cyclical reflection, interpretation, and agentic emancipation. Through my subjective encounters and transformative progression, I extend invitation to participants and audience to reconsider, review and refine their

sense of purpose and identity in a complex messy mortal world.

With the advent of a New National Curriculum Framework that calls for contextual appraisal, autonomy, and agency, a confident step into our expertise is necessary for us to replace mindless compliance with discernment. Occasional creative insubordination or selective abandonment are often deemed necessary to facilitate core purpose. I surmise that we are in tune with communal needs when we become collectively critical in our thinking. Thus, all subsequent judgements and decisions are sound, even if just for a day. The SPN methodology afforded vulnerable compassionate encounter where I was enabled to self-testify and be witness to an unspoken personal angle of school leadership in Ireland.

In the first instance, thorough understanding of the underpinning philosophy of the pedagogy of the interior is a fundamental component of this research. Consistent application of 'I-Thou' encounter is a process of constant renewal, fundamental for evolving professional identity and life-long learning. The various nuances of the what and how of 'I-Thou' encounter will be thoroughly explicated and fully explored. As such, the trajectory of its evolvment is outlined in chapter five, from the grass roots of

restorative practice to the more recent refinements of professional growth communities, and all the positive learning arising from the trial-and-error in-between. It is portrayed through storytelling and personal reflection. Vignettes will interweave the entire research to merge the personal and the theory.

The value of a transformative and emancipatory pedagogy, and its positive domino effect on one school community, is proposed as a complementary spoke in the wheel of professional growth for leaders. This will be portrayed in the applied embodiment and analysis of the pedagogy. It begins with the first stage of pause and has five other nonlinear interweaving attendant stages. Encounter with self, other and context is a component of every stage.

1.7 Pedagogy of the Interior

In my imagining of the pedagogy of the interior, I did not aim to develop another leadership programme nor did I envisage it to be solely for leaders. Leaders, as 'living-centre' (Buber, 1996) of community, must first ensure the pedagogy is alive in themselves before it can radiate outwards. The pedagogy of the interior beginnings were established long ago. I aver it is a skill and a calling bequeathed at birth, where it was at its most potent for this is the

peak of our aptitude for fallibility and non-evaluative attentiveness.

As the world expanded, and its influences seeped in, it began a process of dilution.

The pedagogy of the interior is an embodied skillset and culture that encompasses all relational aspects of school life and learning, and all transitional places in between. In this research, the term pedagogy represents the method and practice of reciprocal authentic encounter according to Buber's (1996) 'I-Thou' philosophy and awakening to beauty according to O' Donohue's (2003) philosophy. It is situated contextually within the realm of leadership development. Pedagogy of the interior is a term inspired by O' Donohue (2003). It pertains to the activation of our inner world of values, beliefs and power and the conscious critical awakening of identity, purpose, and passion. Thus, the pedagogy of the interior can become a bridge to sustainability, a vital flexible approach that sees complexity as a benign pedagogical opportunity for renewal.

1.8 Stages of Pedagogy of the Interior

i) Pause

The pedagogy of the interior prioritises pause. In the first instance, we must pause to prepare for a reverent approach to 'I-Thou' encounter (Buber, 1996). Pause makes way for examination of emotion, limitation, and unmet needs. Pause is an imperative for encounter with disruption, complexity, and change. Pause potentially highlights barriers to actualisation that arise within the ego, perfectionism, outdated scripts, and belief systems.

Sometimes, pause may point to the need to postpone, to surrender or recover. Pause is restorative, a space for wonder and awe in pure presence and fusion with O' Donohue's (2003) awakening beauty.

ii) Ponder

Ponder is the posing of 'what' to the intellect of head, heart, and gut. What am I thinking? What am I feeling? What sense of a thing am I receiving? It is a stage of observation in the absence of evaluation. It involves the identification of the components of the encounter and an openness to growth and change.

iii) Wonder

Wonder is the posing of 'why'. It involves a critical assessment of what underlies the thought, feeling and sense of a thing. It can be

individual or collective, incorporating multi-perspectives. It is reflexive and comprises myriad layers. It is a rigorous appraisal and regulation of the arising compulsion to either focus outwards with blame or inwards with self-critique. It demands an open disposition towards reciprocal learning. It requires a birds eye view and the intention to restore and reinstate purpose and identity.

iv) 'I-Thou'

'I-Thou' is conscious presence and attentiveness. It is a space of listening, learning, and revealing, of restoration and transformation. It is a space where we can activate true self and its relativity to other. It is a space of connection and renewal. 'I-Thou' is always reverent and authentic. Sometimes, it feels joyful. Other times, it involves surrender to discomfort and pain. It is a space of flow and non-resistance. It is acceptance of life on life's terms of beauty, joy, sorrow or mundane. It employs the intellect of the head, heart, and gut as the egoic mind is hushed. 'I-Thou' is not a balancing of either-or, but an integrative fusion. Meeting other in a reciprocal way is an act of homecoming to self and an invitation to wholly engage and evolve. It incorporates the potentiality of inner peace and outer harmony.

v) Transformation

Taking the time to really listen and to still the busy mind that reaches and strains into the next task of the 'to do' list involves conscious and consistent practice and an openness to becoming altered. It transforms and awakens our inner wealth of power, passion and purpose.

vi) Renewal

Renewal is the practice of remembering and reinstating 'I-Thou' relationship for it habitually reverts when we are not vigilant. We would if we could make every moment 'I-Thou' if we were to stay perpetually focused in the present and reverent in every encounter, although this may be unrealistic. At times, when we become lost for long periods, renewal can amount to a breakdown in order for us to breakthrough into the "I-Thou" again.

1.9 Research Outline

Research of the subjective context of leadership will be outlined as follows. In the following chapter, I outline the research design, analysis and hybrid methodologies. In chapter three, the philosophy of awakening beauty through encounter is described when I

formally introduce dominant scholars. Others will weave amongst the unfolding narrative in a more informal way according to thematic relevance. Next, chapter four portrays the leadership dilemma of burnout and unsustainability. Then in chapter five, I explore the autobiographical and psychological barriers to evolving identity and trace the evolution of the pedagogy of the interior from an inside-out bottom-up appraisal of professional practice. Following this, chapter six presents the layered democratic encounter and critical thinking incorporated in the action research approach, entitled *Pause to Ponder*. Finally, in chapter seven research findings are delineated and recommendations are made for a new way of leading and living that is restorative, protective, and liberating.

The pedagogy of the interior has evolved from personal and professional experience which includes the learning arising from *Pause to Ponder*, psychoeducation and self-study. A decade or more of engagement in restorative practice has exerted a fundamental and profound influence. The philosophy of Buber (1996), O'Donohue (2003) and Rosenberg (2015), coupled with Burnham's (2021) depiction of universal unconsciousness and denied

responsibility, affords a new way of thinking about the specific dilemma of sustainable leadership.

Without honest reveal, how can the dilemma be fully understood?

Without self-appraisal, how can we boldly proceed? Without awareness, there is no awakening. Without the boom of self-advocacy, there is only a whimper. Questions generated to enrich dialogue aspire to overflow these pages. Findings lean to suggestion that point to further subjective reflection in research of a phenomenological nature.

1.10 A New Way of thinking, being and learning in Leadership

I will spotlight the unheard personal accounts of leadership hardship by addressing the husk of out-dated debilitating aspects of leadership. I will propose change on individual, collective and localised levels. I will engage in embodied research that embraces wisdom, daring and complexity. I will track the trajectory from principal powerlessness to a powerful passionate purposeful leadership collective that emerges from collaborative conscious encounter. Democracy finds foothold and hegemony is accounted for in the new model. Barriers of perfectionism and shame are exposed and transformed, and the paralysis of perfection is slowly

replaced by a culture of positive error, curiosity, and beautiful risk (Biesta, 2013).

This research examines leadership growth from a different angle, the angle of personal and inter-relational growth first and foremost, using an inside-out and bottom-up approach. While professional support services focus on external provision, this research highlights the development of internal capacity for growth, one that radiates outwards, instils hope, and awakens a new way of being through reciprocal encounter. In this way, it is envisaged that all directions of leadership growth will converge, and the pedagogy of the interior can address a gap in the field of professional learning.

I will demonstrate how transformational leadership practice can become a new sustainable renewable autonomous source of inner power and passion. Traditional professional development mainly resides in the outer domains of curriculum, planning and assessment, and change management. The unconventional direction of my approach affords a more grounded holistic negotiation of the constants of change and complexity.

1.11 In Conclusion

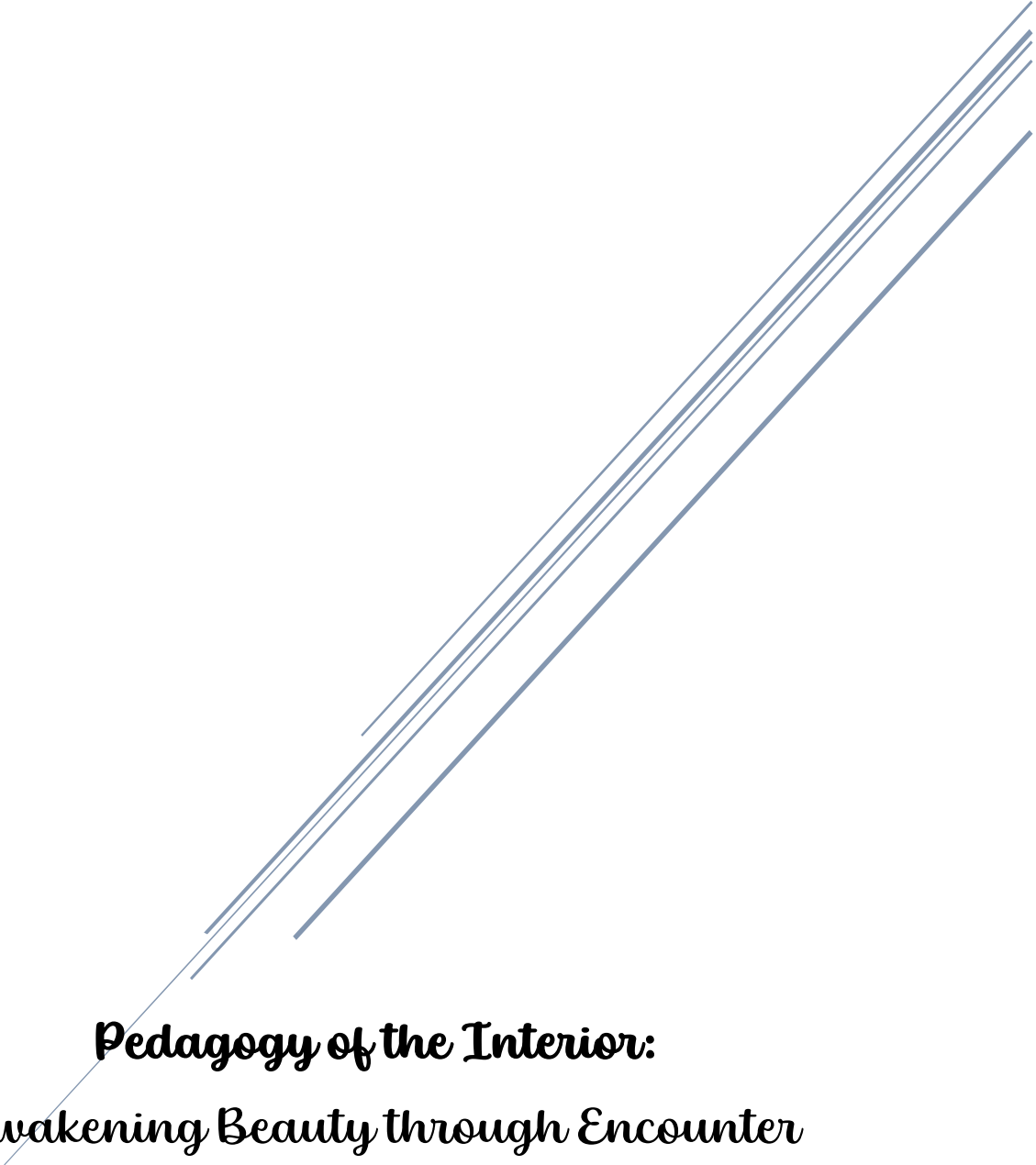
The research primarily spotlights leadership, but it recognises commonality of presiding layers across the spectrum of education, and indeed across contemporary life in general, for we are all leaders of our inner world. It aims to delve beneath the surface layers and negotiate intrinsic change and reform from within local systems in the first place. Whilst it scrutinises specifics of the dilemma of unsustainable leadership on a personal basis and acknowledges the progress by leadership stakeholders toward a more tenable model, it deflects gaze from external power and inner powerlessness towards intrinsic dispositional and habitual empowerment. In other words, it scrutinises tangible agentic ways of reconstructing authentic identity and identification from the inside-out. Through speaking to prevalent harm, principals can shed shackles of shame and stress, pragmatically and publicly address human limitations arising from an undefined job of inexhaustible duties, and thereby pull back from the ledge to revamp their cherished role.

The architecture of the research incorporates layers of encountering, beauty as a construct of identity and as a portal of

disruption necessary for the development of a skillset for awakening. The pedagogy of the interior proposes a new way of being in leadership that arises from fallibility, connection and evolving identity. It represents an amalgam of philosophy, encounter, theory, multi-perspectives and professional experience.

To conclude, I have highlighted the need for a new innovative pedagogy of the interior to address a gap in leadership development. The research objectives incorporate an embodied evaluative accounting for the pedagogy of the interior as an individual and community-based endeavour that enhances sustainability and capacity for personal and professional leadership. Major evolving themes include disposition and growth, inner power, psychological barriers of perfectionism and shame, blame and hegemony, and resistance to change. Through the pedagogy of the interior, I developed tools to break the mould of my own making, change the status quo, and unmask. I found the process humanising and connective.

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY



*Pedagogy of the Interior:
Awakening Beauty through Encounter*

2.1 The Scholarly Personal Narrative

2.1.1 The founder

Nash is a professor in the University of Vermont's College of Education and Social Services. He specializes in philosophy of education, applied ethics, religion, spirituality, and education. He is the founder of the SPN methodology which he began teaching in 1990. Over the period of three decades, he has developed the method, sometimes in collaboration with other academics, and has written/co-written four books on the topic since. In 2011, he collaborated with colleague, LaSha Bradley to produce *Me-Search and Research. A Guide for Writing Scholarly Personal Narrative Manuscripts* which I used for this research. I discovered the methodology when studying critical thinking and multi-perspectives through the lens of Brookfield. Both Brookfield and Nash converge on the concept of blending personal experience, theory and learning through encounter.

Nash (2015) describes the SPN as a style of public intellectual writing which draws on academic and non-academic references to portray complexity of the inner and outer worlds. Nash (2015) advocates for an alternative connective methodology that turns

“scholarly inaccessibility into public accessibility” (p.44).

Accordingly, the “public intellectual” engages in “reciprocity teaching and learning” and “connects, rather than separates, ideas and people” (Nash, 2015, p. 40-41). His ideas about writing are closely aligned with Buber’s (1996) ‘I-Thou’ philosophy as he refers to fusion of self and experience through encounter and self-reflection. Nash (2015) states that the researcher uses the art of storytelling to “write their way into meaning and wholeness” (p. 42) and it makes the “difference between having a career and living a vocation” (p.43).

Nash (2015) argues for the validity of subjective universal research of this nature, asserting its place in academia for its potential to “enlarge, enrich, and deepen the more conventional” (p.42). He speaks of the holistic inclusive intellectualism of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, whose search for wisdom permitted them to “perceive and understand the world both rationally and emotionally” as opposed to superior intellectualism which values only the “rational and cognitive”. He claims there is learning in shared experience “no matter how ordinary or extraordinary” and has learned “how to reason with both his head and his heart” (Nash, 2015, p.41).

Bradley and Nash (2011) acknowledge that each discipline possesses its own norms for what constitutes intellectual integrity and thus endorses “logical thinking, questioning, analysing, conceptualising and being intimately familiar with the works of the great philosophers” (p.199). The philosophical background combined with post-modern constructivist leanings have earthed this blended methodology where research may be interpreted philosophically, subjectively and academically.

2.1.2 The Methodology

This section describes the SPN methodology, and the rationale underlying its alternative approach, in detail. I do so to highlight its essential compatibility with my personal philosophy on education. I will outline the specific mode in which it will be employed to suit the purposes of my research and am cognisant of its uncommon approach. I have used the scope it provides to create a framework that demonstrates the generative flow of my own evolving understanding and faith in a pedagogy of the interior. I do not claim that this is the only way to enact its principles. My SPN incorporates philosophy of action research and self-study to expand encounter, critical reflection and further align with theme. My chosen mix of

traditional and non-traditional satisfied my need for additional academic accessibility alongside further opportunity for “reciprocity teaching and learning” (Nash, 2015, p.41).

The SPN is a phenomenological methodology that provides scope in the arena of academia for doctoral research of a personal, reflexive, transformative nature. The SPN does not follow a traditional research format. Although it comprises usual research objectives, it is a personal story told in the first person that tracks the arc of a dilemma intimately explored, interrogated, and resolved through analysis of recurring themes. The SPN is designed for the doctoral student who wishes to examine a specific practice dynamic requiring change and make sense of it through the lens of their own experience and through the lens of relevant theory and contemporary literature. Bradley and Nash (2011) encapsulate its spectrum:

While it is personal, it is also social. While it is practical, it is also theoretical. While it is reflective, it is also public. While it is local, it is also political. While it narrates, it also proposes. While it is self-revealing, it also evokes self-examination from readers (p.19).

The main notable absences in the SPN are that of the typical review of literature and empirical findings chapters. These are mostly interwoven within the unfolding narrative. The function of the literature is to act as a lens of analysis and to enhance or re-interpret meaning. The data collected is the data of personal experience in the unfolding arc of the leadership dilemma. Data is analysed through the reflexive thematic analysis of dominant themes and the lens of scholarship. The aim of the research is a better self-understanding and transformation of self and supporting actors. I wanted to write about what saddens me (disconnection and judgement), what scares me (insignificance and dispensability) and what maddens me (assumption and bias), particularly as it may be remedied with individual and communal critical reflection. What is:

most important... is that these life-themes (e.g., triumphs, tragedies, victories, defeats, lessons learned, lessons lost, the dreams, and the nightmares, the joys, and the sadness) will lead the way for the SPN writers to expose and examine more deeply the complexity and richness of the me who was doing the writing (Bradley and Nash, 2011, p.97).

2.1.3 Research Methodology and Theme Compatibility

The SPN methodology was compatible with research theme and objectives for many reasons. First and foremost, it was the subjective approach required for a pedagogy of the interior. Additionally, the open-ended exploration of experience and encountering provided scope for personal and professional, past and present, vulnerability and daring, the good and bad, funny and sad, all of which are the components of honest self-disclosure. The longevity of my practice and experience of three curriculums, the Irish Primary School Curriculum (1971); Revised Primary School Curriculum (1999) and the new Primary Curriculum Framework (2023), alongside their attendant professional development models, bear weight in educational conversation. My facilitation experience of restorative practice as a relational framework and as a reflexive process provided foundational data for the 'Me-Search' section. The SPN resonates with my calling towards a style of humble leadership in a culture of fallibility, dialogue, experimentation, and positive error. It spoke to a view of complexity and change as a potential source of empowering encounter and renewed identity and identification. The methodology permitted inclusion of hybrid styles

of self-study, action research, ethnographic, autobiographic, psychological, and phenomenological that I chose to employ. Being pluralistic, it provided space for the parody, surrealism, existentialism that supported my spotlighting of the dilemma of psychological indoctrination and puppetry. The SPN, as a transformative piece, instantiated a wake-up call out of wilful slumber and demanded the fusion of the intellect of the head, heart and gut. Ultimately, the SPN incorporates all of the components of the pedagogy of the interior. It is the pause to ponder, to wonder and to transform through encounter.

2.1.4 'A Cousin of Auto-ethnography'

Chang (2011) in her foreword to Bradley and Nash's guide (2011), refers to the SPN methodology as "an intellectually brilliant cousin of auto-ethnography" (p.ix). She sees similarities in the blend of "self-reference", "self-examination" and "sound scholarship" belonging to each, alongside the shared love of storytelling (Chang as quoted in Bradley and Nash, 2011, p.ix). Furthermore, each style draws upon personal history and socio-cultural context, creating connections between the two. Chang sees her style of auto-ethnography as compatible with the SPNs and likens them to "oases

in the academic desert that has a propensity of drying out personal stories in the name of subjectivity and bias” (Chang as quoted in Bradley and Nash, 2011, p.x). Bradley and Nash (2011) argue that the subjective authorial voice is balanced by the objective lens of scholarship, that the SPN author instantiates rigor by utilising both lenses in their account of the personal data and the data the literature instantiates. They assert that “credibility suggests reliability” (2011, p.83). While I can attest to this experience, I accept that bias and assumption are open to scrupulous debate. I have considered this in my planning. Unwilling to expose my credibility to a charge of unreliability, I decided to embed a parallel style of in-school action research, *Pause to Ponder*, fully outlined chapter six, within the overall methodology.

2.1.5 A Phenomenological Methodology

Narrative (phenomenological, SPN) research methodologies, along with their unique languages, are shaped by a view of the world that is subjective (in here to be expressed), constructivist (at least partly constructed by the observer) and interpretive. (Bradley and Nash, 2011, p.82)

The data of my SPN represents a reflexive plethora of encounters with i) the personal dynamic that I am exploring in my practice and the events that relate to it, ii) my encounter with self through psychoeducation, iii) my encounter with the experiences of other leaders and school colleagues, iv) my encounter with contemporary art and modern-day vernacular, v) my encounter with literature, policy and academic research and vi) my encounter with national stakeholders such as the Irish Primary Principal Network, the Teaching Council, and the Centre for School Leadership, as well as professional learning arising from participation in international stakeholder events led by the Leadership for Professional Learning Symposium, COSÁN, the Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South, and the European Educational Research Association. Encounters comprised a collaboration of pragmatic realities and the handling of values-laden and existential themes. Thus, it follows that there must be a blend of empirical and subjective. Bradley and Nash (2011) justify the latter as necessitating a handling that is “more emotional than rational, more philosophical than data-based, more theological than logical, or more self-reflective than world reflective” (p.82). Hence the SPN

provides scope for a spectrum of epistemologies, allowing a generative and unlimited flow within and amongst. I aver it is a freeing 'fresh air' approach which transformative self-research requires.

2.1.6 Head, Heart and Infallible Gut

Nash contends courage, passion and risk taking are fundamental for the SPN. I have discovered a three-fold style of recall and analysis incorporating firstly, 'head' as the scholarly piece, secondly, 'heart' representing the intellect of the personal and emotional, and thirdly gut as the interpretative knowing. The SPN provides for stylistic scope for a distinctive individualistic voice that engages head, heart, and gut. "SPN writing is open ended, self-disclosing, informative, generous, vulnerable, honest, universalizable, and, above all, educational" (Bradley and Nash, 2011, p.195).

In this style of research, interior learning is rigorously juxtaposed with a conscious critical interrogation of exterior forces that unconsciously mould our practice. I will explore the intrinsic impact of mass unconsciousness and its causal roots. I will endeavor to develop a culture of conscious criticality through multi-faceted encounter as a pathway towards awakening. We need only look to

the 2020s to find modern day samples of negligible blindness in Trump's faithful followers or Russian allegiance to Putin propaganda. Although I do not entertain political debate, I choose to heighten awareness of how political agenda is perpetrated and empowered at local and personal levels. I opt to examine change from within the inner realms of power so that we account for the plank in our own eye and transform, and waste less precious energy on blame.

2.1.7 Feelings Matter

Lamott (1995) advocates that we “write straight into the emotional centre of things.... write towards vulnerability” (p.19). Brown (2018) attests that emotion and vulnerability are gateways to authentic connection. I propose they foreground ‘I-Thou’ encounter (Buber, 1996) and a disposition of awakening. The personal narrative of J. Alfred Prufrock (Eliot, 1915) “disturb[ed] the universe”, not because of his successful endeavours, but because of his courageous exposé of vulnerable vicissitude. The narrative would have been insignificant should the conflict of inner dialogue not have been amplified and exposed. In *Me-Search*, I fully embrace vigorous

honesty and bold vulnerability as a core responsibility of the SPN researcher.

2.1.8 Relevance of the SPN

The SPN style spoke to a) my calling to expand my philosophy of educational encounter; b) my interest in contributing to existing ideologies and research; c) my desire to portray the trajectory of my own awakening identity and transformation as an embodied finding; and c) my ambition to resonate with an extensive audience of academia and educational stakeholders, peers in leadership and my school body and, in the doing so, contribute to professional development and systemic change. In researching my own personal and professional realms, I will recount experiences, values and beliefs, dilemmas and error, evolving philosophy, and my scholarly influences. Awakening beautiful authenticity necessitates self-encounter but also needs to be grounded externally and relationally.

2.1.9 A Multi-Modal Technique

The dynamic under scrutiny will be highlighted using a multi-modal technique of stories, poetry, film, music and art, and it will deploy

layers of individual and collaborative critical reflection and reflexivity. As it is a narrative form of writing, I will tell many stories and compose the occasional verse. Through the SPN, I will embark on a journey of dissonance and enlightenment, trial and error, and breakthrough. At times it will be autobiographical, at other times it will be descriptive and metaphorical. The writing and weaving of the personal into the narrative is a central component. The crafting and re-crafting of ideas enact a back and forth play with theme, the reflexivity unfolding deeper understanding. Meaning will be refined through the prisms of the arts, collaborative critical thinking, and psychology, and it will be personal, revealing, and honest.

2.1.10 Pre-Search, Me-Search, Re-Search, We-Search

Bradley and Nash (2011) break down the components of the SPN into four distinct phases. The *Pre-search* (chapter four) spotlights leadership in Ireland and the predicament of practice. It proposes the pedagogy of the interior as a restorative sustainable way of being in the leadership role that underpins and scaffolds forthcoming systemic change. *Me-search* (chapter five) exemplifies and explicates the pedagogy through the data of personal experience and the transformative experience of restorative practice within my school

community as well as a self-study psychoeducation. The *Re-search: Pause to Ponder* (chapter six) grounds and enriches the data through action research epistemology which aims to develop, enhance, and embed a practice of collaborative critical thinking. The thesis conclusion, *We-search* (chapter seven) presents universalisable ideas and applications. It aims to “yield wonderful insights and have lasting effect upon both the writer and the readers” (Bradley and Nash, 2011, p.111).

I have chosen to present the four stages in a linear way, alongside an extra stage of my own creation which precedes all four. Chapter three, ‘Encounter with the Scholars’, will situate the bedrock of my evolving philosophy within the sphere of its influencers. It lays out the philosophical thinking behind the research and methodological preference. I contend that the launching of a new pedagogy required this extra layer of explication.

2.1.11 In Defense of Rigor

Conceptually, the notion of speaking from the heart, from experience, and from a values-based philosophy has significantly enhanced my learning. Initially I had intended to explore encounter amongst the iterations of Grounded Theory. However, I realised that

my research required an open-endedness to allow for the “bombs of dissonance” (Brookfield, 2017, p.28) that stem from reflexive methods. Grounded theory cannot contain bias and I do not endeavor to do so. Moreover, the concept of saturation is incompatible with the principles of the SPN which, like the pedagogy of the interior, is a lifelong generative process. I found that a qualitative flexible approach that blended inductive and deductive methods was more appropriate. The SPN necessitated an amalgam of enmeshed methodologies and methods. The collaborative experimental approach of *Pause to Ponder* and its beneficence to my school community appealed. Yet, this would have proven insufficient on its own to encompass the width and depth that I desired as it was not simply a matter of assessing an intervention. I wanted to reflect on the complex latent themes that arose (Braun and Clarke, 2021). I required the research design to be informed by my theoretical and methodological perspective, where embedded themes are juxtaposed with emergent themes in a pragmatic rigorous reflexive manner. *Pause to Ponder* established a logistical framework of systemic reflexive practice and provided a

segue into multifaceted encountering. The malleable structure of the SPN was the best fit.

2.1.12 Final Comments on SPN

One of the most interesting things I have learned on my life journey is that 'not knowing' is a sound pathway to wisdom. In my leadership role, I have come to welcome the breakdown and breakup of outdated constructs to make way for the new. Not wanting to be mistaken as the kind of activist who exposes untenable socio-political systems, for I am no expert of this kind, I aim to spotlight intrinsic revolution. I see change as both an inside and outside job and recognise there is space and necessity for both. The SPN has allowed me to become critically engaged with head, heart and gut, and cognisant of a deeper understanding of my stance in the field of education. Just beyond the midway mark in life and learning is an opportune time to pause, ponder, wonder, and transform. Additionally, it has been personally significant and strangely comforting for me to note the re-emergence of older significant themes and literature, almost forgotten, bobbing in the mix alongside newcomers. Critical reflection has set in thrum the dusty strings of my unconscious steadfastness to certain unaltered

core beliefs and values, integrating various chapters of my life in a self-affirming and validating way. Somehow, it platforms the encounter between a wiser experienced school leader and her younger idealistic counterpart three decades later. It is like an old flame reignited, an integration of a continuum of selves, an honour, and a homecoming. One of my favourite lines from a children's poem is about a caterpillar who became a butterfly after the pupa 'sizzling and snoozing'.

He stretched and fell into the sky.

A flittering floating butterfly,

Who never thought of quizzing "why".

But, just said,

"Fancy me!" (Paisley, year unknown)

I love the unquestioning soaring whimsical surrender evoked. It is as if the little caterpillar, turned butterfly, is at once saying 'fancy that' to all it perceives from its new perspective, whilst also inviting us to fancy him, as the beautiful self-assured creature he is. I endorse fanciful curiosity and self-appreciation. Often, the overdependency on the intellect of the head overshadows deeper knowing.

Cognitive dominance can cloud intuition and hamper the language of the heart. It can enact the ‘greim an duine bháite’ (translated from Irish as ‘chokehold of the drowning person), which is strangling, rigid and fear fueled, when in fact, the drowning person needs only to pause and surrender in order to rescue their life force. Only then can alternate possibilities and solutions open up to increase the chance of survival.

In essence, this research justifies jaywalking across empty roads instead of waiting for the green light, taking the route of partial compliancy or pragmatic insubordination whilst awaiting structural change. I maintain that these alternative routes expand, energise and emancipate. They call forth our creativity and innovation in the ever-changing complex vista of education. This thesis is less about findings and more about testing new skillsets and adopting a fallible mindset. We must make friends with complexity, lean into the pause and surrender to limitation, the ponder and wonder, and the disruption of the predictable rhythms of trance-inducing conformity.

As a qualitative endeavour, *Awakening the Concealed Beauty in Encounter* is no neutral story. It is a meaning making, reflexive

narrative, an ethical essential in professional actualisation. “SPN writing is open ended, self-disclosing, informative, generous, vulnerable, honest, universalizable, and, above all, educational” (Bradley and Nash, 2011, p.195). On centre stage, I stand spotlighted as an experienced Primary School leader. I aspire to use the SPN process to transition gracefully into the next life chapter and lessen the shock of the ‘unforeseen amputation’ at the end, as described by a leader colleague when referring to the loss she experienced at retirement. On this cathartic, validating and challenging journey, my aim, on conclusion, is to prove that it was indeed worthwhile:

To have squeezed the universe into a ball,

To roll it towards some overwhelming question

To say: I am Lazarus, come from the dead,

Come back to tell you all. I shall tell you all...

(Elliot, 1915)

2.2 Pause to Ponder

2.2.1 Rationale

The purpose of *Pause to Ponder*, in the overarching methodology of the SPN, was to provide a learning laboratory for the pedagogy of the interior for the eighty-six participants (including eight adult staff members) to locate thematic parallels and multi-perspectives, and to enhance rigour and validity. Certainly, it has scope for a separate dissertation, but this was not the intention. *Pause to Ponder* embodies action research as an epistemic practice as opposed to a singular methodology or technique. Henceforth, as I refer to it as action research, I allude to the principles of action research as I perceive them: a) an approach to collaborative living and learning; b) ongoing democratic co-generative leadership; and c) a way of reflective seeing and being in action. Similarly, Braun and Clarke's (2022) style of reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) found a home with a way of being and acting which is inherent in the pedagogy of the interior and the SPN. Moreover, it contributed to the rigor of the SPN. Familiarisation with and coding of the data of the *Pause to Ponder* engendered initial themes and subsequently the refinement of themes as were relevant to the overall research methods. I am satisfied with the learning provided, the systemic practice of professional growth communities (PGC) and ongoing iterations and

beneficence of critical thinking circles that have become embedded in my school since then.

In *Pause to Ponder* two interwoven layers of critical thinking opportunities were set in motion in my school. In chapter 6.1, I will outline the phases of encounter involving collaborative planning and critical reflection within the PGC and the phases of critical thinking and book talk (CTBT) sessions (Roche, 2015). In chapter 6.2, I discuss the beauty and disruption of Tan's art, his underpinning philosophy of the arts and provide a snapshot of the learning that unfolded from encounter with his art. In 6.3, I explore the commonality of universal themes of power, affective resonance, perfectionist culture, and examine the parallels of relatability between the strata of pupil, staff, and leadership. Themes were explored through the lens of participants and scholarship.

Ultimately, the *Pause to Ponder* aspect of the SPN demonstrated the enactment of critical thinking and authentic encounter, where we learned to see things differently. In the collaborative process, renewed identity and identification occurred as we became players within a larger world, in which, Denzin (2019) attests,

*we are called to change the world and to change it in ways
that resist injustice while celebrating freedom and full,
inclusive, participatory democracy (pp.723-724).*

Pause to Ponder achieved what it set out to do and more.

2.2.2 Research Field

Pause to Ponder was conducted in the natural setting of my own school, a Catholic school of approximately 500 pupils and fifty staff. Data was collected from the CTBT sessions and PGC meetings. The research spanned the first and second term of the academic year 2021/2022.

2.2.3 Research Outline

Pause to Ponder enacted the pedagogy of the interior at the level of pupil, teacher, SNA, and leader. The learning arising from critical, collaborative reflective encounter is an integral aspect of the SPN. Layers of disruption through encounter with art, theory and dialogue were provided. As an insider, I saw my practitioner understanding of dynamics of context and culture as advantageous for the research. Moreover, a move towards democratic learning environment was already at a fledgling stage. Thus, the piloting of

CTBT and PGC was meaningful and relevant for the entire community. The research was conducted at an optimum time for developing a growth mindset and dispositional readiness for the ideals of autonomy, flexibility and agency outlined in the new Primary Curriculum Framework (DES, 2023).

Winter's (1996) key principles of reflexive critique, dialectic critique, collaboration, risking of disturbance, creation of plural structures and the internalization of theory and practice were employed to scaffold the action research. Buber's (1996) concept of 'I-Thou' relationship established reverent and attentive reciprocity, a process of curiosity and self-discovery, in which awakening occurred. *Pause to Ponder* utilised a plethora of deductive and inductive elements including crystallisation, double loop learning and RTA (Braun and Clarke, 2021).

2.2.4 Ethics

I saw myself as cast in the "modest role of Masters of ceremonies presiding uncertainly over a plurality of perspectives" (Winter, 2002, p.151) and was cognisant of asymmetric power relations in the diversity of roles within the body of volunteers. Consequently, power differential was simultaneously reflected upon as a central

theme in the unfolding story and contributed to my understanding of the challenge leadership poses to democratic communities.

Furthermore, I enlisted the assistance of non-participating middle leaders to provide oversight with this issue in mind.

The provision of safety within a vulnerable dialectic and the scaffolding of enhanced relationship was paramount. It was made clear that the research was non-evaluative, that it advocated an attitude of curiosity and non-judgmental appreciation. Participating staff members were empowered, valued and connected, not highlighted or evaluated. Moreover, the process of critical reflection aimed to uncover hegemony and develop a collective appreciation of diverse roles within the school community. Critical reflection, being a vulnerable process, has traditionally been a private experience. Collective critical reflection requires a negotiation of vulnerability within a structure of collegial trust where intention is clearly understood. Subsequently, guidelines and rules of engagement were devised alongside an evolving differentiated approach to participation to suit diverse aptitudes. Furthermore, as an inducement for participating staff, permission for meetings to be scheduled during school time was granted by the Board of

Management to alleviate stress, diminish fatigue, and enhance pleasure in the professional dialogue.

Inclusive invitation for elective participation was extended to all staff and to the pupils in the sixth-class level following separate information sessions and leaflets geared towards staff, parents, and pupils (*appendix 1*). Two pupils opted out as per their right to do so and one staff member subsequently left the PGC due to the interference of an unanticipated leave of absence. Hence, consent for participation in the research was an informed and voluntary process, and the right to withdraw was respected. Participating pupils with learning difficulties accessed critical thinking and book talk in the usual supported and differentiated way, according to their continuum of support. Pupils were already accustomed to working with the staff in the confidential safe space of restorative circles where voice is respected and has influence. Staff were enabled and encouraged to view and approve their transcripts.

The research was in full compliance with the requirements of the University College of Cork's social research ethics committee (*appendix 2*). The board of management was satisfied with the inherent beneficence of relational teaching and learning, of

developing critical thinking, personal and professional growth, and the enactment of a study that aimed to be both a “democratic and democratising process” (McAteer and Wood, 2018).

My aim was to promote an air of curiosity and fun alongside a positive error culture, and structures of dialogue that enhanced peer/collegial trust. Together, we set an intention to observe what unfolded, interrogate assumptions, welcome the unexpected, and to hold faith in the evolving arc of our collective learning. We aimed to adopt a contextual values-based philosophy where ideals were applied in practice, where there was “mutual respect steeped in strong professional knowledge, and a climate that invited risk taking and innovation’ (Louis, Marks, and Kruse 1996, as *quoted in* Darling-Hammond and Richardson 2009, p. 4). On conclusion and in full transparency, feedback on the research was provided by the staff participants to the whole school community. Furthermore, mentoring of CTBT was facilitated for teachers who elected to engage the following year. Uptake was elective and gradual and eventually, critical thinking was comprehensively embraced as a mode of developing critical literacy in all senior classes.

2.2.5 Humble and Unapologetic Fallibility

‘Humble’ and ‘unapologetic’, juxtaposed in one title, is deliciously dissonant and wholly appropriate in this discussion about process of design, analysis and interpretation of the inductive praxis-oriented *Pause to Ponder* research. Design and process of analysis are inextricably linked components of the fluid iterative ‘best fit’ of its inclusion within the overarching SPN. *Pause to Ponder* provided multi-perspective information which anchored and validated the qualitative SPN through reflexive analysis of co-produced data. The concept of humble governance values fallibility and freedom to cast off the noose of ‘all knowing’. *Pause to Ponder* embraced leadership humility as it is fundamentally embodied, both conceptually and systematically, in collaborative experimentation and cycles of reflection and action. A culture of trial and error as an important aspect of learning opened portals for ongoing cycles of unknowing and knowing, invention and reinvention. In my view, unapologetic humility is an agentic values-led way of being, a way of keeping pace in a complex era that changes at a rate which is faster than any knowledge generator can compete with.

2.2.6 Reflexive Thematic Analysis

RTA demands that the researchers interrogate their “values and personal positioning” pertaining to their field and relationship to participants, their “design and methodological choices” and “how all of these intersect with, and shape, the research process and knowledge produced” (Braun and Clarke, 2021, p.16). Action research alone could not encompass the desired width and depth of research objectives, but as a composite part of the SPN, it afforded reflection on the complex latent themes that arose in facilitated multi-faceted encounter and experimentation (Braun and Clarke, 2021). I required research design and methodology to incorporate the philosophical and experiential underpinnings, where embedded themes were simultaneously interrogated and negotiated with emergent themes in a pragmatic rigorous reflexive manner. The narrative became more generative and metaphorical as a result, with meaning arising from and flowing through the narrative process. It was my experience that immersion in reflexivity necessitated the metaphysical, existential, and philosophical.

Initial design made way for iterative analytical double loop learning. From the outset, *Pause to Ponder* proposed that criticality, dialogue, and reflexivity could and would engage the head, heart and

infallible gut, aligning values and practice. It also presupposed that formal facilitated professional dialogue, when prioritised in reformed organisational structures, could develop dialogic skills, values-based practice and a disposition of inquiry and peer learning. Interpretation in the evolving thematic story arose from lengthy reflexive negotiation with relevant themes and ongoing theoretical engagement (Braun and Clarke, 2022). In *Pause to Ponder*, we endeavored to embrace the messy mortal unpredictability of ordinary school life and step beyond initial habitual assumptions into a new habit of collaborative critical reflection, embracing opportunities, including the spontaneous, nonverbal, and in-between moments, to socially construct meaning between us.

2.2.7 Coding and Analysis

Writing became the main mode of documenting thoughts, feelings and observations, of problematising, analysing and interpreting. In RTA, “language is conceptualized as active and symbolic, as creating rather than simply reflecting meaning” (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p.6). Digital and real workspaces became littered with memos demarcating O’ Donohue (2003) beauty (of the harmonious and discordant variety) that called for attention so that sense could be

made of dissonance and commonality. NVivo was helpful to organise initial codes and their relationships, but I favoured the tangible aspect of writing for reflection and analysis. Moreover, I began to truly trust and lean into the creative ambiguity of the liminal space, using the tool of reflexivity to dispel confusion where it arose. Through a process of immersion, distancing and familiarisation with codes and initial themes, meaning organically unfolded and was reported throughout the narrative (Braun and Clarke, 2021).

2.2.8 Crystallisation

Crystallisation complemented multi-modal methods and representations of meaning throughout,

“building a rich and openly partial account of a phenomenon that problematizes its own construction, highlights researchers’ vulnerabilities and positionality, makes claims about socially constructed meanings, and reveals the indeterminacy of knowledge claims even as it makes them (Ellingson, L., 2009, p.4)

I have encapsulated my experience of crystallisation and its limitless vista of possibility in the following lines.

*An act of uncovering
Within in-between spaces and
Cycles of awakening and surrender,
The presence of Beauty.

A new way of unknowing,
Of infinite fallibility
And curious messy mystery.*

*Beauty
Flows, creates,
And transfigures.*

(Moylan, 2023)

2.2.9 Critical Reflection

Brookfield's (2017) approach scaffolded the design of the action research. Reflective conversations were recorded, transcribed and reviewed by participants, who subsequently presented observations and learning from the process to the non-participating staff. Argyris (1997) advocates for the collation and dissemination of data of dialogue amongst colleagues to "get at the systematic skillful unawareness and incompetence, defensive reasoning, and denial of personal causal responsibility" (p.13).

My leadership objective for *Pause to Ponder* was to change mindset, enhance critical reflection, embrace and enact a values-based practice and sustainable leadership at all levels in the school community. We double looped on co-design and re-design of the class-based component, integrating our evolving learning with the research design. Shared leadership, democratic participation, and peer learning were situated and pragmatic. Brookfield's (2017) invitation to 'bomb' one's assumptions by public and private exposure, to journey into discomfiting ambiguity, and to enact 'unknowing' as the spring of knowledge was compelling. Skillful critical reflection was exercised through the lenses of personal experience, theory, colleagues, and pupils.

It may be argued that rigorous honesty is no substitute for hard data or that self-reflection is potentially biased. Brookfield's (2017) critical reflection style strongly contradicts this debate. It incorporates, as does the SPN, the lens of theory and personal experience, but demands that the additional lenses of the pupil, colleague and leaders are also utilised. I do not try to camouflage subjectivity and bias. Nevertheless, I do make claim to research that is vigorous in its interrogation of assumption and is hence, as

rigorous as any fixed fact, if such truly exists. *Pause to Ponder* grounds the research, the multi-perspectives providing additional coherence and rigour. It was a learning laboratory where my constructs were laid bare, robustly evaluated, and analysed from varying viewpoints. Other variables, including role, age, gender and experience provided further diversity and scope. The viewpoints of my co-researchers expanded learning and safeguarded against any self-fulfilling, self-sealing prophesising (Argyris, 1997), a potential downfall of solo interpretation that I was keen to avoid.

The critically collaborative aspect of *Pause to Ponder* both explored and applied theory actively. It simultaneously uncovered diamond values in the dust heap of unexamined practice whilst problematising barriers to their alignment. A rationale of 'why' replaced the habitual 'what' and 'how' school culture and provided safe channels for an inquiring 'why not' mindset. Brookfield (2017) warns of the perils of a self-perpetrating hegemonic life and proposes critical reflection as an antidote for the brave hearted:

To some extent we're all prisoners trapped within the frameworks we use to assign meaning to our experience. A self-confirming cycle often develops in which our assumptions

shape our actions that are then interpreted to confirm the truth of those assumptions. (p.61-62)

Underlying assumptions of power, hegemony, and the democratisation of teaching, learning and leadership are necessarily unmasked and interrogated throughout the research. The concept of power as being a “positional, hegemonic, tool for oppression as well as for action” (Shields, 2010, p.562) is explored. I highlighted and reflected upon the tensions between transformative leadership, uncontested hegemony, and power differentials and saw that principal identity simultaneously unfolded from the same democratic dialogical encounters as emergent teacher and pupil identity. In a communal witnessing of a plethora of emerging identities, kinetic democracy and alignment of personal and professional ethos was activated.

2.2.10 Critical Thinking and Book Talk (CTBT)

The dual cycle, five consecutive day programme of *Pause to Ponder and* CTBT (Roche, 2015) was centrefold. Each cycle was spaced two months apart for optimal assimilatory impact. The data set collected across a sample of eighty-six participants (eight adults and seventy-eight pupils) was ample. Reflection on the evocative vista of

Tan's (2000/2001) landscape and nuanced stories engendered rich insights from co-participating adult and child alike (see *appendix 3* for the *Pause to Ponder* Action Research plan). Everyone partook in myriad layers of recorded reflective opportunities which spanned approximately six weeks for each cycle. Multi-lenses refracted multi-perspectives. Collaborative reflection and reflexivity took the form of individual journaling, digital collaborative documents, and artwork.

At ground level, the self-propelling and innovative force that critical thinking became was enlightening for all. Two mini learning laboratories spiraled organically from the process, a critical thinking and art talk process in a junior class and a new pupil reward system in a senior class. Moreover, new ways of being and of knowing one another were instantiated. I have no doubt that a third or fourth cycle would have seen an exponential growth in diversity of reflective styles as well as further learning loops. Figure 1 maps the double loop learning and an overview of initial themes is illustrated in Figure 2.

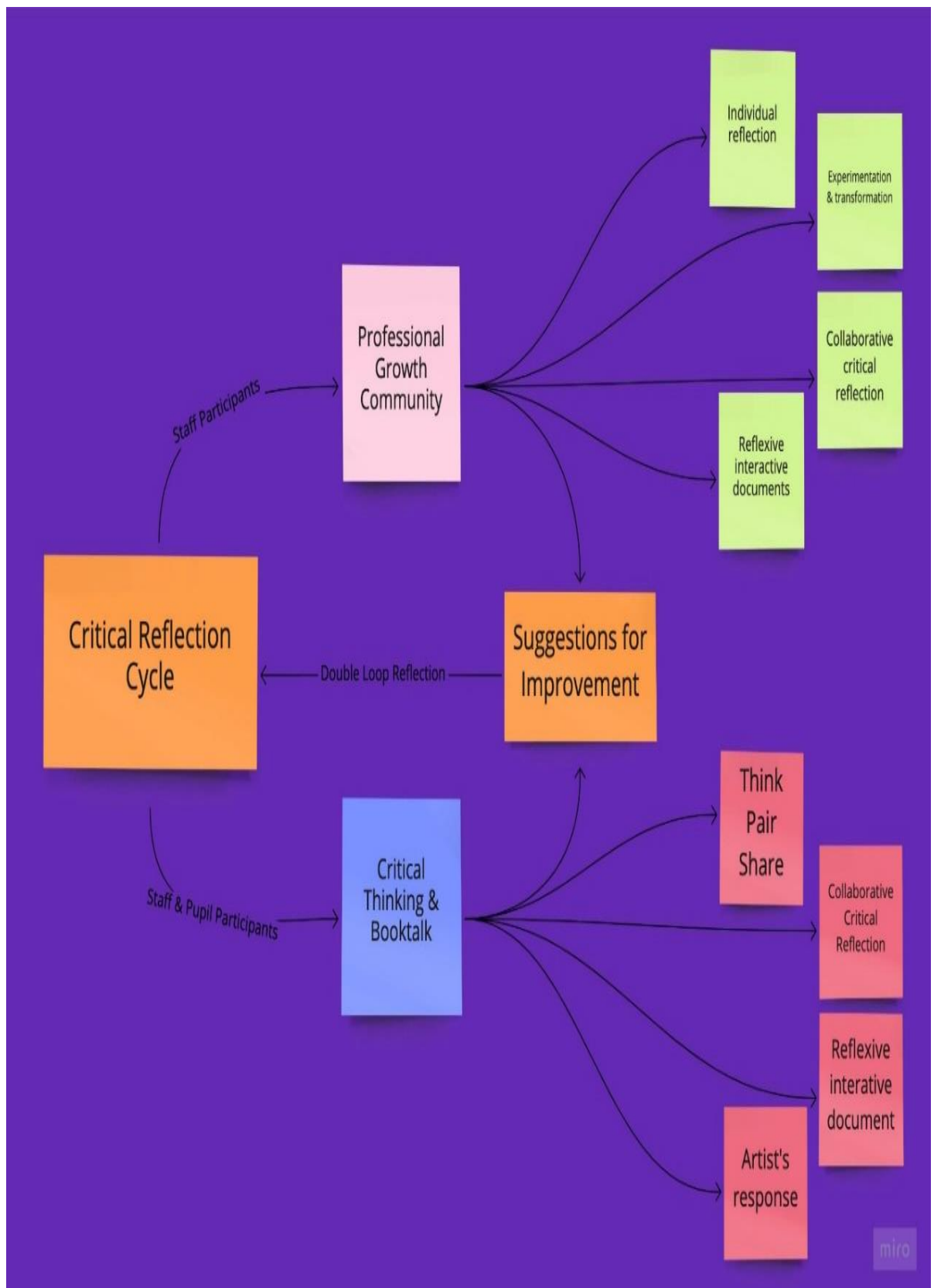


Figure 1.

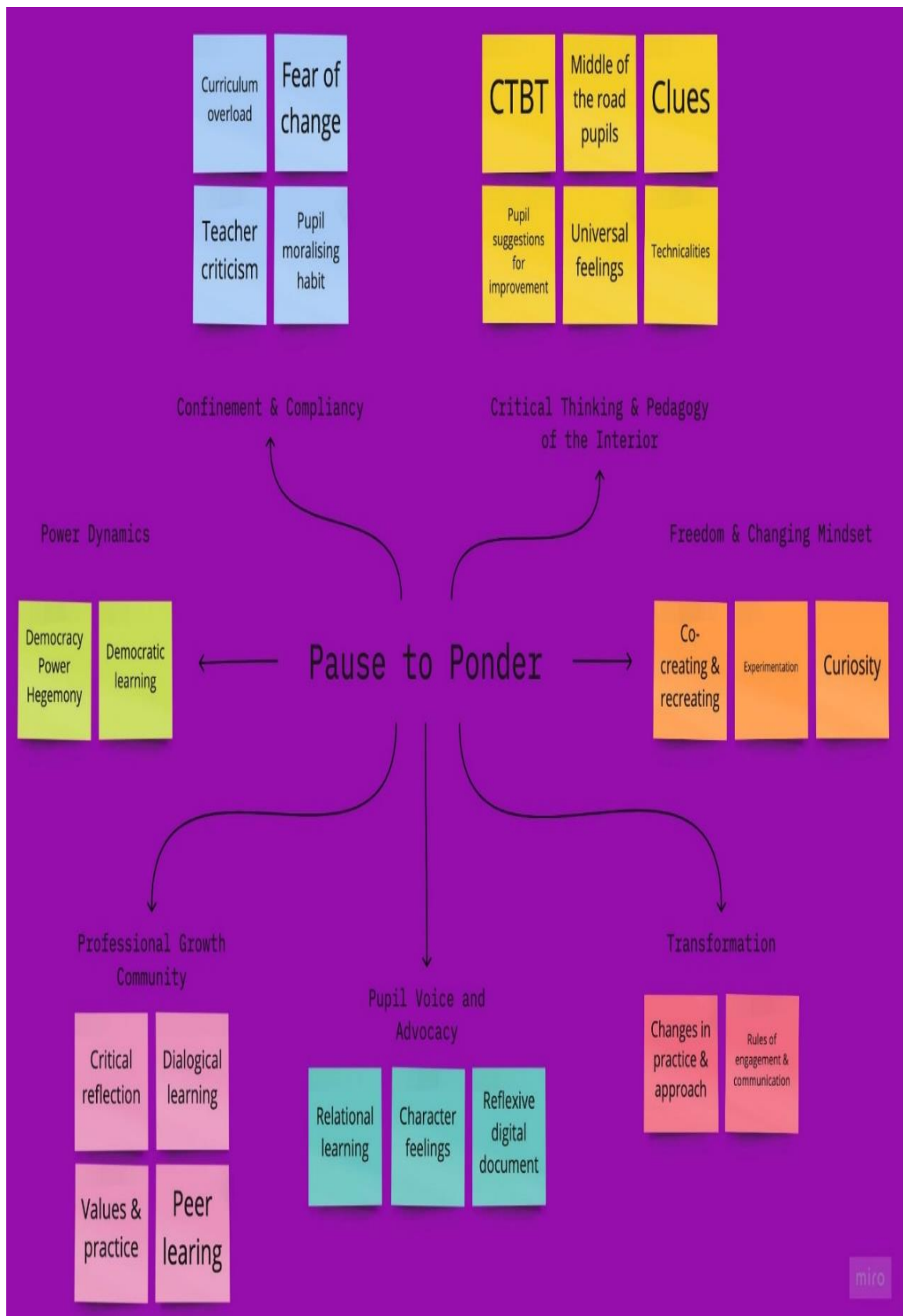


Figure 2.

2.2.11 Professional Growth Communities (PGC)

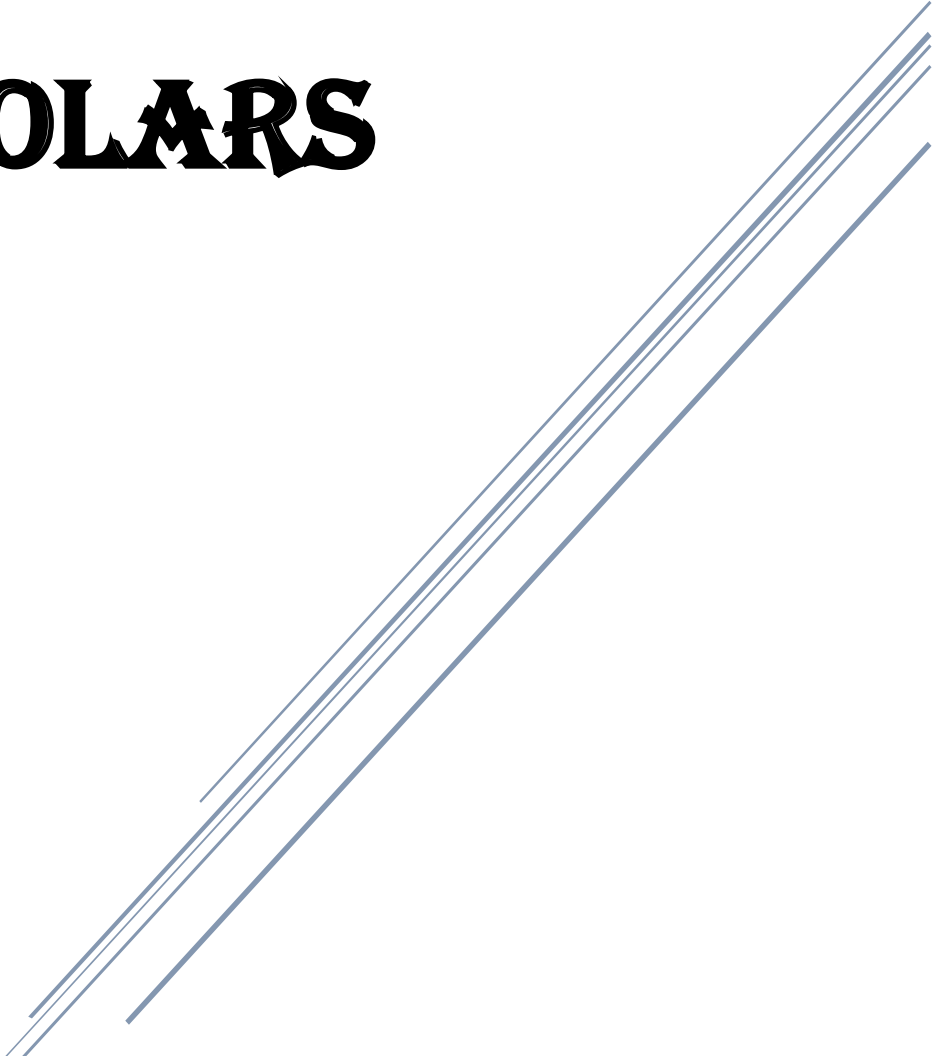
Reflection in the PGC evolved from free flow and set themes. We teased out the theoretical underpinnings of the research design. Videos and articles became springboards for discussion, alongside carefully considered set topics for pondering. We interrogated motivation, rewards culture, 'buy in', fear, change, vulnerability, disposition. We observed and disputed the origins and shifting loci of power. Time was prioritised for codesign and redesign. We noticed how we naturally defaulted to pupil learner over teacher learner topics, how we were habitually entrained in the 'how', not the 'why', how we were beginning to recognise and be amongst one another in an enhanced professional way, and how discussing our professional values truly stirred us on many levels. We discovered a new freedom from intrinsically and extrinsically imposed confinement and our perspective gradually transmuted. Process, design, and chemistry of the meetings contributed valuable data, where analysis was an embodied aspect of past, present and future.

2.3 In Conclusion

In conclusion, chapter two has provided an outline of the overarching SPN methodology chosen for research on the pedagogy

of the interior. It presented the rationale for subjective research of this nature and the hybrid methods of analyses employed, including RTA, crystallisation and self-study. It incorporated full explanation of the embedded *Pause to Ponder* research and the manner in which it was utilised to provide added rigor and validity. It portrayed how the overall research design complements research objectives and facilitates the fallibility, experimentation, embodied integrative participation necessary for the development of a skillset for critical thinking and transformation.

CHAPTER THREE: ENCOUNTER WITH SCHOLARS



*Pedagogy of the Interior:
Awakening Beauty through Encounter*

At the outset of this chapter, I wish to situate my worldview and personal philosophy amongst the foundational influences which have impacted my unfolding identity and personal awakening. To provide a backdrop, allow me to introduce the main scholars which have influenced my epistemology. Their ideologies afford a lens for the interpretation of the arc of my experiences. Firstly, Buber (1996) describes a manner of being that enriches identity, relationship and sense of belonging. Secondly, Burnham (2021) spotlights a universal dilemma and the need for change. His parody *Inside* (2021) provides a backdrop to the malaise of unconscious contemporary indoctrination. I will explore by means of his unique lens the ways in which humanity is perpetrating and escalating alienation from authentic self. Although it does not directly pertain to the educational landscape, it spotlights the universality of identity fragmentation and skewed values. I contend that thorough understanding of this dilemma is necessary for discussion on any human context. Thirdly, O' Donohue (2003) demonstrates the reveal of beauty as a portal to the pedagogy of the interior. Finally, Rosenberg (2015) teaches us to identify and meet our own needs through self-interrogation and dialogue.

Application of the combined philosophy of the scholars with my own evolving one yielded the imperative for the interior work. The pedagogy of the interior is the fruit of that labour and it is my responsibility to sustain the ensuing wellbeing and work-life harmony that it instils. Personal stories will interweave throughout this section, with interpretation unfolding from a 'show and tell' of experience as it relates to and explicates application of scholarship. These stories will be demarcated according to pedagogical phases, namely a 'Pause, Ponder and Wonder' story or 'A Story of I-Thou Transformation/Renewal.'

The concept of Beauty and its power to awaken arose from O' Donohue (2003) whose approach to encounter aligns with that of Buber (1996). While O' Donohue speaks to transcendence and unfolding self, Buber defines the spectrum of encounter that falls between the two poles of 'I-It' and 'I-Thou'. Our presence in the realm of the latter determines potential for self-actualisation. Rosenberg highlights the main barriers to 'I-Thou' and proposes a framework for nonviolent communication which informs the processes of understanding and negotiation of need in relationships.

All three approaches invoke reflection, consciousness and self-awareness as a foundational starting point. They recognise the need for intrinsic change to negotiate our position in a complicated unpredictable world and help us to not only to weather its storms, but to avail of its inherent teaching. It does not allude to building resilience 'against' undesirable forces, rather it is a wholehearted engagement and integration 'with' external forces from a grounded sense of self and community.

I have chosen to include in this section an unscholarly piece *Inside* (2021). In it, Burnham portrays the crisis of unconsciousness in the modern world and the manner in which he sees it escalating and being almost beyond our control. Indisputably, I could have used other excellent scholarly sources to describe this crisis that has tentacles probing into all worldly spheres including education. Instead, I decided to discuss *Inside* (2021), a musical parody, to stage the contemporary arena in which all educators, pupils and their parents play a part. To ignore context would be a foolhardy gap in our interrogation. The universal dilemma pertains to a sense of 'lostness' and alienation that is wrought by subliminal external influences in our lives and an unquestioning flow with the current

of capitalism and its exploitation of us. Burnham exposes the influences and trends that entrap and alienate us from self and others, the plight of disconnection in a world that boasts connectivity, the constant comparison that it induces, and our apathy and mindless conformity to it all.

3.1 'I-Thou' and 'I-It' Philosophy

3.1.1 Martin Buber

Buber was born in 1878 and died in 1965. He was a prolific writer, a theologian and political activist, and is best remembered for his philosophy, anthropology, and religious phenomenology. He is also remembered for his revival of Hasidism, which is not the remit of this research, but it speaks to his profound spirituality, the cornerstone of his philosophy.

It is maintained that Buber's most significant legacy to scholarship is encapsulated in his powerful book 'I and Thou'. His dialogical philosophy contained therein will be the focus of my 'conversation'. This philosophy of relationship and its relevance to education is timeless and far-reaching. His description of the distinction between relational quality and type is succinct and yet has layers of

depth. Personally, I have found it to be an excellent measure by which I can assess the quality of a moment in time: Am I present? Is this reciprocal? Have I respect?

‘I-Thou’ is sustained by continuous check-in and review. It is not to be acquired in a ‘done and dusted’ sense but is rather a state of continuous striving, negotiation, and renewal. Thus, it means that the power for inner peace and outer harmony lies within. It is a matter of perspective and a matter of respect of self, others, nature, and the Divine. Buber has greatly influenced philosophy of education and is as relevant in the present day as he was in the twentieth century.

3.1.2 Section Content

In this section I will outline Buber’s dialogical philosophy and relate it to the contemporary dilemma of spiritual bankruptcy, denied responsibility and universal unconsciousness, specifically as it manifests in the realm of education. I will present my interpretation of his concept of the ‘living-centre’ (Buber, 1996), as the leader who enacts and facilitates ‘I-Thou’ encounter in every facet of the local and wider community of education and how this can be applied in

my practice. Personal stories will weave in and out to explicate and situate my understanding and applied analysis of his philosophy.

3.1.3 'I-It'

Buber's philosophy is based on a relational approach to life. He believed that the 'I' of our reality only exists in relation to a 'You' or an 'It' for 'I' does not exist on its own. 'I' implies the presence of the other. How we encounter is paramount to our wellbeing. He purports there are two ways this happens. 'I-It' encounter is when we use the world to further our own cause. This way requires little or no participation and the self is viewed as apart from and different to others. There is no presence in 'I-It', nor is it situated in the present. Rather, it is rooted in either a clinging to the status quo of the past or a caprice-fueled future. The 'I-It' person does not accept life on life's terms of unexpected twists and turns, instead self-will and entitlement govern intention. Rights are paramount for the 'I' who sees responsibility as the remit of an 'It'. 'I-It' is a transactional mode for negotiating agenda. There is no growth for the fixed mindset and its ensuing struggle with unpredictability. There is only gratification in the instant, which is quickly replaced by fear of lack, and further seeking. The 'It' is a means to an end.

3.1.4 'I-Thou'

The 'I' who encounters 'Thou,' on the other hand, wholeheartedly enters into encounter, and sees themselves as part of an inter-relational dance that has no frontiers. "I-Thou" is reciprocal, present, open and expansive and "demands the soul's creative power" (Buber, 1996, p.60). It can be found in a relationship between teacher and pupil, who both learn, grow and self-actualise as a result of the encounter. He described this in terms of "fusion into a whole being" (Buber, 1996, p.62), accomplished through dialogue with all components. "'I' requires a 'You' to become" (Buber, 1996, p.62) and vice versa. Buber sees 'Thou' as three-fold, representing i) life with people (which includes self), ii) life with nature and iii) life with God (or spiritual life). It is unforced, unrushed and attentive.

Nonetheless, "every 'You' in the world is doomed by its nature to ...enter into thinghood again" (Buber, 1996, p.69).

When man lets the 'It' have its way, the relentlessly growing It-world grows over him like weeds, his own 'I' loses its actuality, until the incubus over him and the phantom inside

him exchange the whispered confession of their need for redemption (Buber, 1996, p.96).

The repetitive breakdown/ breakthrough mode of incubus and phantom is a familiar feeling, painful though emancipating. It is what I imagine metamorphosis in the pupa to feel like. Buber (1996) suggests that one must “disappear into the chrysalis of the ‘It’ in order to grow wings again” and subsequently, one’s “power to relate...surges up in a living flood and renews the world” (p148-149)

3.1.5 ‘Living-Centre’

Humanity has the tendency to rest on its laurels. We can, so easily, disintegrate into the ‘I-It’ if we are not vigilant. The role of leader is an example of the constant contest of ‘Thou’ and ‘It.’ The agendas of governing bodies, belonging to ‘It-world’, can challenge authenticity. Contextual relevance is paramount. Buber (1996) accepts the necessary order of the “machinery of economy” (p.97) so long as one is not confined by its ruling. One must step in and out of ‘It-world’ time and time again, but always back into the world of relation (1996, p.100). Hence, leaders should be perpetually centred and consistently conscious of community values and vision, first and foremost, before progressing the dictates of ‘It’. “When a

culture is no longer centred in a living and continually renewed relational process, it freezes into the 'It-world'" (Buber, 1996, p.103). The true 'Thou,' the "whole devoted being" (Buber, 1996, p.124) of the person, cannot be restricted by another as this comprises our spiritual realm. I propose, in other words, that it follows that self-identity is the grounding force, where the 'Thou' of self and divine is prioritised above identification with other.

Buber's concept of community expands interpretation of 'I-Thou' leadership. He advocates for true community that, in the first instance, has a single 'living centre', a leader who is i) in a reciprocal relationship with his or her people, and ii) facilitates reciprocity amongst individuals, and between them and their leader. This, in my view, is a prominent challenge for authentic leadership as it lies in the assumption that the true community, expecting democratic ideals of equity, inclusiveness and justice for all, will elect to step forward in brave vulnerability and enter the give and take of 'I-Thou'.

3.1.6 A Story of 'I-Thou' Renewal: COVID Keeps

Let me offer an example from my own community. At the end of COVID restrictions, our school community collaborated to compile a

document called 'COVID Keeps'. It listed all the beneficial changes of COVID schooling that we wished to retain as we returned to normal schooling. They mainly consisted of practices that afforded autonomy and minimal disruption to class routine. As a community, we enacted reciprocity and came to an agreement which was intended to be binding. As time wore on, the lure of external initiatives caused some staff members to sidestep away from agreed 'keeps'. Conflict arose and 'I-Thou' began to disintegrate. Differing opinions caused some staff members to become fixated in a stance rooted in a past agreement or a future cause. Drawing from established systems for professional dialogue, I used my position as 'living centre' to facilitate space, voice, audience and influence (Lundy, 2007) to optimise inclusive creative solutioning. In the process, individual stance gave way to a new collective position and an innovative pathway was woven that gave the green light to those who desired something new whilst, at the same time, maintaining the 'keeps' contract for those who did not. For the first time, we rejected the habitual whole school approach. The 'I-Thou' of creative possibility permeated old and new, and allowed both to cohabit within reestablished trust and autonomy.

3.1.7 Pause, Ponder and Wonder: Encounter and Confrontation

As I reflect now upon the unfolding trajectory of my leadership, I can see the differing quality of my encounters and their impact. At the beginning of the journey, I was eager to make my mark, to make a difference in the community, to upgrade physical aesthetics of the school, to enhance the culture of child-centredness and positive pupil-teacher-parent relationship, to be compliant and timely regarding administrative duties and to offer unquestioning conformity to the powers that be. In a way it mirrors the way I embraced other roles in my earlier life. As a child and adolescent, I wanted to be the best daughter/pupil/soccer player/cellist in the town so that my parents and teachers could be proud of me. As a wife, I yearned for the best relationship/nicest home/close friends/exciting adventures. As a mother, I aimed to nurture and care for my children. As a teacher, I endeavoured to ensure that my pupils would reach their highest happiest potential at the fullest mast possible. I could go on. It seems strange to me now that I just never considered how such an 'I-It' comparative perfectionist outlook was recipe for discontent and struggle.

I look back in full compassion at this younger me, driven by ego, constant comparison, rigid rules, fear of failure, unattainable standards and ruthless self-critique. Despite all goals reached, the bliss I sought could never be anything except just outside of my reach. I recall the 'I-Thou' encounters of my past: the rich spiritual dialogue with my father; the philosophical discussions with my mother; their nurturing of my evolving identity. I remember the poignancy of the 'make-up' following relational rows, and the kindness and connection within a vulnerable moment. Most of all, I value the awakenings and ensuing transformations in spite of the pain involved.

As a more mature version of the younger self described above, I still grapple with similar things, but there is a marked difference to my perspective and its subsequent impact on my inner peace. This is mainly due to the 'switching on' of consciousness, my deepening understanding of self and life, and my toolkit for sustaining an 'I-Thouness' which includes critical reflection, psychoeducation, nonviolent communication and restorative practice. I am more forgiving of the world for the complexity it throws up and am more inclined to see creative possibility within chaos. I am increasingly

more compassionate of self and other. I recognise the value of beauty and perceive its presence, even in error and imperfection. I value the growth that my encounters with experience, with other souls and with that power which is greater than I and that resides in me (whatever he or she should be called).

3.1.8 A Story of 'I-Thou' Renewal: Awakening to Encounter

In my novice years as principal, I presented an image of progressiveness and approachability and believed in those strongly held principles. I created systems and protocols for uniformity and consistency in relation to teaching and learning and the management of it all. School was run like clockwork. As time passed however, the systems became rigid and this self-same efficiency and uniformity began to rule decisions. It had begun to freeze into 'It-world' (Buber, 1996). Whilst relationships with pupils and parents thrived, I drifted away from my colleagues. There was distance and a dawning of separateness that did not sit well with me. Having established systems and channels to afford student and parent voice, I was met with the realisation that I was not as in touch with the teacher and the special needs assistant (SNA) perspective. The following outlines the beginnings of the trajectory of 'I-Thou'

encounter in the adult realm of school community, the trial and error, the refinements, the resistance to change and the progression of a new way inclusive participatory way of encountering.

I introduced the annual 'Stop Start and Continue' survey as a new strategy. It afforded a podium for staff opinion on school matters that should be stopped, started and continued. The renewal of our manner of encounter began, but it was not without 'teething' problems. On the first year of the survey, I was surprised at the surge of resistance that the survey aroused. A small number of colleagues even sought Union support, somehow interpreting my survey as an enforced infringement of their dignity. Later, they shared that they had felt unsafe about a new practice, put on the spot as it were. They were suspicious and wary of hidden agenda. At the time I remember thinking that these staff members, who were often most influential at staff meetings, felt concerned about potential competition from less experienced members of staff. I explained that my aim was enhancement of voice in a rapidly growing school where inclusivity was becoming a challenge. In the end, all staff chose to partake. However, their mistrust of my motives required my attention. Mistrust and fear of change belong

in 'It-World' whereas 'I-Thou', being a reciprocal elective process, requires the building, maintenance and/or repair of trust as it naturally weaves in and out of 'It'.

The survey, as anticipated, was enlightening and greatly beneficial for our team. I collated information and disseminated it to all, outlining immediate changes possible, what could be considered for the future, what was not possible and why. The next year there was no reluctance and it was adopted as a worthwhile annual practice. Later, I discerned that deeper encounter could be even more beneficial. The annual *Powwow with the P* (P for principal) was born, one which I aptly named 'powwow' as it refers to an informal conference or dialogue within community. It involved my scheduling of in-school individual meetings, once a year, with each staff member. Yet again, there was a modicum of discomfort about these new and formal meetings though less resistance this time due to stronger inter-relational trust. I was amused during our first roll out of *Powwow with the P* when one teacher joking piped at the end of the dialogue "*an bhfuil aon ceist as Gaeilge*" (is there any Irish question)? Although we found it funny, it nevertheless pointed to the underlying power differential that lurked beneath this cosy chat

of my assumption. All the same, the feedback was more appreciative than I could have anticipated.

The annual *Powwow with the P* was appreciated for many reasons.

i) As a dialogue, opinions and needs bounced back and forth. ii) It expanded creative possibility where often the unanticipated outcomes were the best part of it. iii) Teachers felt comfortable in the private space to divulge personal or professional stresses, which subsequently allowed me to offer extra support. iv) Common recurring themes such as time constraint, curriculum overload, behavioural challenges or teacher/parent tensions were aired.

These common issues could then be generalised and anonymously reflected back during staff meetings to reduce the stress born of isolation that besets us in educational work. v) It led to new preemptive and protective measures. vi) I discovered previously undivulged talents or unvoiced interest in leadership, which allowed for the release of additional autonomy and agency.

Much positive change evolved as a result of the 'I-Thou' encounter.

Faith and trust strengthened. Fun, empathy and courage were part of it also. But as time wore on, I could see how potential for collective creativity could be further optimised within group

dialogue. Furthermore, I yearned to reduce power differential, enhance democratic principles and somewhat relinquish my leader role by participating as one of a team. In chapter eight, I will outline new insights relating to power differential and enactment of democracy in group powwows. During the COVID pandemic we tried different group formats. We had committee meetings, class level meetings, SNA meetings and new group level powwows, which comprised of groupings of two class level teams such as the fifth and sixth class teachers and their special education teacher (SET), the third and fourth group team, and so on. Professional dialogue grew rich and illuminating in this latter configuration of encounter. Group level conversations, as a larger collective, afforded a broader range of perspectives which in turn led to expanded understanding, stronger relational bonds and further positive change. All meetings were very worthwhile and then complexity offered up a lesson.

A group level meeting was scheduled one Wednesday. One class level, riding high on the vibe of their friendly collaborative working relationship, wafted lyrical about their successes, learning curves and planning. They were an exceptionally cohesive group. Early on, I noticed that the other class level team was more reserved.

Conversation with them felt forced and their answers somewhat contrived. I was unable to put my finger on it. Later that evening I had a phone call from one of this class level team. Grace informed me that she was ringing on behalf of two of her three class level colleagues to let me know that they were all upset after the meeting. They felt that they had been ambushed and highlighted. I admit that my response could have been better at six thirty on a Thursday evening as I sat digesting my dinner and the daily COVID count. I myself felt ambushed by the unexpected bomb. Hurt and confused, I requested an explanation of the specific nature of my mistake, but nothing substantial or clarifying was forthcoming. We danced in an unproductive circle for a short while Grace, unprepared for specifics, could only apportion responsibility for people's feelings upon me. She was not able to tell me what I had said or did that had caused offence. I became frustrated. In truth, I was angry and shocked. Of course, what would have been a better course of action would have been for me to have refrained from a futile phone discussion in the first place and save it for the meeting which was promptly scheduled for the following day. I lost a night's sleep. The situation worsened.

Looking back, I can see that my approach to our next encounter was 'It' oriented. I used my power and forced reluctant colleagues to the table. My disposition was unempathetic. So much for my powwow ideals. The class teachers, no doubt, felt cornered and, in a complete turnaround, had decided to deflect blame from me and onto the unsuspecting SET, Mike. Mike was unpopular with this team due to a perceived evaluations of others. One class teacher, Sarah, appeared to be truly angry. She complained about Mike's judgmental remarks and was scathing and personal in her account. Interestingly, to the best of my knowledge, Sarah had been the only class teacher who had veered from the agreed school plan for COVID online teaching and I had already helped her negotiate two parent complaints at that stage.

For a second time, I found myself completely taken unawares. Inadvertently, her condemnation of Mike was lengthier than it should have. I was disappointed with myself for having allowed it to proceed. Grace and the other class teachers remained silent for the meeting. I empathised with Mike, whose lonely stance against their collective was as unjust as the tone of the dialogue. Nothing was resolved at the meeting apart from a collective agreement toward

courteous communication henceforth. Later, I made a cup of tea for Mike, who stoically refused to make more of the matter, saying that true colours would always win out and he was right, though it was a lonely burden for him to carry for the brief remainder of the year.

Days later, Sarah expressed her shame regarding her demeanor. She was eager for me to know that she was 'not that kind of person'. To my knowledge there was no remorse shown to Mike and there was none shown to me for the confusing intrusive accusatory evening phone call. There were many unexpressed sides to this story and on a rare occasion, 'the less said the soonest mended' applies. What follows is my interpretation of what happened and I am aware that it may not be an accurate summation. I surmise that one class team felt intimidated by the glorious teamwork of the other, assumed that the SET, Mike, had spilled the beans about the noncompliance of Sarah regarding the school online learning plan and thus highlighted, blame was creatively and convincingly transferred in an act of denied responsibility. As I said, I do not have all the facts at hand and cannot attest to the validity of my one-sided perspective.

Restoration of relationships is a voluntary process. The most challenging times in my professional and personal life have been,

without doubt, when restorative dialogue was denied and inner peace and harmony suspended. 'I-Thou' cannot be enforced and then inner grounding must be reset from deep inside. In this situation, relations reverted to professional and cordial. Agreed rules for professional engagement arose from the learning, which were collaboratively compiled as part of this research, when we saw community dialogue progressing, this time incorporating multi-perspective critical reflection and additional protective aspects. Safe encounter is paramount. I will elaborate more in chapter six.

In preparation for meetings now, I employ the three E's of fair process which incorporates: i) Explanation, where agenda is fully demarcated; ii) Expectation, where clarity of professional standards and courteous and restorative language is explicit; and ii) full Engagement implied (Chan Kim and Mauborgne, 1998). This group level powwow was one of my best learning moments. Resistance to change is one of the biggest barriers for leaders to manage, so too are the tricky emotions of shame and anger, which are explored in detail later. We must weave in and out of 'It' to manoeuvre innovative 'Thou' in our community, whilst remaining centred in 'I'.

Reflective and restorative practice are crucial for inner peace and harmony and it can be found in encounter of 'I-Thou'.

Restoration is sometimes unavailable in direct confrontation of the issue. For example, it has been my experience that ideals of democracy are lofty and intangible when negotiated theoretically instead of practically. I recall the principle on which the 'Men's Shed' Movement in Ireland is run (Kelly et al., 2021). Ideals are embodied in a 'shoulder to shoulder' approach and wellbeing theory is diverted to task, indirectly negotiated and temporally assumed. This same playout of living theory was enacted in *Pause to Ponder* where we discovered that democracy and consciousness, as concepts, were not so palatable as topics for dialogue and yet easily and organically embodied through the indirect channel of picture-book talk amongst staff and pupils in the classroom. We discovered that the abstract is often more aptly digested indirectly and practically.

Yet another example of this can be found when choosing topics for restorative circles. Themes best arise organically from real life opportunities as opposed to arising from workbooks. It is more protective to tackle the issue indirectly through the storytelling

approach, which lessens direct confrontation or potential highlighting of individuals in the handling of tense issues. I have found that it allows for distancing through negotiation of parallels and depersonalises the situation making subjective understanding possible through objective observation. It weakens barriers and opens elective participation. It expands perspective and a world of infinite interpretation and learning opens. Compassion and empathy enter the equation and 'I-Thou' becomes re-instated. Both these examples describe the leader as 'living centre' of dialogic systems. The 'living centre' is attentive to needs, is intuitive about timing and readiness, and above all facilitates safety and trust for vulnerable 'I-Thou' spaces.

3.2 'Inside': The Universal Dilemma

3.2.1 Bo Burnham

Burnham was born in 1990 and started his career as a comedian at the age of sixteen on YouTube. He pioneered the type of viral internet culture that he now condemns in *Inside* (2021). The success bestowed on him by followers, who like his younger self were also

becoming imprisoned within the liminal virtual world of online culture, launched his highly successful career in the outside. The concept of fame and power imbued by followers is insightfully expressed and fully comprehended by sixth-class pupils, which we will see in chapter six. Burnham's fame and wealth catapulted. But in a karmic twist of fate, due to performance anxiety and panic attacks on one of his tours, he found himself trapped again on the inside, where he retreated for recovery and renewal. The lockdown of COVID coincided and co-contributed to his creation of *Inside* (2021), where he found himself ensconced in an inside virtual world. The cross he bears and symbolically depicts in many of the musical numbers in the show demonstrates his retrospective remorse for enhancing the internet world whilst also provoking an overly woke cancel culture and its fickle followers. In the song 'Problematic' (2021), he sings: "Father, please forgive me" and "Isn't anybody gonna hold me accountable?" In the *Inside* special he finds himself yet again unscrupulously feeding "content" to COVID lockdown hordes. In the introductory song 'Content' (2021), he darkly cajoles: "Daddy made you your favourite, open wide". This time round however, his intention is to awaken consciousness and

emancipate. The religious connotation inherent in the recurrent symbolism of the cross satirises a pervasive saviour complex interwoven throughout as it calls for universal redemption and rescue from unconscious entrapment.

I do not moot Burnham as academic. I argue instead for an intellectualisation of non-academic and a broadening of the spectrum of pertinent modern-day influences, and as such, a scholarship earthed within contemporary lore. This has deepened my understanding of the dilemma I research in a way that is succinct and entertaining. Moreover, my agenda for broader accessibility and resonance in the SPN opens the door to relevant lore and the use of alternative medias for insightful and thought-provoking encounter.

3.2.2 Section Content

It has been a challenge to articulate the potency of *Inside* (2021) and its relevance to my research. I wondered if it was appropriate, if it would shock or repulse. I fretted that I would be unable to do justice to it or to my connection with it. In the end, my 'public intellectual' (Bradley and Nash, 2011) won out and the intellect of the heart and gut ruled my head. *Inside* (2021) resonated. It called

for attention. The context was relevant in a profound and disturbing way for I believe it exposes the context of the contemporary world and the slow poisoning and sedation of humanity. Parody on the surface layer is funny and irreverent, but as you dig deeper, the truth disturbs, lingers and alters. I now see traces of Burnham's world in day-to-day life. It prompts consciousness, grounding and renewal of 'I-Thou'. I am now cognisant of the underworld and its stranglehold. The altered perspective affords me new understanding. I struggle to disentangle the intellect of *Inside* from my admiration of it as a standalone work of dramatic musical comedic art. It made me laugh and cry, it filled me with foreboding and compassion, it evoked dissonance and awakening, which is the point of art and of beauty, as O' Donohue's (2003) philosophy conveys.

Much has been written in the tabloids about this musical film; good and bad. It has won many awards: *Emmy Awards for Outstanding Directing for a Variety Special; Outstanding Music Direction and Outstanding Writing*; a *Peabody Award*, and the *Grammy Award for Best Song Written for Visual Media* for 'All Eyes on Me'. It has had phenomenal exposure on platforms such as Netflix, TikTok, YouTube

and Spotify, to name a few. Critics, themselves, have struggled to agree on its genre and style. There has been much debate. Is it a musical? Is it even comedy? Is it a depiction of mental breakdown? Is it a prophecy of an apocalyptic world ending? Is it too outrageous, too subjective, too universal, too scary, too irreverent, too offensive, too confusing? Or is it, in fact, just a little too close to the bone? To dwell on these details is to miss the point, which is all in the title.

3.2.3 Awakening Consciousness

Inside (2021) depicts the inner life of Burnham and the influences that corrupt it. It is essentially a musical comic special, told through a series of sketches, intercepted by online brand advertising common to online context and simulated by Burnham where he exposes its absurdity. In contrast, there are also sporadic raw self-reflective moments where he reveals mental deterioration. In *Inside*, we witness a subjective exposé of Burnham, sole character, writer, musician and filmmaker of the piece that was self-directed and self-recorded in the lockdown of the COVID pandemic. I suggest that in the reveal of his insides, we inadvertently uncover our own. He mirrors an unsettling image of our familiar world laid bare and

empty, and of our mindless encounter with it. I am certain that *Inside*, as both a work of art and a shrewd critique of society, has its place in the discussion of encounter and beauty. It situates the issues of self-alienation, unconsciousness, mental and spiritual deterioration, to which Buber (1996) and O' Donohue (2003) refer. It calls for intrinsic change to counteract the existential crisis of 'It-world' affecting contemporary generations. It is current and universally relevant. We are all directly or indirectly impacted by Burnham world, the world of 'I-It.' Whether we be pupil, teacher, parent or leader, our school context sits within this larger context and it is therefore integral to our understanding of the people in our own community. It highlights the imperative for critical thinking to be embraced as a curricular priority and a complement to the ever-expanding digital spaces in education.

3.2.4 Inside as Art

Inside (2021) uncovers a multi-layered crisis of humanity, as Burnham experiences it, through paradox, parody and understatement. Spelling out nothing, he allows us to arrive at our own conclusions after the first taste of the icing of good lyrics, catchy tunes and lots of laughs. Like all good art, it needs revisiting

and reflexivity to allow the heart of the matter, and our interpretation of it, to surface. In the year that it took to complete, Burnham was meticulous about lighting, sound, backdrop and effects, all of which contribute to theme. *Inside*, in my opinion, is a taste of O' Donohue's (2003) beauty, which is not all nice loveliness and I concede that beauty will always reside in the eye of the beholder. Nevertheless, *Inside* incorporates components that coalesce to comprise the calling of beauty. When we are captivated by the beauty of the 'I-Thou', the pedagogy of the interior is available to us in the pause, ponder, wonder, and I-Thou encounter with it. *Inside* (2021) captivated me thus and the learning vibrates still.

Burnham laments the state of the world as well as his own state of mental health, a recurrent motif throughout. *Inside* illustrates a world of 'I-It' encounter, fake persona, loss of self, and deep existential dread. It is unclear if Burnham is a villain or victim. Assumably, he is both. At times he is grandiose and condescending, with notes of a satirical saviour complex. At other times, he is a confessing, self-flagellating penitent. He embodies the light, the dark and the conflictual conscience of a Dostoyevskian character. He

depicts a world in a state of decomposition that is physical, mental and spiritual, and berates humanity for the “flattening of the entire subjective human experience” (Burnham, 2021).

3.2.5 Significance of Title

The title contains multiple meanings. It alludes to i) the ‘insideness’ of Covid Lockdown; ii) the trajectory of a comedic career that began inside (Youtube), travelled outside and reverted back again to the inside (due to agoraphobia); and iii) the expanding virtual inside world generated by accelerating internet usage and device dependency. Interestingly, according to Wikipedia, Jeffrey Bezos, founder of Amazon, saw his fortune grow by \$24 billion during the COVID pandemic, though I cannot attest to the accuracy of this. All the same, the trace of lockdown and of internet-driven opportunists can be seen in our new deeply rooted online habits and in the pockets of those who influence and manipulate. The common catchphrase ‘stay connected’ diminishes the meaning of connection and in fact is camouflaging the existential crisis of disconnection. The theme of disconnect from self and other surfaces again in the portrait, ‘Locked Inside my Head’, drawn by Jack, whose story is told in chapter six. Burnham creates different sketches in his work to

cumulatively explore the endless loop of 'I-It' encounter and disconnect within digital spaces. We find ourselves questioning loci of power and control, all the while sensing the malevolence and subversive intent that presides and interweaves all of the sketches. I have chosen a few examples from *Inside* to elucidate what I mean.

3.2.6 Song: *Welcome to the Internet*

In the song 'Welcome to the Internet', a pandemic of unconsciousness is conveyed in the quickfire lyrical long list of unfiltered indiscriminate good, bad and ugly. The malevolence does not belong solely to the realm of 'other.' It is something that is also growing from within, obliterating and overpowering the world. The vaudevillian genre of the music portrays a grotesque and accelerating kaleidoscope of images that spew forth into a macabre whirlpool of chaos. Burnham infers that infinite, a la carte, manic gluttony and omnipresent amorality are always "waiting for you".

Welcome to the internet

What would you prefer?

Would you like to fight for civil rights or tweet a racial slur?

Be happy

Be horny

Be bursting with rage

We got a million different ways to engage. (Burnham, 2021)

The song pauses abruptly at the peak of the allegro tempo and enters an andante indulgent bridge which lovingly recalls the first stirrings of the internet personified. It progresses from the expectant “waiting” for its arrival to the early years of “insatiable” learning when “Mommy let you use her IPAD/You were barely two,” (Burnham, 2021) to the fully grown god it becomes. Adulation is reflected in the loving address:

Look at you, oh look at you,

You, you,

Unstoppable

Watchable

Your time is now.

Your insides out.

Honey, how you grew.

And if we stick together

Who knows what we'll do?

It was always the plan

To put the world in your hand (Burnham, 2021)

Burnham insinuates that we are accountable for the birth and nurture of the monster of our own demise. He suggests that we are accountable for ongoing willful blindness to our oncoming annihilation. Our apathy to the horror of this is reflected in the change back to the original up-tempo of the revolving pleasure-palace carnival of the song which concludes with a repetitive echo “Apathy’s a tragedy/And boredom is a crime” (Burnham, 2021),

3.2.7 Song: *White Girl Instagram*

In ‘White Girl Instagram’ he pokes fun at social media, but there is an underlying sad emptiness. In the midstream of his enacted Instagram picture roll of his ‘white girl’ world, there is a brief authentic encounter, a post to a departed mum. It comes as a shock in the otherwise very funny satire. The unexpected vulnerability, glimpsed in the intense loss, beats a different timbre than all preceding posturing and posing. As understated as it is unanticipated, the memory of raw grief and loss sits amidst the flood of replicated unreality. Sense of loss vibrates the heartstrings in a thrum that lingers long after the song finishes. Burnham is

adept at the knack of concealing beauty in the rubble of fakery. But, like a diamond in the dustheap, almost overlooked, it always beckons and confronts on an unknown level, just like the nagging memory of Tan's *Lost Thing* (2000) as we will see. Similarly, in the upbeat 'Sexting' number, where he refers to sexting as "the next best thing" (Burnham, 2021), a sense of empty isolation and entrapment is present again. In it, he ridicules the online dating scene whilst highlighting the somber cultural shift toward sexual gratification, degradation of relationship and its virtual replacement.

3.2.8 Song: *That Funny Feeling*

'That Funny Feeling' is a singalong list of unrelated references to rich, famous, ordinary and extraordinary, that puts one in mind of a bunch of fragmented headline clippings scattered sporadically across a table. Set against an acoustic and visual backdrop of crickets, woodland and crackling campfire, its soothing tones bely the gravity of the pull of 'that funny feeling' which I believe pertains to the persistent calling of his alienated lost soul. It also may pertain to other themes explored in the overall piece, such as depression or depersonalisation (a robot-like feeling of numbness or distortion

that gives the sense of being an outside observer of self), derealisation (a feeling of alienation, distortion and disassociation from the world), or a sense of an apocalyptic end of the world, reflected in the lines “The whole world at your fingertips/ The ocean at your door” (Burnham, 2021). Alternatively, it may be simply about COVID blues. He never quite puts his finger on what the feeling is, despite a recurring: “There it is again/That funny feeling/That funny feeling” (Burnham, 2021). Burnham enacts depersonalisation throughout the special, interjecting real life snippets portraying a detached Burnham viewing his performances as if he is watching someone else. Derealisation is also enacted throughout in the recurring juxtaposition of dire and mundane. As a society, we have normalised abnormal and desensitised atrocity. Examples in this song include “A giftshop at the gun range/A mass shooting at the mall” and “The quiet comprehending/Of the ending of it all” (Burnham, 2021).

3.2.9 Song: All Eyes on Me

Buber spoke of a portal to redemption that opens within the depths of despair. Stirrings of consciousness offer the option for a new way of being. Thus, there is potential beauty in breakdown. At the

climax of Burnham's narrative arc, he collapses into sobs in a prelude to his Grammy award winning "All Eyes on Me." In it, tension is palpable between the cheering audience and his raw emotional reassurance.

It's almost over. It's just begun.

Don't overthink this. Look in my eye.

Don't be scared. Don't be shy.

Come on in. The water's fine. (Burnham, 2021).

He demands adoration from faithful followers as he leads them forward, asking for their prayers. Perhaps he is reminding them that, regardless of global change, spiritual death has already occurred from our submergence in the pollution of rising content:

You say the ocean's rising like a give a shit.

You say the whole world's ending, honey, it already did.

You're not gonna slow it, heaven knows you tried.

Got it? Good, now get inside.

We're goin' to go where everybody knows everybody,

Knows everybody, oh,

We're goin' to go where everybody knows everybody,

Knows... (Burnham, 2021).

Perhaps he is asking them to follow him to a new way of conscious knowing. There is a sense of yearning for a promised land of real encounter and not the false virtual kind outlined by him up to this point. Now having awoken, he wants to make amends for the part he has played as well as heal his harmed soul by following his calling. Another interpretation of this song might suggest that, at the climax of cognitive dissonance, he has completely surrendered to the madness of reality. Personally speaking, this song has always evoked hope for me and has pointed to Buber resurrection, made possible through critical consciousness and 'I-Thou' connection.

3.2.10 In Conclusion

At any rate, as both Buber and O' Donohue attest, encounter with art is a reciprocal one: "as he beholds what confronts him, the form discloses itself to the artist" (Buber, 1996, p.91). Thus, meaning surfaces in the 'in-betweenness.' Interpretation is a subjective act and transformation is dependent on the quality of the encounter. Certainly, the surreal atmospheric dichotomy of 'All Eyes on Me' has resonated with countless. Moreover, *Inside* has instigated pause,

ponder, wonder and has expanded my consciousness to the stuffing of life that I had previously unquestioningly accepted due to busyness and lack of “botheredness” (Dix, 2017, p.37).

It is important to note that presentation of lyrics as an explication of *Inside* is insubstantial and limited, an insufficient 2D representation of a multi-dimensional vista. Lyrics are only a part of the evolving message. Immersion in the film and in the music is imperative. A taste of the icing of the ‘cake’ enticed me to watch and listen, over and over again, as each time revealed deeper layers and profound significance. It changed my perspective and my own inside.

3.3 ‘Awakening Concealed Beauty’

3.3.1 John O’ Donohue

O’ Donohue is an internationally renowned modern-day mystic. Born in 1956, to a farming background in Burren, County Clare, the influential vista of the wild landscape and changeable climate contributed to his understanding of the dichotomy and contradictions of the soul and the complex beauty of the world. He published his first book, *Anam Cara* in 1997, when it became an

international bestseller. Many books followed, including *Beauty: The Invisible Embrace* (2003), which is a main influence in this research. O' Donohue died in 2007, but his legacy lives on. He was a scholar of English literature, theology, philosophy and mysticism. He was profoundly influenced by German philosopher, Hegel, and 13th century mystic, Meister Eckhart, reflected respectively in his doctoral and postdoctoral work. O' Donohue was ordained a priest in 1982 and subsequently left in 2000 to follow a new calling and another kind of spiritual ministry.

3.3.2 Section Content

In the second chapter of his career, alongside being a writer and a poet, he became a social justice advocate and a leadership consultant. His vision for leadership was a style that integrated soul, beauty and creativity in the workplace and hence, his philosophy is profoundly significant to my research. Indeed, the pedagogy of the interior is a term that I attribute to his ethos. It arose from his belief that the wealth of the interior is increasingly forgotten, neglected and untapped. O' Donohue's work spoke to a lifelong journey of unfolding consciousness, of coming into personhood and of relationship to other. He sensed that humanity hungered for

belonging and spiritual nourishment and that beauty could provide this needed sustenance. His teachings and those of Buber converge in ideology and also in their joint reverence and faithfulness to nature and Divine. O' Donohue's lyrically beautiful vista is in stark contrast to Burnhams', though I am sure he would claim *Inside* (Burnham, 2021) a beauty and an awakener, just the same. This section affords an outline of his philosophy alongside personal stories whose aim is to explicate real life application of his ideology.

3.3.3 O' Donohue's Beauty

O' Donohue (2003) asserts that we feel most alive in the presence of beauty, that it executes a kind of 'quickenings' (p.14) in which "we awaken and surrender in the same act" (p.12). He sees beauty as a calling to the inner life, a homecoming to self, a sense of grounding and of belonging to the world. The narrative of O' Donohue is itself beautiful. When digested slowly, experience of his script effects an encounter which is transporting. His descriptions are sensual, evocative, and spiritual. His language extends invitation to the soul to step out of busyness and into the vista of his beauty in nature, the elements, arts and the divine. He imbues the mundane with a vibrancy and we bear witness to the deeper layers of his

experiencing. He calls for stillness and conscious presence in preparation for approach. He describes the web of betweenness inherent in encounter, where “objective attention to unfolding other and the subjective experience of our altering self” (O’ Donohue, 2003, p.34) takes place. O’ Donohue instils fresh meaning in archaic words usually associated with religion and ritual, words that have lost their essence in common speech but resonate and complement the discussion about beauty. He refers to beauty as a portal to the “dignity, grandeur and grace of the spirit (O’ Donohue, 2003, p.25)” a “profound illumination of presence” (O’ Donohue, 2003, p.33). He calls for a ‘reverence’ in the approach to ‘communion’ with ‘divine’ and a recognition of the ‘sacredness’ of encounter (O’ Donohue, 2003). God is the ultimate encounter for both Buber and O’ Donohue.

3.3.4 Pause, Ponder and Wonder: On God

Buber and O’ Donohue divide encounter into categories. Buber’s ‘I-Thou’ encounters others, nature and the divine. O’ Donohue’s encountering of beauty is the infinite seeing of it in others, in nature, the arts, imagination, imperfection, the ordinary, and the divine. Both refer to the ‘Itness’ of ego and the block it presents to

true encounter. They propose an encounter with divine as a reverent ultimate whole embodied communion with God. Relationship with God is a complex personal and private construct. It is a tricky testy topic, but a necessary component of the discussion. I do not wish to delve into a theological debate, and certainly do not consider myself accomplished to do so. Speaking for myself, my own personal spirituality has evolved and deepened on a cycle involving certainty and uncertainty, knowing and unknowing. I see faith as an ongoing process of meaning making, alongside our life's obligation to the enhancement and refinement of identity and purpose. I see both as interconnected, interdependent and one.

The image of God has been diminished, tainted, and thwarted. Religions have competed for the one true God for centuries and one might say they have fallen short by their human standards and limitations. O' Donohue (2003) attests that the old-fashioned notion of God "as a tabloid, moral accountant, peering into the regions of one's intimate life (p.150)" has damaged perception of the divine. Contemporary God is often taboo or irrelevant. As an 'I-Thou' entity, it cannot be contained at any rate. Some may recoil from the topic

of 'God' or the language of spirituality due to negative associations and yet, crises of identity are regularly and rightly connected to spiritual bankruptcy. *The Lost Thing*, (Tan, 2000) was apt in the discussion in the *Pause to Ponder* research in chapter six. Our search for the 'lost thing', be it conscious or subconscious, material or spiritual, invokes either a clinging to past or a seeking in future, when our yearning for return of its presence pertains to the present. Whether the 'lost thing' is sense of self, sense of belonging, sense of purpose or sense of divine, it is irrelevant for it is all of the same sense.

Therefore, encounter with God, the higher power of our own understanding, is vital no matter what way we define him, her, or it. Eckhart Tolle (1997), an internationally renowned spiritual writer and speaker, refers to an interior witnessing presence, the essence of our deeper divine self. It aligns with the inner vibrations of self-awakening that beauty sets in thrum and the entering into presence. Tolle (1997) sees self as a dichotomy of witnessing presence and egoic mind. Presence becomes witness to the ebb and flow of egoic dominance and constant comparison, an inevitable part of being. Burnham enacts this witnessing of self in

Inside (2021) in the motif of self-observation that interweaves throughout. Is the derealisation, to which Burnham refers, an enactment of Tolle's (1997) witnessing presence, a detachment of true self from egoistic 'It' self and not a mental disorder?

Presence is a grounded deep knowing and inner peace. According to Tolle (1997), for ego to be recognised, awareness of presence needs to be awakened so that it no longer dominates, and we no longer rely upon its scripts that endeavour to run riot or rule. Buber (1996) refers to the spaces where 'I' becomes itself an 'It' and identity is lost in 'Itness', encapsulated so well by Burnham. Buber and Tolle, both make a case for vigilance, self-consciousness and the subjectivity that offers real truth. Through encounter with self, we are liberated from the constant comparison that confuses identity with image, and purpose with trend. And thus, I propose that we view inner presence and divine presence as one and the same, so that a construct of divine, as an extension of self and vice versa, may become more palatable and more universal for the purposes of this research just as O' Donohue (2003) refers to "the divine strain in us" (p.150). Henceforth therefore, as I refer to an interior 'I-Thou,' I imply the 'Thou' which integrates self and the divine. As I

refer to identity, I imply awareness of self and purpose that comes from the inner source and spiritual amalgam of self and divine. And as I refer to identification, I imply awareness of a whole-embodied integrative and inclusive divine strain in humanity.

3.3.5 Transcendence

O' Donohue (2003) articulates beauty's elemental position in the attainment of transcendence. His understanding of transcendence comprises five elements. i) "Being" is the essential part of the "substance of the world and all the things in it". ii) Oneness is an "all-embracing unity...despite all the differences in us, around us and between us". iii) "Goodness" is the calling of our soul towards justice. iv) "Trueness" is the alignment of self with endeavour and encounter. v) "Beautiful" is the awakener of consciousness (O' Donohue, 2003, p.55). O' Donohue's description of transcendence aligns with Buber's concept of 'I-Thou encounter, which speaks to presence, fusion, reciprocity, and actuality. O' Donohue's construct of beauty illuminates the pathway of actuality. As Buber defines 'I-Thou', he advocates consciousness and encounter as an approach to renewal and redemption. O' Donohue then takes up the baton and finishes the cycle by proposing beauty as a portal to 'I-Thou' and

the pathway to consciousness, whence the origin of my subtitle, *Awakening Beauty through Encounter*, as it was birthed from the two great masters:

When we approach with reverence great things decide to approach us. Our real life comes to the surface and its light awakens the concealed beauty in things. When we walk on the earth with reverence, beauty will decide to trust us. The rushed heart and the arrogant mind lack the gentleness and patience to enter that embrace. Beauty is mysterious, a slow presence who waits for the ready, expectant heart. When the heart becomes attuned to her restrained glimmerings, it learns to recognise her intimations more frequently in places it would never have lingered before (O' Donohue, 2003 p.34).

3.3.6 Purpose of Beauty

Up to now, I have never taken the time to contemplate the purpose of beauty, why we are unconsciously drawn to it, obsessed with replicating it, recording it, possessing it. O' Donohue (2003) avers that beauty, as a construct, has become impoverished, associated with glamour, in a contemporary society addicted to image. He believes that, in our attempt to possess it, we have corrupted its essence, its potential lessened or lost (O' Donohue, 2003, p.59). We

cling to its passing and seek to capture it for the future, like the 'snap-happy' tourist whose efforts to capture the memory of the past causes him to miss the present moment. The beauty to which O' Donohue subscribes is a fully embodied immediate encounter where its pure presence quickens the deeper self and the fusion of wholeness, to which Buber alluded, occurs. It is an intercourse of mind, heart, soul, senses with the experience of it all. It reminds me of the music at the crossroads, an old-fashioned Irish tradition of our forebearers. Along the highways and byways, in full blown anticipation and careful preparation, the young and the old converged at the intersection of the roads, bearing their instruments and refreshments for the outdoor 'craic' (fun) and 'céilí' (dance). In the communal space, belonging and encounter fused in the beauty of the dance, the music and the joyful human togetherness, instigating transcendence from the ordinary. O' Donohue attests to the bounty of beauty located in the ordinary, if only our hearts are receptive to it.

3.3.7 Pause, Ponder and Wonder: A Morning Reverie

I have ignored the presence of beauty on my Camino journeys. Sometimes, I would walk for days, locked inside my head,

untouched by beauty's awaiting presence. On other days, I found I was completely consumed in it, awakening and surrendering to its majesty. For instance, this morning, as I sat at my desk overlooking my garden, I gazed out the window and saw only my own thoughts about beauty reflected, until I remembered to wholeheartedly enter into the awaiting presence when all of a sudden, the garden unveiled itself. I saw at once the way sunlight cast shadows on the grass, the endless hues of green, three blackbirds and their staccato pecking for nibbles in the glistening dewy earth. I was both lost and found and renewed from encounter with ordinary. My soul responded with joy and I felt the stirring of O' Donohue transcendence. Even my writing responded to the encounter, flowing in an attentive descriptive way. But in an instant, my focus reorientated to task and the 'It' world intruded. I now saw only a hedge that needed trimming, a car that should be washed, lamenting the scattering of windswept cherry tree blossoms on the lawn. Aesthetics, a borrowed concept of what beautiful should look like, became a future oriented measure of comparison. Society has trained me to covet the happier 'some-where-elseness' vista of perfection. No doubt artificial intelligence, were it consulted, would

supply endless suggestions and advertisements for products or services, and hoodwink the unconscious with a fallacy of future satisfaction.

The purpose of beauty, according to O' Donohue, is to afford disturbance of the habitual and opportunity to reconnect with our inner realm. It opens up healing, instantiates verve and restores sense of identity, which he avers is the duty of our life. It quietens the noise of detail that ambushes the mind and grounds us in our values and personal purpose. More than ever, as Burnham attests to the rising sea of content which threatens to overwhelm and obliterate, it is essential that we make space for beauty in our lives. Passion and energy leak from us as a result of "robot like habits of predictability, repetition and function" (O' Donohue, 2003, p.61) and because of the envy that is induced by constant comparison. Each individual, according to tastes, may embrace their own palate of beauty. Beauty is located upon the highest peak and within the tiniest act of kindness. Some will locate it by getting lost in the oneness of dance in a crowded festival tent and others inside the exquisite lines of poem. In this research I will make the claim that

beauty and encounter are the function of the arts and of human connection.

3.3.8 Reciprocity within Nature

O' Donohue (2003) describes the frailty and uncertainty of nature's beauty. The vista of nature is ever changing, influenced by time, cellular growth, light, and the elements of climate. Furthermore, all things belong to the cycles of life, like birth and death, day and night, inhale and exhale. Everything is in a continual process of renewal and therefore in a perpetual state of altering as a result. Self is affected similarly. Our own moods, the functioning capacity of our senses, our physical wellbeing and our emotional levels all contribute to the chemistry. Beauty requires a beholder for encounter and our experience of encounter is dependent on variables affecting disposition and readiness. We move wholeheartedly towards the experience as it moves towards us, and the encounter is a combination of the variables that coalesce in the one moment. O' Donohue teaches us to recognise reciprocity as a simultaneous dual approach towards other.

Whether beauty be the happenstance of a moment in nature or the arts, it introduces its presence and leans forward in invitation to

encounter. I attest that anything which calls for attention and motivates pause, ponder, and wonder, encompasses beauty. Our interpretation, being subjective and individual, makes each encounter unique and valid. Even the artist does not own interpretation, though he may own his art. I believe that the beholder maketh the master. Tan (2015) reflects his personal point of view in relation to encounter between art and audience. He explains that his readers' interpretation of his work awakens his own deeper understanding of it. I will expand upon this important concept in chapter six. Meaning evolves. Humility, fallibility, and the endless imaginative possibilities of the beholder all play their part. A reading of a piece might reveal one meaning one day, and alternative meaning on another. Meaning, though subjective, can be the result of solo or collective interpretation. I aver that many heads are better than one for the redefining and fine-tuning of personal meaning and that one does not need to be a connoisseur to have an illuminating contribution.

3.3.9 Teannalach

O Donohue (2003) tells a story about *teannalach*, a colloquial word for awareness, which is "about seven layers deeper than

awareness” (p.141) He defines it as the capacity for a profound attentiveness that can pierce through the surface that conceals beauty. In the story, a farmer and a poet meet at an art exhibition and their individual perspectives combine to enhance their personal ones. In the same way, encounter such as this played out in *Pause to Ponder* where communal revelation arose from the democratic dialogue of pupils and adults on the topic of surrealism in the art of the chosen picture book author, Tan. Each voice was significant and worthy of contributing to the mix of evolving interpretation. Beauty makes no distinctions and is inclusive. Everyone and everything is good enough. Moreover, it elevates the flawed, the unfinished and the unexpected. Everything and anything, from the most banal to the loftiest of sophistication, is sacred so long as it stirs the soul and the soul is disposed to being transformed.

3.3.10 Pause, Ponder and Wonder: Little old Ladies.

In 2022, I was fortunate that my visit to Vancouver coincided with the Vancouver marathon in which my daughter and her boyfriend took part. It was my first time at a marathon. The streets were teeming with people. Runners of varied countenance and capacity filtered through a human tunnel of benevolence created by well-

wishing supporters. There was a heady blend of the universality of human frailness, hardship, kindness, and emotion. Everyone was a participant, and all contributed. The raw emotion between the marathon duo at the finish line was deeply moving. Tears of accomplishment, exhaustion and reciprocal pride spilled into their embrace. Later on, I asked my daughter what the most memorable part of the experience was for her. She described something unexpected and exquisite. She told me it was the moment when she had passed five little old ladies banging saucepans with wooden spoons. This encounter, she recalled, touched her deep inside and she found herself crying for some inexplicable reason as she ran past in gratitude, somehow privileged by their presence. It was an incongruous, surprising nugget in the middle of the vista and her memory, as though it were mine, has lingered, as vivid as if it were captured on camera.

Later that year, I encountered another slice of delicious dissonance in the form of a title to a compilation of poetry, written by Barbara Kamler (2001), entitled *We're Not so Nice Little Old Ladies*. In an instant, I was back in that borrowed memory and I smiled at the new possibilities that this title posed. This is the way of art. It can be

a song, a lyric, a word, a gesture, or a colour that stirs. There is no accounting for the beauty that reaches out and captivates. The memory of emotion evoked, amidst the dissonance it aroused, bequeaths a taste that lingers. Memory of a beauty encountered is something that deepens and alters with time, new variables, and repetitive revisits. I will recount personal examples in chapter five. The quickening of beauty and the purpose of its calling is deeply significant. I notice that I am always intrigued and determined to know why this is so. It illuminates something which wants to be known. Ignoring the call of the mermaids, as was Prufrock's predicament in the 'Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock' (Elliot, 1915) as we will see in chapter five, extinguishes quickening and reveals nothing of itself. Not all beauty is loveliness (O' Donohue, 2003). For me the beauty of the surreal, the flawed, the unfinished, the unexpected, or anything really which detonates "a bomb of dissonance" (Brookfield, 2017, p.28) and sets "that funny feeling" (Burnham, 2021) in thrum is achingly beautiful and potentially mind altering if I set myself to pause, ponder, wonder and encounter in 'I-Thou' transformation/renewal.

3.3.11 Approach to Encounter

Beauty is always reaching towards us, but without attentiveness we cannot receive it (O' Donohue, 2003). If we lack reverence, we become alienated from its sacred potential. O' Donohue (2003) sees reverence as the "companion of humility...to live with reverence is to live without judgment, prejudice, and the saturation of consumerism" (p.41). Humility and uncertainty are perceived as weakness in a society that rejects complexity and contradiction as a slight to high aspirations of performativity and perfection. O' Donohue (2003) appeals to imagination that converses with "the awkward, paradoxical or contradictory" (p.148) for it opens up possibility and has no frontiers. "In a sense, this is what beauty is: possibility that enlarges and delights the heart" (O' Donohue, 2003, p.149). I have alluded to the innovativeness that abounds in the unknown already and will return to it later because it is pivotal for the pedagogy of the interior.

3.3.12 Gifts of the Imagination

I will summarise the gifts that O' Donohue (2003) attributes to imagination.

- i) It is akin to a lantern, illuminating concealed beauty.
- ii) It embodies innocence and expands an experience of 'moreness'.
- iii) It establishes a freedom where there are no frontiers.
- iv) It

sustains a youthful outlook. v) It embraces wildness, riskiness and adventure, and is unrestricted by norms. vi) It seeks new pathways with urgent excitement. vii) It offers a “wholesomeness [where] heart and head, feeling and thought come into balance” (O’ Donohue, 2003, p.156). viii) It gradually reveals what we need to learn. ix) It is suggestive, presenting only clues, so that we can uncover the mystery and the richness of things as we interpret them. x) It embraces contradiction and it xi) “creates a pathway of reverence for the visitations of beauty...so that we can retrieve, reclaim and re-enter experience in a fresh new way” (O’ Donohue, 2003, p.158). Beauty is illuminated by imagination and its gifts present a style of leadership where reverence and authenticity open up a world of perpetual renewal. The beauty which Burnham portrays is an overlooked smouldering ember in the ashes of ‘It-world’ overwhelmed in chaos, madness and malevolence. Yet, it nevertheless awakens.

3.3.13 Pause, Ponder and Wonder: Pedagogy of the Interior

Learning through ‘I-Thou’ encounter leads to self-understanding and a recognition of otherness and of how we integrate with it. I refer to this as identity and identification. If one exists without the

other, it is an 'I-It' relation, for cause becomes a singular agenda. This is why the beauty of the surreal and of paradox is especially important. As we train ourselves in the practice of being able to see the mixed nature of things, we become more attuned to life's incongruity, and we develop the capacity to work with and not in spite of complexity. This is important educational work. Imaginative interludes afforded by collective interrogation of art, and our collective subjective interpretation of it, opens up new and multiple ways of seeing things. When we learn to look through the lens of mixedness and identify with our collective sameness, we can then recognise this sameness next time we encounter it, with less resistance, judgement, and blame for it is a mirror of our own interior. This becomes a skill for complexity training, a necessary life skill, that bears weight as a dual pedagogy of encounter between educators and pupils. I assert that professional learning for development of the interior is optimised when it occurs simultaneously for 'I-Thou' is continuously renewed and inter-related. I believe that, as educators, we need to establish a graduated pedagogy of the interior within curriculum that caters for

critical literacy and dialogue, but I believe that it needs careful measured tempered facilitation.

3.3.14 A Story of 'I-Thou' Renewal: Mixing Classes

Class division is the one school led process I resist if possible. It leads to enormous upset, tension, and discombobulation. Often, it is unavoidable. It is caused by changes in the quota of teachers to pupils. Parents and children hate the disturbance inflicted on friendship groups in the class. Class A may wind up getting divided into class B and C if there is no longer an allocation of three teachers afforded by the Department of Education. Alternatively, the constitution of all three classes might undergo rearrangement to create two entirely new classes. In our school, all cases are individually assessed, and input is gathered from pupils, parents, and teachers during the process. As a leader, I must weigh up the validity of differing opinions and agendas, whilst being vigilant for adult agendas that pose as child-centred ones. Sometimes, teachers want to avoid certain challenging behaviours, sometimes parents' are keen on socioeconomic friendship pairings for their children, and sometimes there are other unexpected unforeseeable variables

at play. In the midst of it all, planning for a smooth transition for pupils into the new class mix is paramount.

The topic of the regularly mixing of classes has repeatedly been raised by my school colleagues, who have proposed a policy for mixing classes as required, but particularly at the end of senior infants and the end of third class, an established practice in some schools. The rationale for the proposed change mainly lies in the levelling of the dispersal of challenging behavioural, academic and special needs. Sometimes, there is that 'tough' class that puts a year's pressure on one class teacher and on the mainstream learners within the class.

I am opposed to the idea on principle. I have successfully sidestepped it for a number of years, mainly due to the time factor required for thorough discussion and the airing of multi-perspectives. My position is that, as a microcosm of society, classrooms can replicate the larger outer world and provide opportunity for children to negotiate difference and disruption. As a parent, I understand the instinctual compulsion to manipulate the pieces of childhood jigsaw to make the world as happy, peaceful, and predictable as possible. As a leader, I see an opportunity for

skills-based learning for children to learn how to handle life's ups and downs in a safe facilitated environment, while at the same time apportioning extra supports to the pupils and teacher. Teachers protest that it is an intermittent heavy load for the staff member allocated with the challenging class, that it is unfair on the 'good' pupils (where 'good' refers to aptitude) and that it is an overall easier solution.

The view that all cannot see (as only the class teachers involved in the class groups due for mixing are part of the equation) is its impact on pupil relational safety. A primary school class is like a family. Imagine a world where we could become selective around family members. Has the compulsion for helicopter parenting now subsumed to the educator realm, in a world where it has become natural and normal to virtually 'unfriend' 'restrict' and 'block'? A young child can only see the situation from their insular perspective. Changing class is an enormous ask for the vulnerable child coming from domestic instability or the child whose needs demand consistency and routine. On the other hand, maybe my colleagues have a point, and it is I who needs to change stance. Perhaps children would benefit from the expanded encounter and

the extra exposure to difference and challenge that mixing classes would make possible. Perhaps it is only fair to allow for the equitable distribution of workload and class equity that teachers desire. For the 'I-Thou' to occur between us, it is my obligation and intention to allow time for collective reflection and dialogue in the hope that we can arrive at an optimum middle ground or at least experiment with the idea. I have no doubt, as it has been my experience of such, that unanticipated new possibilities will arise from the multi-perspective appraisal of the proposal, which is scheduled to occur in future months.

3.3.15 Terrible Beauty

Beauty is not just all "loveliness" (O' Donohue, 2003, p.50), nor our encounter with it like a pair of "fuzzy comfy socks" (Burnham, 2021) nor are all little old ladies nice or should be. The assumption that beauty is perfection is an oxymoron. Yeats (2000) illuminates the darker side of beauty in his terrible beauty call to war in the War of Independence. I believe that beauty encompasses dark and light, pain and gain, death and creation, and that these contradictions are an integrated given in all life forces. This is the bittersweetness of human existence. Intense encounter with beauty is when we feel

most alive (O' Donohue, 2003). Pain and discomfort are also a manifestation of its calling. Hardship demands our attention, our pause, ponder, wonder and retreat to the interior, so that meaning and growth may emerge from the experience. Thus, the potentiality of terrible and lovely beauty is one and the same. Moreover, encounter is sometimes defined as a confrontation. Unlike the gentle invitation of lapping waves, beauty can abruptly appear in full force tsunami. We can endeavour to ignore it, suppress it, 'unfriend' it, but we cannot eradicate it. Eventually, we must work through the learning it supplies until we emerge, altered, and grounded yet again. Awakening beauty through encounter is the pedagogy of the interior (O' Donohue, 2003)

Beauty can appear to us in a guise of terrible or more often in the guise of nuisance, such as in the day-to-day challenges of running late, minor car collisions, or the unexpected speeding fine. Yes, nuisance would, if it could, be avoided, but this is unrealistic. We must allow it its space and learn to embrace it as part of existence for it is a predictable component of the essence of life. Often, we lean into the habit of catastrophising the nuisance factor, so focused as we are on perfection. It is perceived as the enemy of peace and

harmony, and the fault of other, when there is no fault to bear at all.

A myopic view puts our own agenda central and separate to others and the world gets cluttered with micro-stages of competitive 'It'.

The reality is, as Shakespeare so aptly put it, there is only one stage, and we are participants in its unified wholeness. When the

Christmas show-time comes around, we spend countless hours practicing for the flawless performance, often diminishing the pleasure for those involved by allowing pressure to build. The egoic mind thinks that its performative measurability reflects our own value when the fact is that the memorable and most joyful moments are to be found in the blunders.

I do not purport that we should smile in the face of adversity, for that can amount to resistance, a withholding of self that also blocks the reciprocity of 'I-Thou'. It is a fact of life that we will be felled by circumstance. Surrendering to the restorative embrace of the cocoon, with space and patience, will instantiate meaning and transformation, if we permit it. Wanting to revert to some unknown measure of 'normal' is always an unreasonable goal for there is no such thing. When beauty confronts, we are never the same again, nor should we, for we are always evolving and becoming. This is the

cycle of life. Our obligation as educators is to continuously work on ourselves and establish an interior aptitude that is conducive to change. We must scaffold the pedagogy of the interior within our educational environment. If we can blend the teaching of flexibility, humility, curiosity, and possibility with the more fixed pedagogies of languages, maths, and the sciences, then we may establish a disposition for accepting life on its terms of uncertainty and change.

The concept of 'beating the blues' is an anomaly. Acceptance of their place and significance, and the revelation that comes from compassionate inquiry within the discomfort, is surely a more effective way of being. It is true that sometimes our learning prompts a leave-taking of an environment mismatched to our ideals and purpose. Sometimes we have life-altering revelations. And sometimes, we just learn the stuff of life that connects us to universal commonality and human frailty. When we recognise fundamental sameness, and the compassion and identification that it supplies, prejudice and judgement simultaneously subside.

Terrible beauty can reveal the soul, illuminate identity and identification alongside beauty in the ordinary. All beauty is revealed in a slowed down stillness of surrender, acceptance, and

attentiveness. Rosenberg (2015) does not refer to beauty, but there is beauty in the discomfiting awareness and vulnerability at the heart of his teachings on nonviolent communication.

3.4 Nonviolent Communication

3.4.1 Marshall Rosenberg

Rosenberg was born in 1934. His career began in psychology and mediation which led to his development of nonviolent communication in the 1960s. This is a dialogical process of conflict resolution which is based on a forensic approach to arising emotion and unmet need alongside a simple four step framework for the language of advocacy. He has won numerous peace awards and written many books, including *Nonviolent Communication: A language of Life* and *The Surprising Purpose of Anger* both of which have greatly influenced the way in which I handle discipline and difficult conversations in my leadership practice.

Rosenberg has worked world-wide as a peace maker. In 1984, he founded the Centre for Nonviolent Communication, an international non-profit organisation, which still connects people from all over the world to nearby nonviolent communication trainers. His work

has been profoundly influential in the restorative justice arena and in restorative practice in schools and workplaces. I have used his methods in my personal and professional life for over a decade to build and maintain relationship, to facilitate conflict resolution meetings and conferences, and to teach primary and post primary educators nationally. Rosenberg died in 2015, but his legacy lives on.

3.4.2 Section Content

Rosenberg's (2015) principles of nonviolent communication are connected to the manner in which we encounter and to our approach to encounter. Therefore, his ideology aligns with that of Buber and O' Donohue. Rosenberg's approach to encounter requires inner knowing and interior work in the first instance before nonviolent communication can take place. If this piece is not thorough, then communication can be judgmental, provocative and non-fulfilling. Thus, it tangibly and practically contributes to the pedagogy of the interior because 'I-Thou' encounter must be of a similar ilk. In this chapter, I will outline the preparation stage, the four steps and provide personal examples of its application in real life. I aim to outline Rosenberg's main philosophy and framework

under the following headings: i) needs, feelings, and scripts; ii) a framework for nonviolent communication; and iii) anger, a complicated emotion. But first, I will provide an overview.

3.4.3 About Nonviolent Communication

Rosenberg's (2015) framework for nonviolent communication has been life changing for me. Furthermore, it contributes to the fundamental principles of restorative practice, reflective practice and 'I-Thou encounter. I view it primarily as a negotiation of one's identity, needs, sense of belonging within relationship and as a way of building, maintaining, and restoring (when required) relations through scaffolded dialogue. The primary aim of nonviolent communication is the restoration of inner peace and harmony and of relational health. It has taught me that feelings are not facts, that a one-sided perspective is flawed for it is not fully informed, and that openness and attentive listening are the only ways to gather a more comprehensive picture. He has drawn my attention to needs, particularly the unmet needs that spark the emotion. I have been startled at how difficult it is sometimes to source the underlying need of an arising emotion. There is an emphasis on the

identification and scaling of feelings in the curriculum, but I believe there is a significant gap in education for a pedagogy of needs.

It is only through process of self-awareness and self-interrogation that one can identify their needs. Rosenberg's nonviolent approach values emotion as a signal, a prompt for self-reflection, but the responsibility for meeting needs lies predominantly within the personal domain and not that of other. Nonviolent communication is empowering and emancipating. One can choose to express one's needs in a manner more conducive to getting them met and thereafter embrace the freedom of choice. Alternatively, one can deny personal responsibility for negotiating better ground and blame the world for one's discontent. Rosenberg attests that our scripts are the root cause of emotion. The story I tell myself about a situation is the source of my reaction to it and not the circumstance itself and, moreover, sometimes perspective is uninformed and defective. This is due to patterns of thinking that have become entrenched and impact our ability to read a situation clearly. Sometimes, it is simply just the habit of assumption, the 'know all' position of a fixed mindset that blocks 'I-Thou' encounter with

other. And sometimes it is a protective factor, a guarding of vulnerability, that induces a withdrawal of self from other.

Rosenberg proposes a style of nonviolent communication that embodies personal responsibility for meeting our needs. The philosophy is grounded in “compassion, a flow between me and others based on a mutual giving from the heart” (Rosenberg, 2015, p.1). Similar to ‘I-Thou’ encounter, it requires reverence and careful approach alongside vulnerability and authenticity. It unveils the commonality of emotion and the universal characteristics of human need. It induces empathy, compassion, and restoration. It is a brave process that constitutes a fundamental component of restorative justice in its support of both perpetrator and victim, in the composing of victim impact statements, and in the meaningful amends made by the perpetrator. In chapter five, I will offer detailed real-life examples to illustrate its potency.

3.4.4 Needs, Feelings and Scripts

In my experience of providing professional development for teachers in restorative practice I have, without doubt, found needs education and non-violent communication the most challenging to impart. In general, knowledge of personal needs and ability to

express emotion non-violently is difficult. In the first instance, feelings hijack the rational mind. It requires a determined conscious effort to pause, ponder and wonder about their source, which is usually a combination of script and unmet need. Secondly, communicating needs is not a natural default and requires preparation and practice. Rosenberg (2015) likens negative feelings to the urgent flashing on the dashboard of a car. It counts for nothing unless we act. It demands that we lift the bonnet and search beneath it for the source which is the unmet need calling for attention. And yet, our default will usually draw us towards conflict in the assumption that fault always lies elsewhere. The discomfort caused by a one-sided summation, being unpleasant, is often discharged as anger and blame. It is full to the brim with shame-inducing judgement and bias. To top it off then, our chosen verbal and nonverbal style of communication unleashes condemnation onto other or self. 'I-Thou' attentiveness is absent.

Rosenberg (2015) classifies human need under the following headings. We all have a need for i) autonomy, ii) integrity, iii) celebration, iv) interdependence, v) play, vi) spiritual communion and vii) physical nurturance. I will choose a few examples to

illustrate how simple a needs inventory can be. Sometimes, a negative emotion such as anger can arise simply from a physical need such as the need for rest, food, or movement. We have all seen the child whose movement break from class can alter the quality of successive interactions. We have all experienced that 'hangry' (hunger and anger combined) feeling. It is a signal that nourishment of our bodies is overdue and yet, whilst we are in its throes, this is often not readily apparent. Just like 'Chicken Licken', in the fable about the falling acorn where the frazzled chicken assumed the entire sky caving in, he was unable to see through to the uncomplicated heart of the matter in the density of arising emotion. If we train ourselves to first look beneath the bonnet to investigate cause, we can attend to the need before that sky comes tumbling down.

But not all needs are easily detected. For example, if we are deprived of autonomy in our workplace, we may feel depressed and not necessarily know which unmet need is calling to us. We have all heard about the poor cat that gets kicked at the end of the day. We often project our emotional response outward and onto something or someone else: "*My boss made me kick my poor cat*" or inward:

“Why do I always get picked on in every job? There must be something wrong with me” Or if we are in a relationship where integrity is absent, we might feel suspicious or unsafe: *“Who is she texting? Perhaps it’s the good-looking neighbour from next door. I feel so ugly.”* If we do not isolate the need, attend to it, and express it coherently, we will eventually lash out accusingly or become entrapped on the maladaptive cycle of shame, to be explained in detail in chapter five.

3.4.5 Framework for Nonviolent Communication

Nonviolent communication is a four-step process involving: a) observation of the trigger of feeling without attaching evaluation; b) identification and expression of feelings c) ownership of responsibility for our feelings by connecting them to our needs and d) request of that which would enrich life, namely the doable request. The ability to observe without evaluating is more complicated than it sounds. We have a habit of seeing and labelling. It is always worth a spell of self-observation to track the extent to which we habitually do this. When we find ourselves reading into other’s agenda or psycho-analysing behaviours or making uninformed judgements, we are evaluating. Any communication

which follows will generally imply judgement and will immediately shut down other's capacity for listening, flattening empathy and instigating defensiveness. Nothing is gained. Is there any point talking when other is not disposed to listening? So, we must express our observation without evaluation to optimise potential for a hearing. The following represents an observation with evaluation and possible outcome.

Passenger: You are driving too fast.

Driver: I'm not. I'm within the speed limit. You are always commenting on my driving.

When we remove the evaluation (the 'too') from the observation and include the identified feeling and connect to the need, there is less chance of conflict.

Passenger: Wow, I'm feeling a bit scared (feeling) and unsafe (need) right now. You are driving fast (observation without evaluation).

Furthermore, as Rosenberg attests, communication is incomplete without the doable request, the last step, that clearly defines that which would restore inner peace and outer harmony. Often, we

expect others to read our minds without any effort on our part to uncover and convey what action would meet our need, which leads to more upset and further evaluation such as:

Passenger: *How come he just doesn't care about me.*

He knows that I hate it when he drives too fast. He is really mean, and this must mean he doesn't care about me.

Or instead, the expression of feeling, need and doable request will more likely induce positive change.

Passenger: Wow, I'm feeling a bit scared and unsafe right now. You are driving fast. Do you think you could reduce the speed to 80km/hr for me while we are on this windy road, please?

The outcome of course will depend on the personality of the driver, but it is very difficult to deny a doable request which is preceded by unbiased observation, feelings, and need. The encounter is far more likely to be resolved than not, even if it is only that the passenger comprehends that future safety is a personal choice to avoid further

trips with a reckless unsympathetic driver. Either way, it instantiates awareness, freedom, and empowerment.

3.4.6 Anger, a Complicated Emotion

There are two particular feelings which are difficult to transform.

Firstly, shame is a complex emotion that requires 'I-Thou' encounter for transformation. Shame is a 'less than', 'not good enough' feeling that arises from comparison and perfectionism. It is believed to be the root cause of addictive behaviour and is a very painful isolating feeling. Later in chapter five, I will explicate the compass of shame and Brown's shame resilience theory. Secondly, anger is the other complicated feeling. It is easy to identify, but it is actually the armour that shields a more vulnerable inter-relational feeling.

Identification of the underlying feeling can be difficult and painful, but transformation of anger is impossible without this step. Shame and anger present major barriers for critical reflection and authentic restorative encounter.

Rosenberg (2005) summarises pertinent anger facts. "Anger is a product of our thinking", not the circumstance (p.1). "Anger is an alarm that tells us we are thinking in ways that are not likely to get our needs met" (p.3). Anger prompts us to "separate the trigger

from the cause” (p.8) which is the unmet need. Expressing anger usually creates “more defensiveness than learning or connection” (p.10). Anger is a judgement and seeks to blame and punish (p.12). Society has trained us to stifle anger when the truth of the matter is that transformation can only be achieved through nonviolent communication (p.17). The need to express anger arises from the need for empathy for the pain experienced. Only, when it is handled non-violently will it instigate mutual empathy and interconnectedness (p.19). Finally, he claims that anger is “a result of life-alienating, violence -provoking thinking” (p.21). In facilitation of restorative practice (RP), it is crucial to be cognisant of anger as an armour that hides emotions such as hurt or fear. Sometimes this can be difficult to access directly and easier to identify indirectly through stories, poetry, or art.

3.4.7 Pause Ponder and Wonder: Beauty of the Paradigm Shift

There is a moment in restorative practice, the instant when the beauty of ‘I-Thou’ encounter fuses. It is a palpable flood of mutual empathy and understanding, the quickening of soul. It is the moment when the pressure exerted by painful feelings diffuses and the true seeing of soul is instantiated. In my facilitation of

restorative meetings, I have been privileged to witness and sense the transformative essence of beauty in this stage of paradigm shift. The compulsion to blame and punish is removed and the needs of other becomes paramount. Individual identity is revealed alongside the evolving collective identity. A new way of seeing contributes to infinite possibility and new ways of being, in harmony and peace with self and others. As witness, I find myself also becoming fused with the moment as the 'living-centre' of the sacred space and I am altered by the experience just as the participants are. It is a humbling and reverent point in time of pure presence in the present.

Restorative practice has illuminated the power, passion, and purpose inherent in true communion. It is a pathway to love and simultaneous acceptance of difference, sameness, and complexity. It exemplifies 'talk therapy', and is why advocacy, reciprocity, attentive listening, and understanding the impact of others' emotions and behaviours is fundamental for transforming our lives from the inside-out. It belongs in the remit of lifelong learning as well as in the realm of our teaching. It is why we must embrace uncertainty, unpredictability, the flawed and self-doubt as portals to

learning whilst casting aside unrealistic entitlement to perfection that belong to ego and 'It-world'.

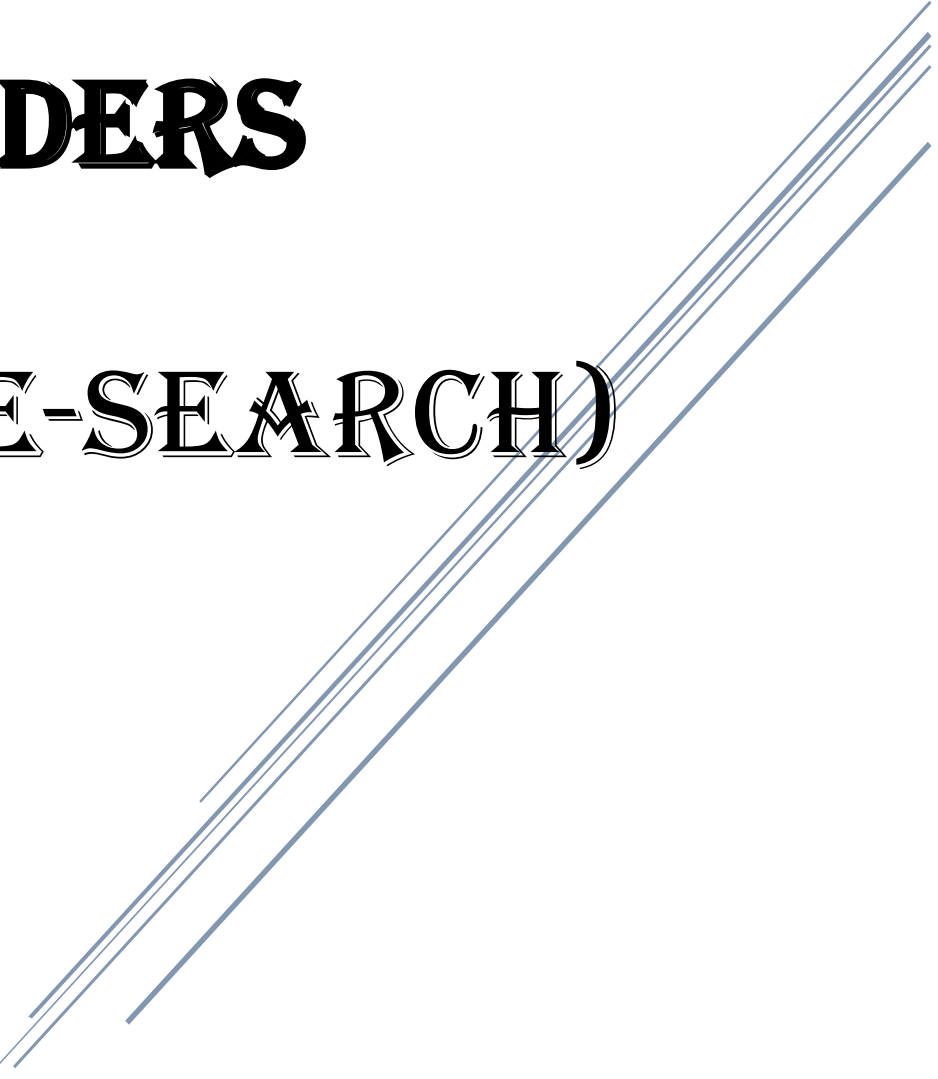
The bounty of beauty is connection to a deeper knowing and the grounding of identity. It relocates the 'lost thing' and enables us to identify with the world instead of rejecting it. It reveals to us our inner power and uncovers deep passion and purpose for living. It is a restorative homecoming. By disturbing the scripts, assumptions, and bias of the ego, our own inner beauty is reflected outwards (O' Donohue, 2003). It is the calling to intrinsic change, authentic encounter and the actualisation of the soul. All beauty is illusive and requires a 'web of betweenness', dispositional readiness, curiosity and openness to grey, for nothing in this life is black or white. To doubt is to be open to the expansiveness of possibility (O' Donohue, 2003). As a school leader of a restorative school, I endeavour to bravely embrace complexity and engage in continuous cycles of awakening and rebooting. I sometimes get it right and sometimes I don't, but I am forever grateful for the striving.

CHAPTER FOUR:

ENCOUNTER WITH

LEADERS

(PRE-SEARCH)



Pedagogy of the Interior:
Awakening Beauty through Encounter

4.1 Chapter Content

In this chapter, I will outline the dilemma facing leadership in Ireland in the twenty first century by exploring the findings of the Irish Principal and Deputy Principal Health and Wellbeing Survey (2021) and the Roadmap to Sustainability (IPPN, 2022) from an inside-out, bottom-up angle of intrinsic change. I will also examine the lived experience of three colleagues who resigned from their principal position due to its untenable demands. Their stories will illuminate the ongoing leakage of leaders of high expertise, experience, vision, and fervour from the system. The aim is to spotlight the tension that exists between internal and external expectation and the legacy of an “ad-hoc approach to the re-framing or, more accurately, the expansion of the role of the school leader” (IPPN, 2022, p.13) since the last time specifications were outlined in circular 16/1973. My aim is to heighten awareness, to awaken critical consciousness and ignite inner power in the hope of instantiating change on the personal and local levels. I want to disturb the compliancy that disregards personal limitations and blinds and binds, and to establish the urgent need for the pedagogy

of the interior. As cited by the European School Head's Association (ESHA, 2019) in relation to a similar dilemma in Scotland:

it is time for head teachers to identify the things they can or will no longer do. This does not mean being resistant to change, it is about identifying the real priorities for your school and your pupils, communicating these to those around you and then only doing things which will contribute to the achievement of those priorities.

Hence, it is time to pause, ponder and wonder and disrupt the status quo for the purpose of transforming the role. Thus, the beauty and privilege inherent in school leadership may be uncovered and renewed.

The interior work involved in developing professionalism and negotiating change is unaddressed. This is mostly due to the impossible non-stop flow of tasks that have been systematically and continuously imposed on leaders. A pause is an imperative first step for schools so that they can consider their PIEW (IPPN, 2022) priorities in the Pilot, the Initiation, EMBEDDING and Waiting List stages (*appendix 4*), where two years is afforded to thoroughly focus on each of the stages of every new initiative. The PIEW framework permits leaders to take a grounded stance and manage

realistic workload, capacity, and expectations, and facilitate immediate reduction of stress. Every effort to adhere and defend the stance of a bespoke and active PIEW document must be made, where possible, so that consistency and fairness are enacted from the bottom layers of the school community. It slows down the reactive merry-go-round and allows school self-evaluation to become a transparent and a defensive enterprise. In this way the pedagogy of the interior becomes a process of transformation that interweaves all planning, consultation, and evaluation. Our PIEW school plan is mounted on our staffroom wall, enlarged and detailed. Teacher and SNA leadership is recognised, communicated, and encouraged every step of the way. The PIEW framework, devised by the IPPN, is but one tool of an inside-out/bottom-up approach, and it involves authentic encounter every step of the way.

4.2 The Irish Primary Principal Network (IPPN)

IPPN established in 1999 is the professional body for principals and deputy principals leading in excess of 3,200 Irish Primary Schools. As an official education partner, IPPN works in collaboration with the Department of Education and Skills and various educational

agencies and bodies of the Irish educational context. As a member, I engage daily with the online network, attend local support group meetings and professional development seminars. The annual conference is one of the highlights of my year. Their comprehensive vista of online resources and publications are invaluable. I know that individual support is just a phone call away when needed. The Centre for School leadership (CSL) was co-founded in 2015 with the post primary National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD). CSL affords professional development, mentoring and coaching to Irish leaders and is progressive in vision and practice. I have been a mentor of newly appointed principals for over five years and have attended all professional development days. I have also engaged with the IPPN coaching model and value the growing contribution made by CSL to professional development for leaders, including aspiring, middle, senior and retired leaders. Professional development provided by the IPPN and CSL complements the Misneach, Forbairt, Tanaiste, Meitheal and Comhar programmes provided by Oide, formerly known as the Primary Development Service for Teachers. IPPN and CSL represent, support, and pragmatically address the needs of leadership in the

current dilemma of untenable workload, stress, and leadership capacity in Ireland. However, Padraig's story which follows, presents a vignette of where leadership development and support were not sufficient to counterbalance a new leader's stress and overwhelm.

4.3 'I-Thou' Transformation: Padraig's Story

I met with Padraig for a conversation. It was informal and unrecorded. In the account to follow, circumstantial details have been changed to protect his identity. What follows is my account of it, which he has reviewed and approved. It was a sunny Good Friday morning, almost a year to the day he had left the school where he had been principal for a short period. I asked him if he would be happy to talk about his encounter with leadership. Good Friday, a traditional 'clean the dirty windows' day when I was younger, was symbolic of cleansing. In some ways, we had a similar purpose in mind. Our conversation involved the scrubbing at the stains of shame and stigma to allow a clearer perspective to shine through. While Padraig's resurrection, from what he sees as a rock bottom in his life, is progressing well, a few stubborn stains linger. Padraig was happy to engage with the work, saw it as an

opportunity to process the experience and to speak out. Names have been altered and circumstantial details changed to protect his identity.

I have known Padraig professionally for years. An experienced educator, he was a highly committed middle leader and professional mentor to anyone who needed support in his previous school setting. In addition, he possessed a vision, agency, and professional ethics comparable to few. It was no surprise to me that he would thoroughly prepare himself for the next natural step of principalship. He set about furthering his education and was methodical about gathering as much information about the role as possible and he received the support and guidance of his principal to do so. But he concealed his aspirations from his teacher colleagues out of fear of failure and he now wonders why there is not more openness about promotion and ambition in schools. He had a far more comprehensive preparatory journey than I did and moreover, had witnessed the struggles and supported many principals over the years in another professional capacity.

Therefore, it was with eyes wide open that he accepted a position as an administrative principal. He was proud of his accomplishment

and excited about the new chapter. However, the following months altered his perspective radically. Padraig experienced an onslaught of the unexpected that no planning could have prepared him for, and he found his new role in a new school intolerably debilitating and isolating.

He performed his best, working late evenings and throughout weekends and holidays. It seemed to him sometimes, that his school life threatened to interrupt every single aspect of his personal life. There were relational demands from the school community, bullying and disciplinary issues, parental demands and expectations, maintenance and repairs, COVID restrictions and mandates, a staffing shortage crisis, usual administration deadlines, alongside an attendant guilt for not rarely reaching core purpose.

Looking back now, I remember the same onslaught of external agenda and fear of error and judgement. I recall, at the start of my career in leadership, the resistance of staff who were suspicious of change and an eagerness, on my part, to gain approval. Padraig's daily 'to do' list never cleared. The next challenge was always waiting in line. He began to question his decision to leave his much-loved teaching role and to doubt his competence. He noticed a new

habit of counting the days to the next holiday. He resented feeling forced to 'manage' as opposed to 'resolve' the issues that seemed to come by 'quick fire'. He engaged with IPPN and CSL and with colleague principals. He followed best advice. One day, he collapsed in school, was diagnosed with severe stress, and advised by his doctor to take time off school to recuperate. Not long afterwards, he found himself sitting an interview for a teaching position, having resigned from principalship.

Padraig's story, now a statistic in the sustainable leadership report, is becoming a recurring theme. But no statistic portrays the trace and stigma it leaves behind. The absence of a dignified step-down adds salt to the wounds. In the course of our conversation, Padraig used recurring words and phrases: 'shame'; 'failure'; not being 'cut out for the role'; of having 'let down' family, friends and colleagues. He related a 'fear of meeting people' in the early days, the inquisitiveness of neighbours who wondered why his car was rooted in the driveway, his escalating withdrawal from family and friends. One day, his young son asked "Dad, why are you always sad?" He prepared a script for those who might inquire, saying "it wasn't for me and I'm glad to be back teaching". He felt a constant

pressure to explain himself and only a handful of people knew the extent of the impact on his confidence and wellbeing.

As I reflected on his words, certain pieces called for attention. It seemed that all the best professional advice was inadequate substitute for the holistic support that he needed at the time.

However, the latter is often not possible in the peak of shame when it is natural to isolate. Shame is best transformed through the speaking of it, but few wish to speak about perceived failures. This will be further discussed in chapter six where it was determined that the bar of expectation is unrealistic and shame-inducing and that the relief of identifying with other, and not feeling alone, is immensely consoling and transformative. When Padraig made the decision to resign, there was a temporary retraction of access to support in that lonely liminal space in the trajectory from leadership to teaching. He made the transition unsupported, underwent a break in service, experienced loss of dignity and re-entered the system at the bottom rung of the ladder, in a substitute capacity, in a new school. There was a financial impact and interruption to personal work schemes alongside adverse effects on

professional identity and good reputation stemming from the stigma associated with 'stepping down'.

Padraig's ability to handle it all speaks to a resilience he thought he lacked. I admire his bravery and ability to prioritise values and family life. Together we wondered if the ideals of leadership excellence were at odds with the hidden reality of an undefined role or indeed if they might ethically constitute a betrayal of unsuspecting 'lambs to the slaughter'. In recovery from a stressful situation myself, I shared my belief that we pay a high price for stress. In his case, it manifested physically and unexpectedly and could not be ignored. Others slide slowly into withdrawal and experience depressive symptoms. In my case, I gave serious consideration to leaving my school, a story told in chapter five. In some cases, many become trapped in a blame game. Yet, there was only self-blame in Padraig's story, an open honest account of the series of events. I am inspired by his disposition of gratitude and indebtedness to those who have shown him support.

We discussed the trajectory of his perspective on leadership from i) his vantage as teacher who saw the role, in its traditional sense, as the person in the office, doing God knows what, whose job it was to

prescribe deserved punishments, uphold discipline and keep everyone happy to ii) the conscious aspiring leader whose inquisitive inquiry unfolded professional understanding of the broad and complex role that it is to iii) the lone vanquisher of chaos in the heart of an unsustainable reality to iv) an empathic supporter and co-leader of collective visioning. Now, as teacher in the school of another principal, Padraig describes his unique perspective of his new leader. He empathises with the steady stream of 'fix its' that land upon his desk. He notices the unfairness directed towards him by those whose understanding of the complexity and powerlessness of the role is limited. He understands that his principal, as member of the team, requires the same support and recognition as everyone else. As Padraig sees it, not every difficult child can be removed, nor every irate parent handled in the remote capacity of the principal's office. It points to the urgent case for dissemination of the information in the IPPN Roadmap to Sustainability (2022) report and provision of knowledge to those who would benefit from a better comprehension of the role. There is much inside-out/bottom-up work to be done here.

He admires the tenacity and expertise which his principal brings to his role and, though he may not agree with him on every matter, he offers support and friendship in the face regular segregation by others. Padraig can see that his principal is worthy of the same dignity in the workplace as those who claim it as entitlement and of positive collegial relationships. Ultimately, his evolving perspective has led him to his current conclusion that he will never again aspire to leadership at principal level.

On a positive note, there was a knock on his classroom door shortly after he resumed teaching. The same inspector, who had the previous year paid him an incidental visit when he was school leader, popped in to say a quick hello and wish him the best. It was a bittersweet moment and a humane gesture of compassion and understanding on the part of the inspector. Padraig related that he still has regrets, despite the relief of being back in the classroom and berates himself for the work he did not finish.

Principalship is a role brim-full of unfinished lists and business, no matter how long or how much is invested. My two older sisters also left the leadership position. Sadly, one left the role midstream, regretting from her hospice bed the lost opportunity to officially

afford opportunity for closure for her grieving community. When my other sister retired, she likened the shock of her loss to that of an unforeseen amputation. It is interesting that all three examples speak to the irony of a principal's commitment to a community from which they can in some cases feel so segregated.

Brown (2006) purports that perfectionism breeds shame, which is only healed through self-compassion, psychoeducation and sharing of the experience with other. Its presence is rife in our world of unconscious constant comparison. Paralysis of perfection besets the profession of education, and the high bar we and others hold is often the rock upon which we perish. This is discussed in detail in chapter five. On this Good Friday, Padraig and I confronted the shame, the fear, the self-blame, and the misperception that his change in role was a circumstance of failure. On the day when Jesus died so that our sins could be forgiven, I was struck by the thought that the hardest work is often that of self-forgiveness. I hoped that the airing of his ongoing recovery story has helped Padraig continue to transform his experience into a valuable learning, a new way of being in his teaching role and reflecting on his leadership role and how they both interrelate. I wish him the best in the ongoing work

of reconfiguring evolving identity and vision, a lens through which Padraig can view his self-professed ‘failure’ as extraordinary competence, resilience, and bravery, as I do. I am indebted to him for our ‘I-Thou’ encounter.

4.4 The Sustainable Leadership Project

Many resignations could and should be avoided through a pedagogy of the interior for leaders that would support their negotiation and understanding of their complex role, excessive task load and current context.

It is IPPN’s belief that if school leaders were enabled to maintain their focus on that core purpose and not diverted from it by tasks, functions and responsibilities that are not in keeping with that core purpose, it would have a significant and positive impact on the effectiveness and sustainability of their leadership” (IPPN, 2022, p.9).

Core purpose is identified as leading teaching and learning. In 2022, the IPPN launched ‘Primary School leadership: The Case for urgent Action *A Roadmap to Sustainability*’. It is a comprehensive analysis of the sustainable leadership research project to date, which is informed by academic literature, the inspectorate evaluative document ‘Looking at Our Schools’ (DES, 2016) and data

from the three-year longitudinal study, 'Irish Principal and Deputy Principal Health and Wellbeing Survey' (2021) commissioned by IPPN and NAPD, as well as other practitioners' research.

Researchers undertook the first forensic collation of the duties of the role of the principal since 1973 through examination of the circulars, legislation, and policy documents between the years 2016 and 2022, and by building upon the last outline of the role conveyed in the 1973 circular. The excessive list detailing the expansion of the role was then viewed through the lens of 'Looking at our Schools (DES 2016), to illuminate the discrepancy between the sheer volume of managerial and administrative tasks and the core purpose of leading teaching and learning. Task volume and time constraints, and the burden it bears on ability to lead, were found to be the most significant stressors impacting leadership wellbeing. Other issues pertaining to the existing governance model were also interrogated alongside the imbalance in the numbers of early leavers and new recruits to the role.

Conclusions were drawn from data of academic literature and research, and consideration of all aspects of the dilemma were analysed. Pilots are underway in the development of middle

leadership capacity and local collaborative school clusters. A formidable, staged head-start suite of supports for newly appointed roles is underway. Urgent demand for additional middle leadership posts and skilled administrative personnel, mandatory training for boards of management and for enhanced leadership autonomy were proposed. A complete critique of the roadmap is not the remit of this research. The IPPN and CSL are engaged in a committed and potentially ground-breaking trajectory of reform and restoration. Their findings are validating and awakening, their recommendations tangible pragmatic and realistic. The roadmap signposts a brighter, more doable future. Although the call for urgent action will doubtlessly be addressed in usual sporadic partiality over the forthcoming years, every point of progress will be welcomed and celebrated.

My research, being a pedagogy of the interior, aims to support and complement the call for change. However, it spotlights the layered change of the inside-out/bottom-up that is required in the first place. The IPPN roadmap outlined the three tiers of change: firstly, what leaders can do for themselves; secondly, what the IPPN can do and thirdly, what the DES can do. The pedagogy of the interior

pertains to the first strand. It is the transformational 'in the meantime' work of the waiting room. For this reason, I will draw attention to the response rate to the 'Irish Principal and Deputy Principal Health and Wellbeing Survey' (2021) to illuminate a gap. The tally of participants tell an unspoken story. There are in excess of 3,200 primary schools in Ireland which point to approximately 6,400 senior leaders at primary level. In 2022, there were 405 participants. This discrepancy portrays a notable lack of engagement in leader advocacy especially when findings portrayed burnout, stress and depressive symptoms amongst school leaders as being almost double the norm. Hence, the opportune time to pause, ponder and wonder and take part in the survey was ignored and lost. This is interesting.

4.5 Pause, Ponder and Wonder: Change as an Inside Job

I can remember a time, at the beginning of my leadership career when I considered surveys to be an extra 'ask' and my engagement with them was often a 'hit and miss' nonpriority in a busy day. At times I can default to the heroic style of leadership, depriving myself of what is good for me in the name of duty, convincing myself that I am too busy to think, to talk, to pause, to ponder, to

wonder. Oftentimes, my perspective of my role has been myopic and uninformed. Thankfully, my personal circumstances and location afford a degree of freedom for engagement and, in tandem with a natural disposition to network, my horizon has expanded throughout the years. I do not consider myself an activist, but I am curious, and moreover, I am always more aware of what I don't know and want to know. In chapter five, I will expand on the relief, connectivity and expansive possibilities that arise from this sense of fallibility. I like becoming informed and conscious of the fields surrounding my school and I find participation fruitful and energising. Yet, roll back the years a decade or so, and the vista differed, defined as it was then by my children's agendas and where most leadership seminars and workshops occurred outside school hours. I surmise that peripherality and unconsciousness have impacted the response rate to the survey for the rationale and impetus of an imperative is best assimilated through learning and dialogue.

Delving deeper, I wonder how many leaders have had opportunity to read the IPPN report, to pause, ponder and collectively wonder about the findings of the 'Roadmap to Sustainability' (IPPN, 2022)

with, at the very least, their board of management, if not the larger body of staff and parents. I concede that some people are avid readers while some, including myself, are skimmers. It is a 144-page document. I hazard a guess that, for some, the document might yet lie amid other competing documents in the liminal space between a busy school and home life. Notwithstanding, it is often more meaningful, whenever possible, to walk through documents and circulars in dialogue with others. It brings the two-dimensional to life, imbued as it is by multi-perspectives, and it is that which affords thorough interrogation alongside analysis of potential application. 'I-thou' participatory encounter aids digestion of the significant and portentous.

On the other hand, perhaps the level of burnout, stress, and depressive symptoms, some of which I have also experienced, has had an adverse debilitating effect on motivation and passion, as it well can. Is there widespread disillusionment, defeatism, and retirement clock-watching? Have we considered the hegemonic implications of the denied responsibility of non-participation with the sustainability project? Are we not partially accountable for the task of reformation at the bottom level of our own workplace or do

we anticipate Utopia will be served in its totality upon a platter? Do we perceive sustainability advocacy as an entirely external piece? Surely, a glance at even one aspect of the roadmap during a staff or board meeting would inspire collective creative solutioning and instant alleviation of workload through distributed leadership. In the current leadership context, there are always comrades isolated by harm, and silenced by fear and shame. One thing that the camaraderie and support of my local IPPN group has taught me is that complexity and conflict are a common occurrence. No-one is exempt. Authentic 'I-Thou' encounter can help shed new light and perspective. The person who supported me yesterday may require my help today and collectively, many heads are better than one. Hence, even if my health and wellbeing are not impacted sufficiently to inspire engagement with a survey or a report, there may be due cause in time when I too will call out for urgent change. Relational support is the bedrock of sustainability, but it demands that we turn up to the table in the first place.

The moral purpose of school leadership brings with it a responsibility to interpret, adapt to and, sometimes, disrupt these influences. That moral purpose confers a legitimacy on the right of school leaders to make decisions that are in the

best interests of the children and their school communities,
imbued as they are with an innate understanding of their
school context... tension arises when such autonomy is
constrained (IPPN, 2022, p.7-8)

4.6 'I-Thou' Renewal: A New Opportunity

Martina would identify with the above analogy. As a leader colleague, I have been inspired by her tenacity, commitment and bravery. In the account to follow, circumstantial details have been changed to protect her identity. What follows is my account of it, which she has reviewed and approved. Martina was appointed as a teaching principal of a start-up school. After a number of years in the role, she decided to resign, but not before researching the role she was leaving, which enabled her to spotlight the complexity and unsustainability of the unique role. She bequeathed the legacy of her research recommendations to future aspiring leaders in the wake of her reluctant leave-taking. She described her learning as a validating endeavour which partially contributed to her ultimate move to resign. She chose to reinstate wholesome personal and mental wellbeing that had been depleted in the leadership period. I had invited her to share her lived experience and learning with me.

If a principal belongs to a minority group, then it follows that the principals of a start-up school, which represents an altogether tiny cohort that is all but invisible, warrant their own podium. The details recounted in her and others' experience of this role were alarming. I can only liken it to a gathering of all of the most stressful 'head-wrecks' and exhausting 'time-eaters' of every individual school type and context and then dumping them all upon one miniscule category of leaders. Awareness of the stark reality of a start-up school is a relatively unheard story within the wider educational realm. It has altered my previous passive partial blindness to the situation.

Martina shared with me her sense of personal accountability for having allowed the role of principal to become "all-consuming". This contributed to her determination to enact a much needed "major" change. No decision to resign is ever made lightly and is always brave and courageous. She recognised that she "had become profoundly stressed". Despite her passion and investment in her brand-new school, she was compelled to "return to a less demanding teaching role". She recounted the "defeat" she felt, heretofore unfamiliar to her in the face of an expansive successful career trajectory. Harsh

self-critique was evident in the course of our encounter. “Not someone who gives up easily” she resented the “whole new level ...to reach such a point of really needing to stop and give up”. It was clear how difficult this was for her to accept and come to terms with at the time. Thankfully, almost a year later, her decision has yielded the bounty she deserves. Happy and fulfilled in a new school that affords a harmonious work-life balance, she knows she “absolutely made the right decision”.

In hindsight, Martina sees the dual teacher/principal solo start-up role in a developing school as untenable. She advocates for a front-loading model that allows for the appointment of a deputy principal from the outset, a crucial component of shared leadership which would provide adequate administrative time. In the isolated position, she found herself juggling competing demands in a perpetual round of selective neglect that led to occupational stress. Leading teaching and learning posed perpetual challenge, especially as it involved constant negotiation with the DES to meet the additional educational needs of pupils and the staffing appeals that are the bane of a developing school. Policies demanded attention alongside the kit out of temporary accommodation, furniture and equipment. She found

herself constantly fighting for the human resources needed for her school community and she deduced that it all came down to sheer “drive and resilience” in the face of a dearth of basic advance planning on the part of the DES and patron body. As I digested her story, it dawned on me that she received no extra remuneration for the endless hours she devoted to the establishment of a new school and its fledgling reputation where she continuously exceeded personal limitations. Not only that, despite the innumerate professional development seminars and courses attended during the period, none of which entitled her to even one single extra personal vacation day, which put her enormous effort and time committed on a par with a teacher with no leadership duties at all. It is also worthy to note that the mentoring that she availed of at the time was supplied by another principal whose collegial support and willing investment of time would have been similarly unrecognised by the DES. I am very happy to know that Martina is finding enduring fulfillment and wellbeing in her new role.

4.7 The ‘Irish Principal and Deputy Principal Health and Wellbeing Survey’ (2021)

Primary school principalship in Ireland of 2023 is an undesirable role. Once upon a time, the role was a celebrated marker of promotion and success. Now, principalship

is not thriving. If anything it is reeling because of heightened expectations and corresponding neglect of re-examining and repositioning the role, suitable to the needs of the system in the twenty-first century" (IPPN, 2022, p.6)

Data gleaned from the ‘Irish Principal and Deputy Principal Health and Wellbeing Survey” (2021) presents a grim reality. Current senior leaders rate the level of sustainability at slightly less than four out of ten (p.2). Out of the 39% of schools that have undergone a change of leadership in the past five years, 60% of those cases related to early retirement or resignation (p.10). Of those intending to remain in the position for the next five years only 9% stated it was due to a sense of “thriving” in the role. The remaining cohort conveys a sense of entrapment which is due to either personal circumstances, lack of other career opportunities or the absence of a “dignified stepdown facility” (p.11). Principalship has come to be viewed as a health hazard, only suitable for a particular type ‘cut out’ for the position, whatever that may mean. It was further

ascertained from the survey that the “average number of applications received for those vacant principal positions was 5.5 and that in 7% of cases the role had to be re-advertised” (p.10). Clearly, it calls for immediate response from the DES.

4.8 Pause, Ponder and Wonder: Leader on the [L]Edge

Not so long ago, a few stars collided to unleash an epiphany. At the time, I was navigating a protracted demoralising staff relations issue amidst the first year of the lock downs, openings, remote learning and general ‘COVID Crazies’. I found myself ensconced in a loop of work that seemed to span morning, noon, and night. It was a time of intense occupational stress. During this period, I was invited to facilitate a module of the Postgraduate Diploma in School Leadership in University Limerick, an endeavour that would normally have appealed to me. But as I explored the material, the adage ‘lambs to the slaughter’ intruded my perusal. I noticed that the content, at that time, somehow heightened my sense of imperfection and of shortcoming which plagued, and I felt it would be an act fraudulent impostership for me to endeavour to inspire the aspiring at that time. I declined the opportunity. It was simply not the right fit for me then. There was a substantial gap between my current reality and the lofty

ideals of theoretical transformational leadership. However, the happenstance did afford new insight. I realised, from the first-hand experience, that timing is crucial. An overwhelmed leader is best supported by pragmatic solutioning, holistic support and encounter. Leadership ideology, at a vulnerable time, can deplete confidence and sense of competence. I assert that recognition of current circumstance and holistic relational restoration is also an important aspect of leadership development where theory can be thoroughly interrogated and selectively assimilated against the backdrop of current contextual challenges and level of wellbeing. 'I-Thou' encounter, as an authentic reciprocal endeavour, should form a complementary and separate part of every leadership programme for there is a wealth of information in shared experience, compassionate inquiry and co-solutioning. It rises consciousness and recognition of possibility and may constitute a head start piece that is more bespoke.

I have come to believe that principals are a minority group, especially within the school community. Indeed, it has been broached on many occasion that we would benefit from a Leadership Union, so that our unique issues do not fall between the gaps of generalised teacher

needs. Furthermore, the principal is usually the only person in the staff body that is cognisant of the unrealistic demands of the role. Few principals reveal burnout and stress with school colleagues as they endeavour to live up to expectations of knowledge, patience, time, fortitude, perfection, and kindness. Principals, being strongly attached to moral purpose, are advocates for justice and equity and pick up the pieces that get strewn. The wellbeing survey (2021) conveyed that, regardless of the overload, we still find deep meaning in our work. I surmise that there is a lack of awareness of the fact that principalship is unique in its absence of standard contract or defined duties and that the board of management, employer, recruiter, and overseer, does not have the authority to negotiate our terms of employment. This authority lies with the DES, responsible for the constant expansion of unnegotiated legislative duties. This amounts to a one-way relationship and a phantom boss who is unavailable and unaccountable for the harm induced by an untenable volume of work. Is this wilful blindness? Damian White, former President of the IPPN, encapsulates the untenable situation, comparing it to

the analogy of a surgeon in an operating theatre expected to schedule the staff, prepare the patient, procure and maintain the materials and equipment, arrange the cleaning, source the funds, write the reports, and fix technical problems, all while performing surgery. (IPPN, 2023, p.50)

4.9 Governance

I am indebted to the members of my Board of Management for their longstanding involvement in the school and for their support of my work in maintaining and progressing our school to the best possible standards. I have been blessed with members who embody an uncommon diversity of high expertise and who willingly participate in the training supplied by our patron body. Our meetings are well represented and engagement is whole-hearted, person-centred, and thorough. Each and every member is fully invested and committed. Unfortunately, many schools do not share the same experience. In general, there is a dearth of volunteers, expertise, and mandatory training to meet the increasingly complex responsibilities and moral obligations of governance. As stated in the IPPN report, “[w]e have outsourced the second most important public service to volunteers “(2022, p.72).

4.10 John's Story

My final principal tale tells a story of a man who paid a high price for the dearth of governance volunteers. Names and details have been changed out of respect and high regard. This story is a tribute to my late colleague for his decades of service and his dedication to the role of principal. John was appointed to the post of teaching principal. Many years later, his patron body arranged for him to step into a teaching position in a new school. I will endeavour to explain what happened in between . In 2019, at the end of the four-year term of the current Board of Management, new recruits were difficult to find in the community. Significantly, a new chairperson to fill the role of the outgoing person, who had served faithfully for numerous terms, was unavailable. An unresolvable parental complaint coincided with the empty seat of chairpersonship and the trajectory of the complaint procedure put enormous pressure on John. The events that followed impacted immensely on his mental health, which exacerbated an existing health issue. The patron appointed a manager to fill the vacant seat until the position of chairperson could be filled.

While John was on sick leave, the new manager carried out what felt to him like a full investigation into his practices and documents. He was asked to hand over his school laptop and he cooperated with her endeavours although he was unwell and on leave. His health issues worsened in the ensuing months and COVID lockdown arrived. John's isolation, extreme anxiety and compliant nature deterred him from querying the uncommon process. In the midst of early pandemic frenzy and fear, his best efforts to find the support he needed were unmet. He felt isolated, unsupported, and defeated in the unusual cooccurring circumstances.

Shame and humility caused him to feel the need to apologise for his imperfect handling of parental discontent, a situation few principals avoid, and for his imperfect mental health. Eventually, without any opportunity for recognition of faithful leadership service from his close-knit parish community, his departure was silent and invisible. John never really recovered from the shame and stigma. After a spell of lengthy leave and ongoing health issues, he passed away shortly afterwards, well before retirement age. For the family members he left behind there is no solace. As an untold

tragedy, I give it the attention it deserves. May his humble gentle soul rest in peace.

4.11 In Conclusion

This section is aimed as a call for change and reform from the inside-out and bottom-up, the first tier of sustainability proposed by the IPPN (2022). The pedagogy of the interior is a starting point, a place where inner power, passion and purpose can be renewed through the awakening of consciousness and the reveal of the concealed beauty inherent in the privilege it is to lead. As we struggle with time and work overload to reach our espoused core purpose, I propose there is an even deeper far more neglected core purpose that requires urgent attention. We have a moral obligation to place higher value on our own inner peace and outer harmony and shed the shackles of crippling perfectionism and untenable expectation. It is time to pause, ponder, wonder, and transform through 'I-Thou' encounter and through speaking out about misplaced occupational shame. There is an ethical responsibility for training and supports that offer respite, recovery, and renewal through the reconfiguration of priority and task. It is time to embrace a style of humble leadership that gives birth to new

possibilities, removes the mask of command, changes entrenched hegemonic tendencies that permeate, and turn up as our vulnerable limited imperfect selves.

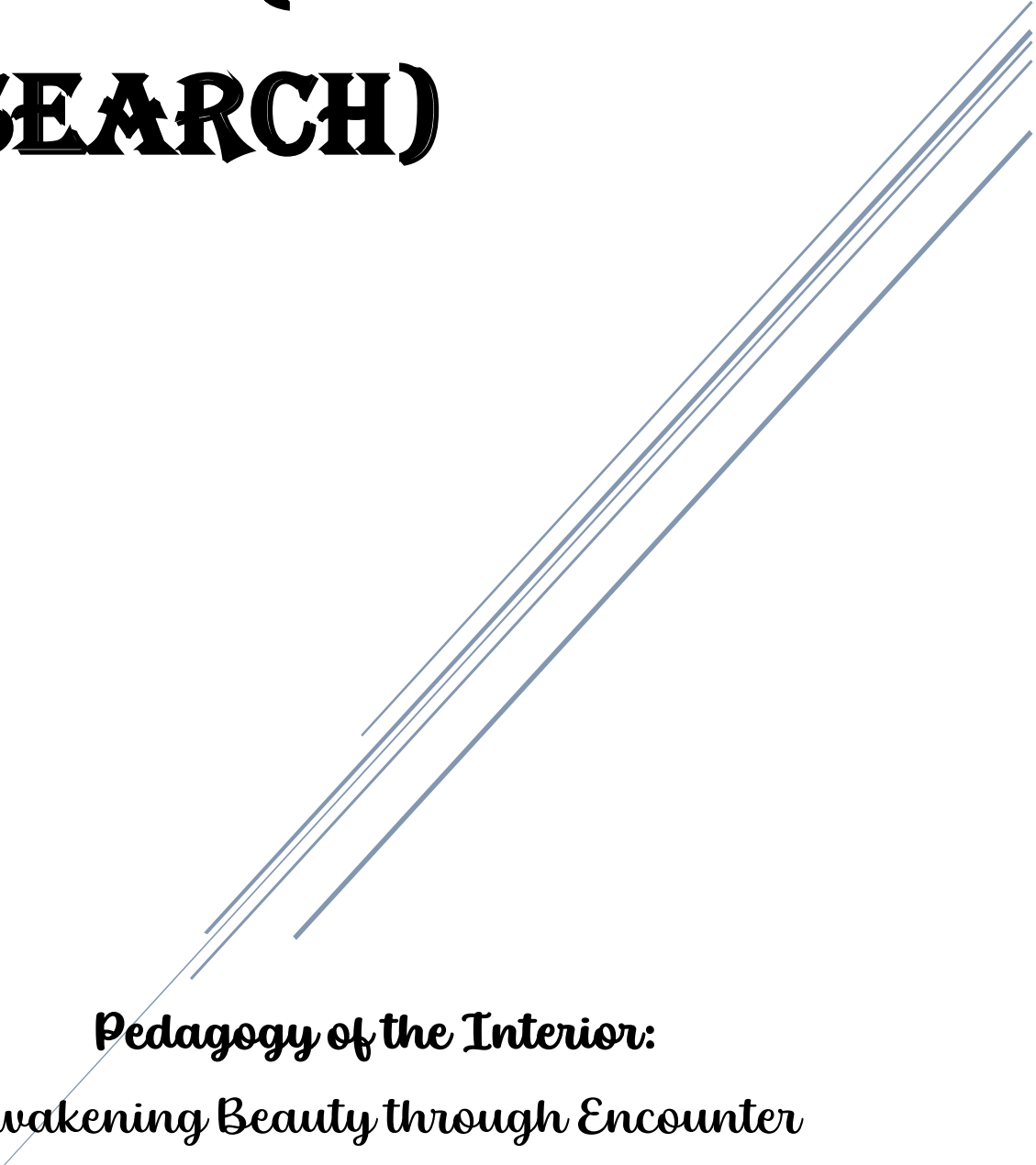
I retrospectively value the knowledge and skills I have amassed and am grateful for the high degree of relational trust and faith we have built in our school community along the way. We have been blessed by mutual support, shared purpose, and workload, achieved with time and attention. I regret times when I allowed external dictates send us into a flurry and have learned to call halt. I love our 'powwows with the p' and our habit of co-solutioning. I am excited to further expand the professional growth communities that embody the holistic, the academic and the all-important 'I-Thou' encounter. It has been our experience that "authentic and successful partnerships take time and considerable effort to consolidate" (IPPN, 2022, p.63). I will never regret any time that is dedicated to positive communication, relationship building or restoration, for it is time that is well spent. For sure, our:

schools are policy overloaded, curriculum overloaded, initiative overloaded, programme overloaded, additional duties overloaded, reporting overloaded, planning overloaded and recording overloaded. Workloads cannot remain the same - they must be decreased, not

redistributed, if any real positive growth and change is expected in
terms of leadership effectiveness and sustainability (IPPN, 2022, p.17)

The courage to change begins in me.

CHAPTER FIVE: ENCOUNTER WITH SELF (ME- SEARCH)



*Pedagogy of the Interior:
Awakening Beauty through Encounter*

Chapter Content

Researchers should consciously and deliberately acknowledge, interrogate, and disclose their own selves in the research, seeking to understand their part in, and influence on, the research... they should go beyond private reflection on how their own biographies and backgrounds have influenced the research and disclose this publicly as part of the necessary transparency of the research.

(Cohen et al., 2017, p.303)

Me-Search is a reflexive self-study of personal, inter-personal and professional growth comprising the groundwork of the pedagogy of the interior. This chapter takes a retrospective view of the pedagogical origin and how it evolved from meaning ascribed to personal and professional experience. In section one, I answer the calling of beautiful disruption and critically interrogate the me-child and me-teen disruptors of arts and early childhood experience. I highlight the socio-cultural external influences on evolving identity and belonging, the educative implications, and how this impacts inner peace, outer harmony and growth. In section two, I outline the way in which restorative practice paved the way for critical reflection and 'I-Thou' encounter of the pedagogy. I will examine the peak of my professional dilemma and the ensuing restitution of

inner power, purpose and passion that transpired from enactment of the pedagogical stages of pause, ponder, wonder and 'I-Thou' encounter. I illuminate the learning potential of integrated pedagogical opportunities that uncover the autobiographical and psychological roots of feeling, script and beliefs through an embodied exercise of meaning-making. I pay particular attention to the theme of shame induced by societally imposed perfectionism and constant comparison.

Me-search portrays the awakening of consciousness through storytelling and theory applied in practice. I assert that the pedagogy of the interior reconfigures a disposition of fallibility and growth, and a leadership style of continuous realignment of values and vision, one that can be nurtured from early years to twilight years, and modelled at every level of community, for we are all the leaders of our own inner world and choices. I attest that when work of interior is enacted in synchronous reciprocal individual and collective cycles, it enhances consciousness, relationship, safety and growth mindset.

Pause, ponder, wonder and 'I-Thou' transformation/renewal, is an embodied iterative applied pedagogy that embraces uncertainty

and unmask vulnerability as a fundamental starting point for the interrogation of unconscious practice in the performative-driven field of education. A new way of conscious being gives birth to innovation, agency and sustainability in “organic connection between education and personal experience” (Dewey, 1938, p.25). It calls to be awakened, integrated and balanced. Sustainable leadership is a ‘living -centre’ (Buber, 1996) approach to governance that embodies a positive error disposition to curiosity and inquiry, a relationally rich school culture, and courage. Bradley and Nash (2011) purport that

to know yourself is to forget yourself. To forget yourself is to be awakened by all things. Courage is giving myself permission to be awakened by all the things in my life that used to torment and diminish me (p.63).

Sustainable leadership demands unmasking, accepting personal limitation and making peace with complexity and imperfection. Lamott (1995) avers that “[p]erfectionism is the voice of the oppressor, the enemy of the people. It will keep you cramped and insane your whole life” (p.61). A new style of leadership begins with

the interior business of wondering about what makes me tick, and why. Let us journey back to the origins of identity.

5.1 Pedagogy of the Interior: Integrating Identity

5.1.1 Who am I?

Identity, according to Denzin (2014), is “less a matter of ‘who am I’ and is more about “when, where and how am I?” (p.1123). I am, in part, an amalgam of the era into which I was born, unto parents who are, in turn and in part, an amalgam of theirs and of the influences of their forebearers. Furthermore, I am simultaneously shaped and transformed by the components of every measure of time, from the date of my birth, from each morning until night, and indeed, from each inhale to exhale. Perpetually in encounter, I am a transmutative product of each and every interaction enacted in person, in place, in deed, and in thought, from my family of origin to a myriad of outer families to which I have since belonged. Hence, I may know, without too much struggle, the ‘when’ of I am and the ‘where’ of I am. The ‘who’ and ‘how’ is my interpretation of it all, its integrity dependent on my aptitude for discomfiting self-interrogation, humility and continuous striving. Thus, identity-seeking is a fluid and “a moral, allegorical and therapeutic project”

where “experience, discourse and self-understandings collide against larger cultural assumptions.” (Denzin, 2014, p.1123)

5.1.2 Identity and Name

Identity is an iterative and life-long relational task. Expressing who I was in relation to other, began with my first name tag in Junior Infants. First attempts at scripting one’s name are an early exercise of advocacy. I remember perpetually doodling my name throughout early school years, practicing flourishing signatures, adding to it my Confirmation name and a comprehensive address that expanded to include solar system and universe, (useful for aliens in pre-Eircode times, presumably). It now seems unusual to me that one so exacting about her name would cast it aside upon marriage. Although, growing up in the Ireland of the 1980’s in a family of girls, in an era where double barreled names were considered pretentious and scarcely acknowledged, makes sense of it contextually

Nonetheless, I endeavoured to secure succession of my name and decided, years in advance of motherhood, that my eldest child would be christened ‘Moylan’. It was either that or becoming a Mrs Moylan, an option unavailable at the time. Identity-seeking

manifests in other shapes and forms too, from cringe-worthy teenage hairstyles, questionable fashion statements and rebellious piercings, to taste in music, astrology signs, club colours and so on. Identity and belonging are interconnected and relational. Who I am and what I present and represent in the world is a stamp of identity and identification and it underpins self-actualisation. I believe that when a person loses sight of their significance, they are in danger of losing themselves entirely.

5.1.3 Identity and Belonging

One of my earliest memories of unbelonging was the spanking I received and deserved for upturning the pram in which lay the attention-seeking usurper of my previously established identity as the most adored and utterly thrilling youngest member of the family. I do not recall disliking my new sister nor did I intend her any harm. Almost three-years-old, I could not reach up to see what resided in the imposing semi-roofed dark pram and in my efforts to explore, it came tumbling down, baby and all, amidst the shrieking and scolding of the 'big people'. Confusion and fright combined with the new sense of being a 'bad' child, a feeling that was far more painful and isolating than the spanking episode that followed.

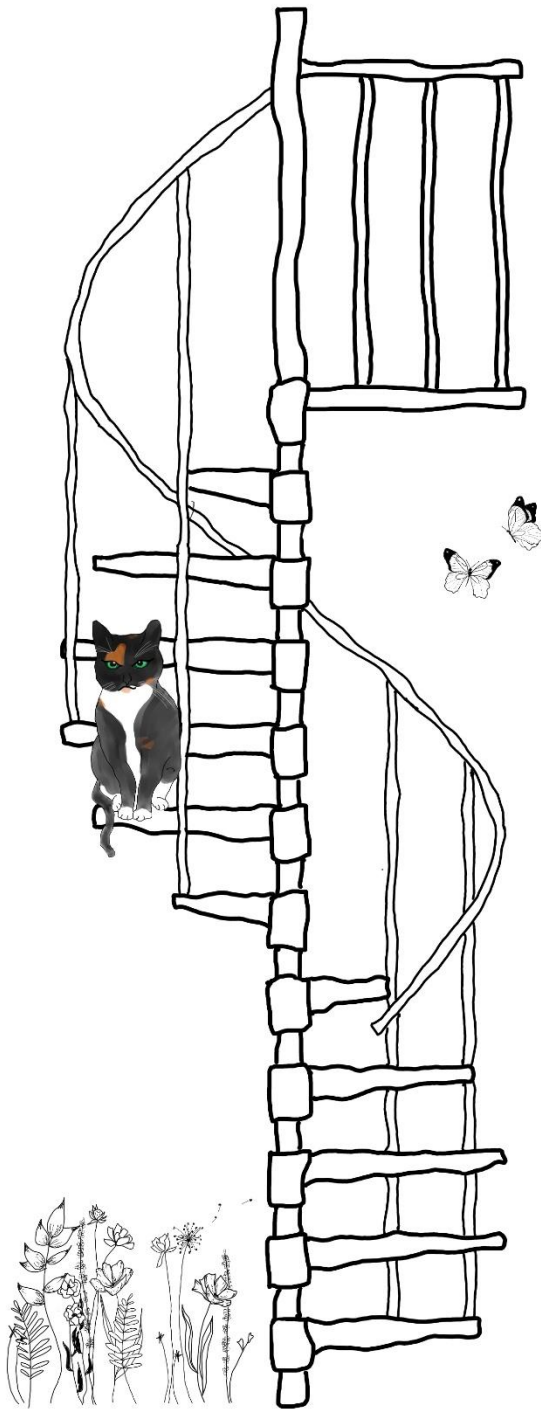
I revisited the episode with my Employee Assist Scheme (EAS) counselor who helped me to understand that the origins of fear of error and disapproval likely began at the time of this disruption.

5.1.4 Origins of Fallibility

I was the sister in sixth position of seven daughters in my family of origin. From the lowly sibling ranks, I marveled at the certainty of older sisters. In awe, and in unquestioning faith, a lengthy pursuit of the absolutes ignited early on, but remained elusive. Now, with the benefit of hindsight, I can see how my negative association with fallibility induced a tendency to armour up and to fake a degree of omnipotence I did not possess. I have come to acknowledge that egoic assumption kept me captive on a conveyor belt of constant crippling comparison, where I aspired and grasped, perpetually missing the mark of my own making. It is a relief to surrender absolutes, as neither imposter nor expert, and develop a deeper inner-knowing through the pedagogy of the interior. Uncertainty has become a brave birthplace of renewed and reconfigured identity and identification, and I have found comfort in the surrender to the humble fallibility of the middle ground, which leads me to discuss the liminal space of 'Halfway down the Stairs'

(1976), sung by Robin the frog in episode 110 of *The Muppet Show* and illustrated by my daughter in figure 3. The song provided my first experience of ambiguous disruption through the arts as it encapsulates a calling to pause and presence.

5.1.5 Pause and Presence



Happy Birthday Mum, 1/12/12

Half Way Down
Half way down the stairs
Is the stair where I sit.
There isn't any other stair
Quite like it.
It's not at the bottom,
It's not at the top;
So this is the stair
Where I always stop.

Half way up the stairs
Isn't up and isn't down
It isn't in the nursery
It isn't in the town.
And all sorts of funny thoughts
Run round my head:
"It isn't really anywhere
It's somewhere else instead!"

2022

Milne, 1924 (Figure 3)

‘Halfway Down the Stairs’ (1976) conveys a magical moment of pause and presence. The lyrics are from an A.A. Milne poem and the tune was composed by Harold Fraser-Simpson. Incidentally, the song reached the top 10 in the UK Top of the Pops in 1977 and is fondly known in my household as that strange tune which mum tries to sing but always gets too choked up to finish. For me, the song still disrupts, ‘quickens’ and calls to me, an example of O’Donohue’s (2003) awakening beauty. I firmly believe that things, which call for attention, even though we may not know why, are significant and unique for each individual. Robin’s position of ‘in-betweenness’, halfway down the stairs, denotes a moment of pure presence and consciousness. Aware of the peripheral world, he does not allow it interrupt the flow of “funny thoughts” that “run round” his head (1976).

Around the time of the Muppet Show hit, I had experienced another real-life disruptor in my timeline. Again, with the help of my EAS counsellor, I unearthed another nugget of self-learning. I discovered that a new neural pathway was set in motion and merged with my previous script relating to fear of disapproval and

being a 'bad' child. This time I learned to fear rejection. My eighteen-year-old, second-eldest sister became pregnant and left home to get married against my parent's wishes. Naturally, there were disputes, tears of frustration and enormous upheaval, and at the time, being only nine years old, I did not comprehend the situation. I saw only that my sister seemed to have caused deep upset and then abruptly lived with us no longer. I internalised the situation as a rejection of her by my parents. My resolve to be a good girl and to make everyone happy strengthened as a result. Fear of abandonment developed.

In my own naïve way and unbeknown to anyone, I embarked on my first rescue mission where I resolved to compensate for my sister's error with extra 'goodness' and with that, I was determined to mask anything which might invite disapproval or possible similar rejection. I have since discovered that an attachment style developed and is positioned somewhere between the 'secure' and 'anxious' type (*appendix 5*). Ordinarily content and happy but with an underlying need for perfection, I have a positive image of other, but a conflicted self-image, that thrives on approval. I was blessed with academic aptitude and talent in music and sport. I was

outwardly rewarded for my successes and achievements which afforded me my much-needed approval and led to my pursuit of more of the same. My sense of value and belonging became intertwined with success and praise. Perfection is crippling and confining, a 'teacherly' commonality as I discovered in 'Pause to Ponder'. Thankfully, my sister reconciled with my parents and together they became a loving parenting/grand-parenting team for her six devoted children.

Additionally, I discovered that the Karpman (1968) drama triangle (*appendix 6*) explained my compulsion to fix and restore calm and order when in the midst of a storm, often to the detriment of personal limitation. Now, it surprises me little to see how well suited I am to principalship (the rescuer) and why restorative practice (the striving for peace and harmony) is one of the most meaningful aspects of my job. Inner knowing and awareness of script is very valuable. Personally, it has activated awareness and inner power to critically examine and discard old scripts, beliefs and rules that pop up from time to time in favour of new and enlightened way of being.

Returning to Robin's song, I can now locate the roots of the disruption through the lens of my psychoeducation. Milne's couplets denote absence of place or import: "It's not at the bottom/It's not at the top"; "It isn't in the nursery/It isn't in the town" and "It isn't really anywhere/It's somewhere else instead". In the non-hierarchical nowhere space, free from politics or demands, there is refuge. There is no hurry, no pressure, no judgement, no right or wrong, no masks. It is exactly the kind of space that might call to a confused and fearful child. Such pause and observation, devoid of evaluation, is a foundational step of the pedagogy of the interior. This obscure little 1970's hit was a disruptor of undistilled beauty for me, and while finding comfort in the liminal space of pause may be easy for a muppet, for humans it is a bliss elusive to many. It grounds inner peace and outer harmony in a creative space that is open to all possibilities but governed by none. The stillness and oneness of Robin's self-encounter is juxtaposed with the hustle and bustle space of other. Personally, I feel it evokes an emotional unconscious yearning for refuge, pause, presence, renewal, and homecoming to soul.

5.1.6 SWISH (*Sharing of Wisdom Information Strength and Hope*)

My early years in the role of principalship offered many opportunities of disruption for learning. One such opportunity was afforded by a parent of a pupil. Maura's son had a diagnosis of autism. He was a happy, grounded well-behaved pupil. Maura was eager to avail of every support that we could offer and often questioned what she saw as the discrepancy between DES allocation of supports and the realities of school limitations. Like many parents in the same boat, she had become used to grappling with systems and institutions to secure the best for her child. As a private independent person, she chose not to share her son's diagnosis with members of family or friends. She had a clear understanding of what his education should look like and was committed to making it happen. She found homework difficult, but rejected our differentiated recommendations, convinced that her son's efforts should match the aptitudes of other children. Meetings were often fraught with teachers guarded against her critique. I was concerned about my teachers and also about the mother and wondered how we might strengthen relationship and build faith and trust. It was clear to me that there were barriers present and that encounters were one-sided

and sometimes disrespectful, but I struggled to see how it might change.

One day, Maura informed me, in frustration, that I knew very little about special needs education. When my ego recovered and I reflected on her words, I conceded there was certainly more to learn. The disruption gave me pause to ponder and I realised that theory is only one side of learning and there were no real opportunities to learn from the parent perspective. Not long after that, I founded an innovative new space for encounter which I named SWISH. SWISH was established to create a hub for parents and interested staff members for the Sharing of Wisdom Information Strength and Hope. SWISH was set up as an experiment and has been running for over seven years. It is primarily a parents meeting, with school participation, that takes place once or twice a term. It is not confined to parents of our school and is open to all who want to discuss the special needs, available services, and supports for families and more. Protocols for safety and positive communication are outlined in the preamble to each meeting. Confidentiality is paramount. As 'living-centre' of encounter, I hoped we might learn from parents and that they might learn from each other and from us. Another aim, in my

founding of this group, was to build relationships and to open a space of innovative co-solutioning so that parents of children with special needs along with the school team, might optimise learning spaces inside and outside school. At times, a visiting psychologist or occupational therapist will provide a workshop. At other times, we discuss a range of topics from the ins-and-outs of sleep patterns, food routines, travelling abroad, or who might be the best fit for teaching piano to children with special education needs in the locality. At SWISH meetings there is a blend of laughter, tears, frustration, and hope. The local Family Resource Centre has also linked in to provide further supports for parents and children such as low-cost counselling, art therapy and youth clubs. As a staff, it has enhanced our understanding, empathy, and planning for our pupils with special educational needs.

Parents who attend have become friends with each other and with school staff. There remains a discrepancy between the volume of parents who attend and the potential figures. We have tried many ways to increase attendance, including changing scheduled time, day, and frequency of meetings. We discovered that parents who work outside the home are unable to attend during the day, but there is

also difficulty with evening time meetings due to the necessity for consistency in children's routine. In addition, I observed that some, including the mother who inspired SWISH and never attended, prefer privacy and some are lucky to feel no need for SWISH. Others have revealed that sometimes when stress escalates, they withdraw, ashamed that they are not coping as well as they feel they should. Shame activates withdrawal, which will be explained later. There are peaks and troughs in attendance, as there is in capacity to cope, but our meetings continue to be a beacon of shared wisdom, information, strength, and hope. More significantly, they are a place of pause, ponder and renewal, and a space of compassion and connection. Encounter reveals the commonality of a communal experience of complexity in negotiating special educational needs. I am grateful for the learning provided by parents, for the interest shown by staff, for the community links, and especially for the ongoing commitment of group members some of whose children have now moved on to second level. I now consider myself more informed and I am still learning.

5.1.7 Wonder and Disruption

Mr J. Alfred Prufrock, fictional character of Elliot's 'Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock' (1915) (*appendix 7*), is another example of disruption that has given me pause to wonder since the day of our first encounter almost four decades ago. Prufrock embodied a warning for me, having sacrificed his soul's calling and choked his "overwhelming question" (Elliot, 1915) for the sake of compliancy and fakery. By line three of the poem, he is corpse-like "etherised upon a table" (Elliot, 1915), defeated, passive and burnt-out. As a lovesong, it misleads, for there is no apparent romance. However, on a deeper layer, it may be interpreted that the love interest is in fact his abandoned self. He convinces himself there is no point in speaking his truth, that he is of scant interest and unworthy of audience. Nuances of his dilemma of burn-out and powerless conformity are transferrable to that of leadership. Prufrock was a disruptor that provoked the me-teen, his troubled vacillation struck a chord because on a subliminal level I identified with his fear of ridicule and rejection, a universal fear.

The poem exposes the perils of uncontested self-imprisonment, where the dictates of other rule and inhibit power, purpose and passion. The leadership dilemma of burn-out, overwhelm, time

deficiency and barriers to core purpose align with the theme. His inner power, passion and purpose have been diminished by the endless “cups, the marmalade, the tea” and jargon “talk of Michelangelo” (Elliot, 1915) just as a leader’s passion is, due to endless circulars and administrative deadlines. Yearning for identity, agency and meaning is close to the bone. Prufrock prompts us to wonder about the point of an existence that is “measured out...with coffee spoons” (Elliot, 1915) of policy, initiative and dictate. We notice that, as the internal pressure mounts in the poem, so too does his self-critique and self-deprecating comparative. He eventually reaches the end of his tether and cries out “I should have been a pair of ragged claws /Scuttling across the floors of silent seas” (Elliot, 1915). In the arc of his dilemma, he surrenders to the shame, anticipatory fear, and judgement. He denies his purpose and passion, relinquishes inner power, and succumbs to the control exerted by internal assumption and projected expectation.

I first made the acquaintance of Mr. J. Alfred Prufrock in 1987, in one of Mrs. Hope’s ‘you could hear a pin drop’ English classes in secondary school. I remember that class especially for the inimitable exquisite pain that is only experienced in the most

austere of forbidden spaces, the sort that has you on a perpetual brink of explosive mirth. I recall those stolen moments where me and Resty (my seating buddy), would engage in furtive scribbled dialogue on the margins of a shared second-hand *Macbeth*.

Beneath the sardonic regard of Mrs. Hope we sat, in simultaneous awe and rebellion, as she enlightened from the exalted perch of her high stool and desk. Despite the giddiness and the merry distraction induced by the beautiful Resty, I fell in love with English and with Prufrock and with Resty too, as I am being honest.

My connection back then to Eliot's balding timorous middle-aged self is intriguing. I was 'an cailín leis an leath gruaig', so christened by a Leaving Certificate exam supervisor in a nod to my half-shaven dubious hairstyle, no doubt. Otherwise, known as 'Bauld Brazen Áine Máire', which pointed to my thirst for adventure, I gather.

Regardless of the apparent divide between Prufrock and I, there was nevertheless a deep and visceral river of identification that flowed in between and presided in intermittent suspension for the most part of four decades. As I contemplate my own lovesong in the work of this scholarly personal narrative (SPN), Prufrock has rallied with redoubled import, re-instigating disruption, and daring me to

consciously confront my own mid-life vista. For me, his lovesong plays a countermelody to mine and stirs me to examine the subliminal discomfort of lost essence, partially suppressed by decades of unconsciousness and approval-dependent compliancy. He holds up the mirror of his vacillating vicissitude and unrealised ambition to urge me toward a rescue mission of authentic identity.

5.1.8 Identity and Becoming

The mid-teens are a formative stage of life where values, dispositions and skills become instantiated in habits that are difficult to undo. The drive for independence arises naturally and the process of becoming begins. In Victorian times 'coming out' was the public statement of social readiness for females as young as twelve. In more recent times the term has been associated with the making public of sexual and gender orientation. Dictionaries define the term 'becoming' as 'appropriate', 'acceptable', 'fitting'. To delve deeper, whether one is 'coming out' or 'becoming', each state pertains to a declaration of social identity in a brave inside-out journey that is then measured in terms of decorum and appropriate acceptability. But the natural inclination to merge authentic and social identity is conflicted by norms which constrain and impose.

This conflictual co-occurring pressure of the internal and external is a life-long cycle and demands critical consciousness. The pedagogy of the interior paves the way for negotiation, renewal, and reconfiguration, but demands that we remain vigilant, conscious, and grounded. Prufrock suppressed his hidden identity at a cost and became strangled by 'It-world' (Buber, 1996) weeds of shame and fear.

And I have known the eyes already, known them all.

The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,

And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,

When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,

Then how should I begin

To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?

And how should I presume? (Eliot, 1915)

Eliot's use of 'presume' at the end of this rant speaks to a future of further conjecture, falsity, performativity, and ultimately his stultified actualisation.

Pressures exerted by external forces comprise basic need to belong and be seen. But in the 'I-It' interchange of inside and outside, the internal disassociates and disintegrates, as aptly portrayed by Burnham in *Inside* (2021). Buber (1996) advocates for vigilance and

the constant consistent realignment of the 'I-Thou' encounter with self, other and the systems that govern. Governing systems are numerous and diverse. The 'I-It' is not always initially obvious. It arises socially, occupationally, politically, culturally, and within every system including the religious, the charitable, and the ecological. Now it is all augmented and accelerated by online media. It is present in all communities from intimate and local to national and international, regardless of purpose. It is the essence of the relational realm of humanity. 'I-It' is a lure, a leaning, a trap and is the world of the ego. Even idealistic leaders of emancipation and reform are susceptible. Ideals will always become tainted and manipulated, a tokenistic 'I-It' salute to their 'I-Thou' origins, when the sentry of consciousness slumbers.

The pedagogy of the interior must be afforded significance and viewed as an imperative for practice, because often, we are lost to ego, before we realise it is happening. The rhythm of the lovesong enacts the dialogue of witnessing self and ego. The alternating ritardando and accelerando replicates the juxtaposition of the slow pace of invitation to pause and presence of witnessing self and the speedy babbling and perpetual nag of unbridled ego. This internal

dichotomy presides at the core centre of every person, where the 'I' of the self-grapples with self-sabotaging ego. If we could learn the skill of critical thinking, how more informed and empowered might we become? If we understood that anything which pertains to comparison is not to be trusted, how more grounded and purposeful could we be? It is through cycles of deconstructed 'I-It' and reconstructed 'I-Thou' that we are renewed and resuscitated. Thus, we can view complexity as disruptor and as beauty, and as opportunity to 're-become' our truest social self. How better to sustain a life of inner peace and outer harmony.

Disruption, whatever form it takes, is a calling for renewal, realignment and homecoming. O' Donohue (2003), no doubt, would delight in seeing Prufrock succumb to his mermaids, become grounded in their beauty, and awakened through encounter with them. The pedagogy of the interior instantiates a disposition towards pause, ponder and the skill of critical wonder so that burn-out does not overtake purpose, passion, and inner power. I see it as legitimising and prioritising a lifelong pedagogy that operates like the machination of synchronised pistons, an 'I-Thou'/'I-It' filter system as it were. Let us not become entrenched in a system that

reproduces cogs in the wheel of economy. The terrible beauty of sustainable leadership is a cry to battle against a cycle of hegemony. We must initiate autonomous bespoke education of the 'when' and 'where' of our own contexts alongside the 'why' and 'why not' of our interactions. The pedagogy of the interior embodies self-awareness, consciousness and fusion of self and context.

5.1.9 Identity Splitting and Disintegration

I believe that the tug of external forces on identity begins at birth. From there and throughout our lives we are perpetually conditioned to deliver on the dividend of socio-cultural indoctrination, which is why critical consciousness is a vital skill. For many, preservation of self requires a degree of secrecy. Masks are donned for merging within a myriad of social contexts. Splitting and dilution of identity "to prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet" (Elliot, 1915) becomes a norm. Prufrock's yearning, sense of lostness, and the donning of social masks resonated with the soul of 'me-teen'. In some ways, it related to an aborted becoming, for one unknowingly addicted to approval and perfection. The trouble with masks is that the mask and its wearer can become inextricably interwoven until they are all but inseparable if one is not vigilant or

has no sense of their interiority. Potential loss of self was terrifyingly real for the 'me-teen'. I attest that the unmasking and reveal of concealed identity is the work of education so that new neural pathways may be instantiated to equip learners for the relinquishment of habitual ways that confine and suffocate, such as traditional outdated notions of leadership. Pause and surrender to the uncertain and the fallible is brave and necessary. I have found the bounty to be manifold.

To know yourself is to forget yourself. To forget yourself is to be awakened by all things. Courage is giving myself permission to be awakened by all the things in my life that used to torment and diminish me (Bradley and Nash, 2011, p.63).

5.1.10 Educative Implications

Prufrock's society is similar to Burnham's (2021) as it represents an inauthentic judgemental fixed 'I-It' world. The 'me-teen' subconsciously felt the ominous foreboding of a funeral of my own becoming. The lost educative potential of negotiating inner peace and outer harmony through the terrible beauty of Elliot's poetry, or by other means, is something to be lamented for it could have been

harnessed to help tease out a way of being in the world that protected unfolding identity. Instead, we learned by rote the interpretation of other, in an educational system designed to deliver dividends of points for college courses, and its ensuing economy-enhancing careers. Surely, as educators, we can value the pedagogy of the interior, a skill for life that is honed throughout. Now, beyond the midlife stage, I choose to believe that Prufrock found his way to his calling mermaids, to authentic encounter and to a homecoming with true self. I choose to believe that he confronted his self-defeating scripts and beliefs and became transformed in joyful abandonment, wearing “the bottoms of [his] trousers rolled” as he “walk[ed] upon the beach” (Elliot, 1915). “We are always unfinished participants in an unfinished world” (Armour et al., 2017, p.8).

School context is situated within the wider context of an expanding digital world, in which we are all embedded, to greater and lesser degrees. More than ever, people of all ages need support to negotiate meaning and identity. Multiple identities jostle in a multitude of digital spaces and worlds. For many, there is little respite from the tug of the digital world, so aptly captured by

Burnham (2021) as a case for urgent concern. Chambers & Sanford (2019) claim

that an uncritical appreciation of the acquisition and transfer of socio-technical capital between and across such spaces, holds significant implications for young people's construction of identity and associated digital well-being (p.5).

Ess (2015) proposes that “endorsing responsibility in a hyper connected reality requires acknowledging how our actions, perceptions, intentions, morality, even corporality are interwoven with technologies in general, and ICTs in particular” (as cited in Chambers and Sanford, 2019, p.18). The pedagogy of the interior does not differentiate between age, role, or culture for everyone has a valuable contribution and identity evolves in its democratic space. Rudduck (2001) commented on the fixedness of “schools, in their deep structures and patterns of relationship” (p.7) in contrast to the rate of change of the world. Twenty years along from her statement, the situation still fails to address reform with a speed sufficient to match ever-accelerating digital change.

Children are enormously vulnerable in an unconscious society, but so also are their teachers and leaders for similar reasons. My

pedagogy of the interior addresses a gap and a golden opportunity of a dawning new era in education. We must desist from regurgitating the old and insist on time devoted to collective critical reflection on what matters and why, and with no apology. The leadership dilemma is part and parcel of a universal dilemma. In this era of reform, we must deeply consider what real reform looks like from the point of view of “organisational structures and patterns of relationship” (Rudduck, 2001, p.7) and change from the inside-out and bottom-up. The school leader, positioned as ‘living-centre’ (Buber, 1996) must intrinsically prepare for approach, allocate time and prioritise the pedagogy of the interior for professional and personal growth so that adults and children can synchronically change in symbiotic encounter. Then they can revel in the ripples of beneficence that subsequently extend outwards and onwards. We must cast debate aside, and “dare disturb the universe” (Elliot, 1915) to construct not just a “better match between schools and young people” (Rudduck, J., 2001, p.8), but a better match between ideals we espouse and embodied leadership values.

Relationship and communication are the best intervention and foundational in all therapy. Teachers have traditionally shied away

from their responsibility to nurture the interior climate of the child, asserting that they lack training and that it is not within the scope of their role. There is a gap in the cohesion of the intersecting systems which impacts and constrains all players. Young people inhabit a hybrid world with few boundaries, often scanty morality, and little to differentiate between information and misinformation. Abandoned to 'It-world' manipulation, alongside their grownups, in a world where toddlers are often as adept in technology as their parents, I have noticed in my practice that mental health is deteriorating from a much younger age. 'Pause to Ponder' established safe spaces for both teachers and pupils to tease out complex universal themes collectively, individually, and reflexively. It became a platform for deconstruction of myths and for enlightenment. Relationship and wellbeing thrived. Advocacy and democracy bloomed. Internal and external power shifted and transmuted in a renewal of identity and identification. As a leader, I renounce unconsciousness and hegemony. I refuse to be a political cog and am filled with terror at Prufrock's self-portrait.

*an easy tool, deferential, glad to be of use, politic, cautious
and meticulous, full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse, at*

times, indeed, almost ridiculous, almost, at times, the fool."

(Eliot, 1915)

Instead, I embrace autonomy that sometimes necessitates unapologetic creative insubordination, selective abandonment, or partial compliance, to legitimise my right to make informed decisions based on personal capacity and community values. I aim to make time for the pause, ponder and wonder as an embodied whole school community endeavour so that inner peace and outer harmony can thrive. It is increasingly impossible to meet the escalating demands on the leadership role, and were I to continue do so, would be at a high cost of personal and inter-personal holistic needs. It is unrealistic to anticipate a healthy happy school community whilst the leader is deflected from core purpose and unquestioningly driving overwhelm. By turning up to the national and global conversation, awakening critical consciousness and focusing on an inside-out/bottom-up trajectory, we can step into a relevant and meaningful practice and thereby,

explore both the connections and the contradictions between the smooth spaces imagined and made by global policy models and the more mundane and 'sticky' reality of day-to-day delivery, between the apparently limitless world of the

business class policy guru and peripatetic consultant, on the one hand, and the more circumscribed spheres inhabited by local administrators, stakeholders, and frontline workers on the other. (Peck and Theodore, 2015, p. xvii)

5.2 Restorative Practice: A Bedrock of the Pedagogy of the Interior

I assert that restorative practice (RP) and the skill of nonviolent communication comprise the bedrock of the pedagogy of the interior, while research on unconscious uncontested shame affect underpins the psychological capacity to understand self and others. I attest this as the dispositional imperative for the social, relational and emotional work of education. Dewey (1938) refers to the plurality of existence as a process of social intelligence. There is a need for a pedagogy that demystifies emotional response and patterns of beliefs. I will now draw from catalysts of my learning through “a backward movement that re-covers and re-presents, alongside a forward movement that generates and evokes” (Latta, 2013, p.192). A dual approach of theoretical knowledge and a framework for practice is proposed, one that habitually harnesses disruption and complexity as opportune moments for consolidating aptitude for critical consciousness. I will explore layers of reflexivity

afforded by RP and the work of the interior that enhances identity, amplifies identification, and supports interrogation of internal and external influences that can run contrary to passion and purpose.

My personal experience of leading a restorative school culture has proven RP to be an embodiment of 'I-Thou' encounter, a framework for the unveiling of beauty within disruption, and a glimpse at the turmoil-inducing 'It-world'. I have found RP to be a reflective, reflexive, regenerative approach to identity, identification, and encounter with complexity. It is authentic, non-judgmental and reciprocal. It involves retrospective learning, presence in present and a fusion for a future-oriented co-solutioning way of being. The giraffe is the mascot for RP for it has a bird's eye view of the world and has the biggest heart in the animal kingdom. The ability to see many perspectives and to love with a big heart are primary characteristics of RP and of good leadership.

Experience has shown me how the restorative approach is grounded in the building, maintaining, and protection of positive relationship, whilst providing a mechanism for resolution and restoration during conflict. But it is far more than a conflict resolution tool or framework for discipline. It facilitates Lundy's

(2007) requisites for voice by providing safe space, opportunities for voice, attentive respectful audiences, with influence being a transparent part of the exchange. Lundy's (2007) model is in fact a reflection of the basic human needs of safety, voice, significance, and respect. Everyone's voice matters, be they pupil, teacher, SNA, parent or leader, and each deserves audience and power to influence. RP inculcates the habit of attentive listening, deepens capacity for mutual understanding and accountability. It is democratic and a shared communal responsibility. It enhances agency and sense of community alongside wellbeing, respect, and tolerance. It affords personal and interpersonal learning experiences, within a conscious, consistent, and comprehensive school approach. RP sees perfection as absurd, error as normal, and allows everyone to turn up as their flawed vulnerable selves.

RP is an integral part of policy, evident in Child Protection, Wellbeing, Code of Behaviour, Antibullying, Social Personal Health Education, Positive Communication policies and procedure such as those which handle parental complaints, grievances, and staff relations:

The pattern of motives which sustains the relationships between the adults in the school is the governing factor in its whole activity. If these are right all other relationships will come right automatically or will very easily be straightened out, whether between the pupils and the staff or between the children themselves. If they are wrong, nothing will go right. If the staff is a community, the school will be a community. If the staff is a mere society of functional cooperation nothing will make a community of the school.

(Macmurray *as quoted in* Fielding, 2012 p.685)

I have been an advocate for RP for well over a decade. I love the simplicity of its approach. As leaders, we work in an emotional, unpredictable and imperfect human environment. RP may seem simple, but it is no quick fix. Traditional discipline punishes a child for an angry outburst. It manages the child temporarily, but not the anger. In the simmering injustice of his/her punitive silencing, the child is unable to learn and nor will his/her seating partners who will likely wind up bearing the brunt of unresolved anger. Therefore, in our consideration of preparation for its role in teaching and learning, emotional intelligence and disposition play an important role. It is my opinion that SPHE (social personal and health

education) programmes lack a 'needs education'. They cater for identification and regulation of emotion without attending to unmet needs or the language of advocacy. We cannot manage emotion. Telling a child that they should feel sorry does not make them sorry. Difficult emotions must be contained and transformed within 'I-Thou'.

According to Amstutz (2015, p.20) "three major philosophical strands have shaped restorative discipline", namely "constructivism, critical reflection, and psycho educational theory".

Constructivism holds that individuals gain meaning and motivation when they are given power to make their own decisions and to engage in the problem-solving process through collaboration.

Critical reflection describes the problem-solving process that honours multiple perspectives and emphasizes creative problem-solving along with an analysis of systems and situations. The psycho-education approach values an understanding of the internal feelings, needs and conflicts that motivate behaviour.

Restorative justice theory has added a focus on the relationship piece: the harm done by misbehaviour and the consequent need to put things as right as possible. (Amstutz, 2015, p.20)

The restorative process, whether it is a conflict resolution meeting, circle-time or conference, necessarily starts from an open-minded fallible position. Until all perspectives are voiced, until impact is understood, until all of what is said settles and is digested through further reciprocal exchange and interaction, nothing is fully known. Until we can account for the part that our own emotion plays, and what lies beneath that and why, we are not turning up in true authenticity and reciprocity. Traditionally, professionalism was incorrectly misconstrued as unemotional and impersonal, that it was possible to veil bias, but all is interrelated and is consciously or unconsciously conveyed via non-verbal communication, regardless of our assumptions. In order to take ownership, we must first be able to spot what arises and understand it before we can proceed. The quest for meaning is one of our basic human needs. It can transform the most untenable circumstance and reinstate inner peace and outer harmony. RP affords the school leader the facility to create a continuum of practice for transformation and renewal. I will summarise the trajectory of my own learning and experience of this and the unanticipated awakening that awaited and surprised.

5.2.1 Leading a Restorative School

The following is an account of my relational learning at the ground floor of experience. I have included in *appendix 8 and 9* the resources we use in our school to support our work. I have found that establishing a restorative school requires a fully embodied conscious and consistent commitment. It takes learning, time, experience, a culture of positive error, amends, follow-through, critical reflection, and the pedagogy of the interior. Disruption and learning is necessarily part of the process because tension and conflict is as natural to humanity as our desire for harmony.

I was appointed principal in a large developing all-boys school. At the time, there was a highly structured code of discipline in operation that comprised of a system of coloured cards and sanctions that progressed in stages of complexity and import towards suspension and ultimately expulsion. As a newcomer to the team, I noted that it was valued and employed by all members of the staff and was complemented by individual class programmes of positive reinforcement. There was no differentiated behaviour plan and little dialogue afforded in the handling of misdemeanours and disputes. Sanctions were swift, efficient, and exacting of lofty

standards of respect and compliance. Yet, every school has its cohort of 'usual suspects' and ours was no exception. Incidence of reoffence was high within this group.

It had been the role of my predecessor to oversee the card system and accompanying sanctions. I was not keen on the idea of becoming the chief judge and executioner of sanctions to children I did not yet know. Besides, and it was not something I would openly admit, I found the 'cards' system complicated and somewhat imbalanced, with some teachers utilising the 'sanction service' with more frequency than others. Nonetheless, the strict approach had the approval of the staff. Using my unique position to objectively observe, I created another rung in the ladder of import, asking my deputy to manage lower-level sanctions, while I set about getting to first know the pupils in more positive and ordinary circumstances. I invited teachers to catch their pupils being good and to send them to my office for acknowledgement. The uptake was initially low and inconsistent.

It was around this time that I first heard about RP. It aligned well with my own values. At the time, it was in its infancy in Primary Schools in Ireland but I was fortunate to find two speakers willing to

introduce the topic to the staff. I was intrigued by the potential potency of restorative questions and, along with a number of other teachers, I adopted the practice with encouraging effect and noticed instant reduction in figures of reoffence. I have never looked back. Due to a dearth of trainers in Ireland at the time, I concluded that my best approach would be to engage in all levels of training myself so that I could then train my staff. Another interested teacher joined me in the enterprise. Slowly, all staff received training over a period of years, along with neighbouring schools and community club leaders and social workers in the locality who were invited to take part. I was privileged to become co-founder of the community-based restorative practice hub and a national RP consultant, linked with The Childhood Development Initiative in Tallaght, Dublin, (creators of the bespoke school restorative programme later adopted by the professional development service for teachers, the PDST). I found that the more I trained the more I learned.

We became a listening school, a school that afforded differentiation and extra support for pupils who were behaviourally challenged. There were mixed views within the school community about this

initially. Pupils were cautious, if not a little suspicious, of an honest approach of no blame. Some teachers missed the efficient autocracy of the old methods. Parents found it difficult to adjust to a new way that supported both perpetrator and victim in equal measure. It demanded time and dialogue to put forward our rationale and convey the principles of a restorative school. Sanctions were not abolished. Instead, they were used in a more considered and sparing way. We found that, as our continuum of RP progressed, we spent more time building and maintaining positive relationships and less time facilitating conflict resolution or resolving incidences of bullying. We used the idiom 'practice makes permanent, not perfect.'

The trajectory was imperfect. Rich learning opportunities presented themselves for refinement. "Refinement is about the continual change process and attention to the detail of quality and sustainable practice." (Thorsborne and Blood, 2013, p107).

Protection and safety are paramount for the vulnerable process of negotiating feelings and needs. As 'living-centre,' I facilitated time, opportunities for encounter, human and financial resources. At first, it was a challenge to persuade teachers that time spent in

democratic dialogue in RP circles was more time efficient than the regular reprimands that interrupt the daily flow. Initially, RP was an elective piece. It was always evident which classes engaged in regular practice. These classes thrived relationally and behaviourally and the blossoming bond between teacher and pupil was clear for all to see.

A listening school assesses need on a much deeper level and need analysis contributed to bespoke differentiated planning for teaching and learning. This in turn returned dividends of civic sensibility and responsibility throughout the entire school community. Thorsborne and Blood (2013) attest:

Relationships has a far more expansive meaning than is generally thought. It has to do with how a team or organisation values its people - their emotional, physical and spiritual well-being; the level of connectivity among people across the system; the value placed upon collaboration and high functioning teams; and the level of connectivity of and the type of relationship between key teams, programmes and operational systems. It is not just the traditional understanding about a focus on people getting along and liking each other. (pp.134-135)

The most challenging aspect of a restorative approach by far was restorative language, otherwise known as nonviolent communication (Rosenberg, 2015). From my experience as practitioner and trainer, I have found this to be a consistently underdeveloped skill amongst adults as well as children. To remedy this, we have focused on a needs education in our school for it is the unmet need that triggers the emotion and the subsequent relational fall-out. As a staff we simplified Rosenberg's list, deducing there were four main needs that seemed to demand most our attention when handling pupil disputes: i) safety; ii) belonging; iii) having voice and being heard; iv) respect. We discovered, in our collaboration on workplace dignity, that these same basic needs counted for adults. We created a graded approach from infants to sixth class to scaffold Rosenberg's pillars of nonviolent communication or restorative language, as it is commonly referred to (*appendix 9*). Firstly, from junior infants to first class, pupils learned to identify their feelings. Then, from second to fourth Class, pupils learned how to identify their feelings and express them using an 'I-statement.' Lastly, for fifth and sixth classes, pupils learned to identify the unmet need and convey it, adding a doable request. It

was easy to see how Roche's (2015) courteous language, used in the action research *Pause to Ponder* blends beautifully with RP, as we shall see in chapter six.

Of course, the assumption that needs education is facilitated by teachers who understand its purpose, or indeed their own needs, is a fallacy. Self-awareness and comprehension varies from individual to individual. It requires time, consistency, practice and modelling. Locating unmet needs is a vulnerable process of personal responsibility, growth, and change. In *Pause to Ponder*, I found that capacity for critical reflection differs, that entrenched habits of assumption, judgement and blame can prevail, that fear of imperfection, vulnerability and ridicule are sometimes tightly defended and require deep interior work. The pedagogy of the interior facilitates opportunity for teachers to ponder and wonder about the source of fears and our freedom to shed its shackles. Complexity is inherent in the messy mortal business of education and knowing self is an essential precursor for demystifying the cognitive triggers of our scripts and beliefs. I make a call for professional learning that provides psychoeducation to support our understanding of self and other. I call for a full and consistent use of

the EAS counselling service as a way of developing our learning and as a matter of supervision, as is the case in the therapeutic fields.

5.2.2 Restorative Practice for Staff

For years, my attention was focused on the establishment of a restorative culture where the wellbeing of the child was heart centre. Later my focus was directed towards the nurturing of RP amongst staff. Now all approaches combine with an additional focus on self-discovery and self-recovery. In the past, I mistakenly assumed that the principles of RP were easily transferrable to the adult realm. I assumed my own safety and comfort in the approach was reflected for other. But ability to engage deeply in dialogue is varied. I have had bad timing and denied the pre-requisite pause stage for a reverent approach in a rush to expediently resolve. RP is an elective and slow process. It has taken years to embed the nonprescriptive ever-evolving RP continuum. I uncovered the need for safety to be equally important at the adult level and in fact, longer to establish. As a leader, I can feel vulnerable in powerless situations. I have learnt that my teachers feel vulnerable too, that they too use masks to conceal fear and exude a semblance of control that is absent. Slowly, we are making brave progress

through powwows and professional growth communities (PGCs), but safety is always of the utmost importance. This applies to school leaders as much as it applies to staff, which is an important iterate piece for leaders to convey for this is not readily recognised.

The spectrum of influence of the RP school continuum is generally unknown. I notice that it is mostly understood as restorative discipline and training is generally absorbed as such. Another misconception has led the uninformed to perceive that it is only for children, as an INTO legal advisor confidently and incorrectly advised a fellow colleague. Secondary school subject-oriented structures make training complicated. Often teachers become side-tracked in the debate about which curriculum RP belongs to, but relationship occurs in every subject and in every classroom, in the corridor, the offices, and recreational spaces. RP flounders in schools that view practice as a matter of choice because this leads to inconsistency, confusion and disgruntlement. I have heard tell that RP is a 'soft' approach, easily manipulated by the 'usual suspects'. However, it is in fact far more challenging to listen to the impact of your actions on another and endeavour to make meaningful amends, than it is to do sulky detention. Schools often

revert to investigating deeds to determine the right and wrongs, instead of addressing the needs that drive the deeds. This dwells on a black and white/right or wrong approach, apportioning blame instead of affording the holistic differentiated support that is required for change to occur. Some think it is unfair or inequitable to approach behavioural aptitude differently even though academically, this is considered best practice. I have trained solo teachers who adopt RP as their own prerogative, as they wait for their whole school 'buy in', which is to be commended, but RP requires the 'living-centre' leader to gather traction. Conversely, I have witnessed management who struggle with resistance from staff who think that the hard stuff of relationships is a managerial duty. In Ireland RP is recommended by the Department of Education and Skills, but it has not yet become a mandatory module of the Bachelor of Education (BEd) or Professional Master of Education (PME), which identifies a pertinent gap. The following is a story that illuminates the fallout from misrepresentation and misinformation.

5.2.3 The Flag Story

Every school takes pride in flying their flags of achievement. If you fly an Active flag, it means your school community is fit. Green Flags denote a grade of eco warrior status. European, National and County flags call forth fierce and fighting pride of place and some schools design flags for what matters to them. In my first year as principal, I was more than a little smug when our school became the first school in Co Cork (and third, I believe, nationally) to fly the Irish Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children 'Shield Anti-bullying Flag'. I remember doing a self-congratulatory interview on the radio at the time. But pride often precedes the fall.

I was unprepared for the day I felt 'beaten', metaphorically speaking, by our own flagpole. I quickly learned that the new anti-bullying flag was perceived by at least one vulnerable family as a declaration of a bully-free establishment instead of a preventative accountable culture. Clearly our manifesto was somewhat misconstrued. This was brought to my attention by a parent who described the distress she experienced by the raised flag. She explained that it felt like a 'blind lie' to the bullying behaviour her son was experiencing. It seemed that his relational harm felt all the

more unjust and isolating, being perpetuated in silence under the flag's flapping manifesto.

With effective communication, the bullying situation was investigated, the child's safety and wellbeing restored, my relationship with his mother repaired and her sense of empowerment reinstated. We reviewed and revised the symbolism of the flag to involve and empower the entire school community of pupil families and the community at large. I am proud of our awareness, protections, anti-bullying measures and revisions, as well as the evolving understanding of the restorative approach amongst parents. When I lowered our flag many years later after it had flapped itself to fitters, it was with wry appreciation of the reflective learning it had afforded.

5.2.4 Teaching Therapeutically

The progression of a relational, reflective, and restorative culture is slow and difficult to measure. I have frequently heard the complaint that human emotion and needs is the remit of psychologists.

Nonetheless, where such therapy is unavailable, we can still nurture and operate therapeutically. Delaney (2009) using her combined background of psychology and education, advocates for "thinking

spaces”, “extra knowledge” and a disposition of curiosity, so that we can “incorporate therapeutic thinking into our everyday teaching and learning” (p.193). She outlines the unconscious defence mechanisms of projection, transference and displacement that obstruct teachability. She draws attention to attachment theory to help us look beneath the surface of our own habitual ways of being as well as others’. There is much to be learned for a leader of a school from using her approach and, although her book relates to the teacher-pupil relationship, it resonates with leadership relationships at all levels of the school community.

Delaney (2009) refers to the many pressures “which sometimes limit our capacity to think creatively and take risks”, and that we “need to acknowledge which pressures are real and which are ones we have created ourselves” (p.2). She suggests that “our role is to recognise, acknowledge and manage feelings”, and that “time needs to be built in to allow this to happen in the same way that it happens in other professions such as psychotherapy” (p.60). She alludes to behaviours that “create attacks on thinking” where the ensuing “paralysis in the thinking” can then lead to “frustration and blaming” (p.59) and impact ability to cope (p.3). Delaney (2009)

urges us to “explore what is happening on an unconscious and conscious level” (p.57) in the inter-relational space. Again, I aver that psychoeducation is valid and necessary for all. As an imperfect practitioner of RP and a self-professed eternal student, whose remit as a school leader is to develop a culture of applied learning, I realise with increasing clarity that I have infinitely more to learn. I see it as my role to cultivate a disposition of curious and compassionate inquiry through professional training and dialogue and through the human conflict and disruption which are perpetually available for study.

5.2.5 Nathan's Story

Nathan's story tracks the journey of emerging RP in our Primary School. An evolving eight-year relationship with this remarkable young person facilitated deep professional and personal learning for our staff team, one which enhanced the skills of attentive listening and purposeful dialogue, empathy and relationship building, and shame transformation. This restorative story entails frustration, conflict, and moments of vulnerability and powerlessness. I am grateful to my staff, pupils and parents for placing their trust in the restorative approach. Nathan helped us enact living theory and

pave our school's pathway through policy, systems, training, communication and participation to set high restorative standards for all. He was one of my best teachers.

Nathan arrived at school, a bubbly sociable chatty four-year-old. He was eager to make his mark. He wanted to be noticed and he relished attention. Although, one of eighty-four junior infants, he stood out. A few weeks in, his teacher found him demanding and disruptive. He found it hard to stay on task and was involved in regular rows in the yard. We monitored the situation. I could see that Nathan was keenly intuitive and insightful, with an already keen ability to calculate people and situations. He was also very sociable and engaging. But there was a thread of restless anxiousness undermining his happiness that he camouflaged well. He would strut into the yard each morning with a 'bring it on' demeanor which became more pronounced as the years went by. This was mentally exhausting for him, his peer group, his teachers, his interdisciplinary team, and his family.

Nathan readily sniffed out fake. He was not one to be fobbed off by usual distraction or deployment methods. He played the 'game' for us when it suited him and upended it when it did not. It became

unclear who was manipulating who, sometimes. Instinctively he knew when he was being judged and blamed. He suffered with shame: shame because he felt he was unlovable; shame because he felt he didn't belong; shame because he thought his life was not up to grade. He badly needed to be liked, to belong and to be noticed, but his anger kept interfering.

Nathan's enrolment in Junior Infants coincided with our first wave of our restorative consciousness. We initiated individualised behaviour plans and democratic dialogue, using restorative questions for conflict resolution. Nathan would otherwise have perished. Our previous system would have led to his expulsion. His teachers required additional support and much time was apportioned to the restorative conversations. SNAs and new teachers received training. He responded well to the restorative approach. He liked honesty. He was able to account for his part. His trust in the school staff strengthened. There were numerous meetings with his parents, especially his mum who initially found fault in school systems, but later trusted and bonded with staff.

As the years rolled by, our staff partook in further restorative training. We introduced RP circles. Circles were used in each

classroom for a variety of reasons. They were used to discuss persistent situations, deepen understanding and empathy. They were both a preemptive and responsive approach to common bullying situations such as abuse wrought by popularity, name-calling and exclusion. Staff members, who had higher levels of training, mentored those who were still developing their facilitation skills.

Unfortunately, Nathan's parents separated when he was in the middle classes. It was not an amicable separation. Nathan's access to his dad diminished and eventually dried up. Dad moved on and away with a new partner and children. The impact on Nathan was profound. He became emotionally unstable and highly unpredictable. He was constantly upset, like a dog with a bone, unable to accept that his dad was no longer available to him. His access to the curriculum diminished. He spent more and more time outside class with staff members with whom he had a bond. We protected him from trouble, rewarded his efforts and preempted as much conflict as possible.

Over the next couple of years his negative behavior escalated. At home, he was aggressive with his siblings and mother. He became

suicidal. He spent his evenings out and about with an older troubled group. He was getting himself into dangerous territory. Nathan's inter-disciplinary team included the 'Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services', 'Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children', 'National Educational Psychological Service' and 'TUSLA Child and Family Agency'. Play therapy and counselling were set up in the local Family Resource Centre. But Nathan became weary of interventions and eventually rejected them entirely. He told me he was sick of talking to strangers. During fourth and fifth class, he became more openly defiant. His behavior grew erratic. There were whole class evacuations due to violent outbursts and threats, reduced days, in-school suspensions, full suspensions. The parents of his classmates were expressing concern. At times his classmates were frightened of him. One day, I sat with him in his evacuated classroom as he overturned every table and chair. I remember feeling absolutely powerless and hopeless that day. But I sat in my discomfort and witnessed his raging grief that day. His mother arrived to collect him. He was exhausted and emotionally spent. There was a suspension, but we turned a corner that day. He had done his worst. Our next job was to support a meticulously planned

reintegration to school, following his three days away, which is an extremely important aspect of RP.

We followed the restorative approach. We became aware of behaviours that were shame-induced. We listened. He had a voice. We helped him transform his shame and anger. We facilitated his understanding of the impact of his actions and encouraged him to figure out ways to make amends. We acknowledged his efforts and differentiated his schooling every step of the way. It was a very difficult period for the staff. We were mindful of our own limitations and supported each other. We always kept in mind his fractured sense of lovability and belonging, and his need for support. We persisted.

In the final year of primary school, things began to slowly change as his level of emotional intelligence increased. Of course there were occasional relapses, but these diminished over time. His self-awareness and self-regulation strengthened. His ability to use restorative language and to self-advocate was inspiring. He was able to identify his feelings and connect to an unmet need. He responsibly requested permission to 'stay in' from yard on days when his tolerance was low. He asked for movement breaks when

he felt emotionally hijacked. He began to talk about his mum.

Conflict at home was sometimes violent and abusive. I facilitated many restorative meetings between Nathan and his mum. I tried to help him communicate his needs to her. But it was difficult. She did not have his restorative skills and was understandably full of fear. I empathised. She loved her son, but she was beginning to lose him. I helped her enlist community resources to help her transform her fear, anger and shame. She was dedicated to recovery and slowly she found that she could positively engage with her son once again.

Restorative conferences were set up with the significant people in Nathan's life. Teachers, SNAs, extended family and certain outside agencies came together. Needs became the focus, not the behaviour. Restorative conferences and the whole school restorative approach were a winning combination in this story. We saw Nathan go on to become a leader of RP in our school. He became mentor to younger pupils and a strong advocate in the student council. The benefits of RP were also evident in his class level. His peers had always quietly supported him in a non-judgmental, kind and forgiving way. The mutual empathy was beautiful to behold. The ability to problem-solve was second to

none. As for pupil voice, it was sometimes hard to get a word in edgeways with this particular cohort!

The dialogue in the final circles of this class's journey in primary school was deeply inspiring. The entire class had learned so much. In this diverse class there were diverse complex needs which included autism, anxiety, suicidal ideation, LGBT, addiction, homelessness and fostering. Parents were very inspired by their children's emotional intelligence, by their understanding, their empathy, their resilience and their ability to support each to put things right. This class level understood that behaviour does not define the person, that we all do things we regret, that we all need support to make amends.

In one of the last circles of sixth class, Nathan took the talking piece in his hand. In a quiet voice, he told his classmates that he would love to return to third class to change the way he had hurt them. They listened to his words and remained silent, for one does not pass comment on another's words in circle time. However, in the hush that followed, a flow of forgiveness and understanding was communicated in a non-verbal way. The healing was palpable. It was a poignant moment for the staff who partook in the circle that

day. And Nathan said that he was happy to have got that 'off his chest'. Nathan was a brave boy. Like his classmates, RP had taught him to be honest, to be vulnerable, to trust, to transform shame, to restore and be restored.

5.2.6 Shame

Courage has become just another synonym for humility. It's the recognition that I can be loved even when I make mistakes. And even if I am not God, my grandiosity and pomposity have too often covered up my fear that I'll be found out, if not this week, then most likely next week, and if not, then the week after that. Striving for perfection was just another way of asking ... do you love me? Am I good enough? (Nash and Bradley, 2011 pp.62-63)

Shame is an uncomfortable and misconstrued concept, usually confused with guilt, and while it sometimes incorporates guilt, it is separate to wrongdoing. Shame implies weakness, which is misleading, for shame more often manifests in masked success and power. Since I unearthed its presence within myself, I have come to personally recognise it as a malady of perfection, of comparison and unconsciousness stemming from socio-cultural conditioning, personal ideology, and lack of psychoeducation. Shame is part of the human condition, whether or not we are cognisant of its

influence in our daily habits and motivation. What we as human beings do with shame is pivotal for personal and communal wellbeing because shame embodies two opposing powers: the power to disconnect and harm self or others; or the power to reconnect and heal self and others. John Braithwaite (as cited in Kelly and Thorsborne, 2014), professor and criminologist in Australian National University, names shame as the prevalent precursor of re-offence. He advocates for a re-integrative support system for offenders to help them resolve and transform their shame proactively so that they may heal and transform. Andrew Becroft (as cited in Kelly and Thorsborne, 2014), New Zealand's Children's Commissioner and previous Principal Youth Court Judge, campaigns for improved access to justice for young people. He attests that, while inconsistency and lack of resourcing are improvement issues for restorative justice, lack of theory and education are the primary problem. Theory-informed professional practice, imbued as it is with meaning and relevance, always has greater impact.

Tomkins (2008), philosopher, psychologist and researcher of affect script psychology (ASP), attests shame is rooted in the

biopsychosocial domains. He explain how it manifests biologically as the origin of affect at infancy in a universal response to the human face. He defines affect as “a biological programme wired into the central nervous system of all new-born infants” (Tomkins as cited in Kelly and Thorsborne, 2014, p. 27). He purports that every human being is born with nine affects which are triggered by information received through our sensory system. For example, the distress affect is triggered when a baby is hungry, while the enjoyment affect is triggered when the baby is fed. Affects are automatic biological responses over which we have no control. Tomkins (2008) purports that human beings are programmed to care about what is pleasant or what inhibits our pleasure. Affect, accordingly precedes cognition and is what instigates motivation to continue, stop or repeat the feelings and awareness that arise from these unconscious affects. Shame is one of six negative affects (Tomkins, 2008). Understanding of the shame affect is a crucial component of RP and nonviolent communication, and it expands our understanding of the barriers to authentic encounter.

Kelly and Thorsborne (2014) outline the trajectory of affect and script (Tomkins, 2008), illustrated below in *figure 4*, to explain how

stimulus triggers affect, which triggers cognition, which transmits into a feeling. Memory then allows us to store the information as scripts for future feedback, which in turn helps us process stimulus, affect and feeling more efficiently on the next occasion. Scripts are cognitively composed to enable us to readily recognise patterns so we can more speedily interpret our life experiences. For example, for the two-year old 'me-child', the reaction of the adults to the toppling infant in the pram provided the stimulus of shame affect, which led to my feeling fear of error, which led to the script that informed me I was a 'bad' child that should avoid further pain of disapproval at all costs. Scripts are inferential and biased and can become fixed and resistant to change.

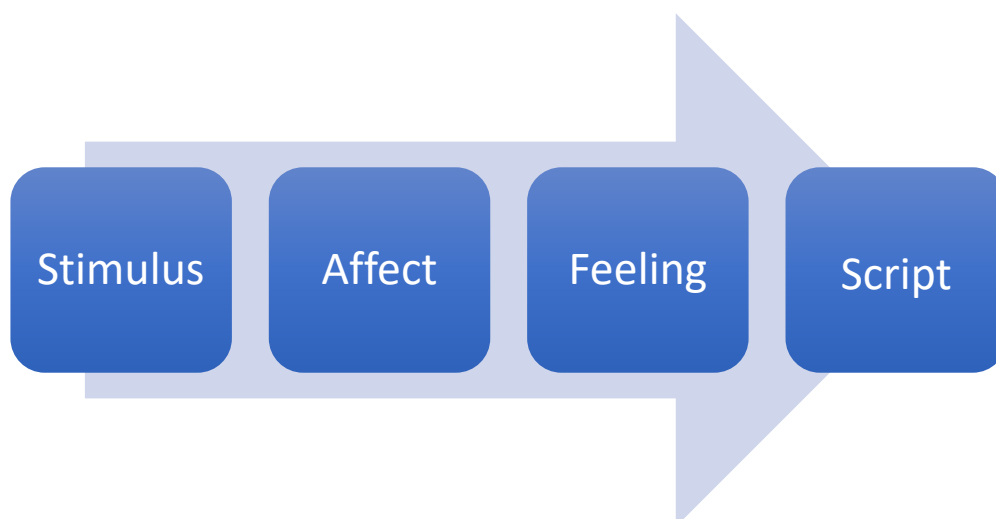


Figure 4.

Shame is an umbrella term for a myriad of painful responses, which range in their intensity from mild to extreme. They include embarrassment, shyness, humiliation, guilt, and mortification. Shame is distinguished in an infant in “a diverting down of the eyes, a slumping of the head to one side as the muscles of the neck go limp” (Kelly and Thorsborne, 2014, p39). Because of the pain associated with shame, the affect is also attended by a strong compulsion to reduce or eliminate the pain. This is key for understanding shame’s polar potentiality. The shame response can be handled restoratively and reinstate connection and return of the positive affect. Conversely, it can manifest in one or more of the patterns of pain-relieving behaviours seen in the Compass of Shame in *figure 5* (Nathanson, 1992).



Figure 5.

Shame has many masks. The compass of shame illustrates how shame-based behaviours can manifest in aggression and blame, self-hatred, isolation, and avoidance. Though pain is temporarily alleviated in these ways, responses can develop new neural pathways that flare a shame default setting when shame is triggered. For example, avoidance can lead to addiction, which induces further shame and cyclical entrapment of maladaptive behaviours. Breaking free of the cycle, learning to rescript, and changing habitual responses requires relational support. Seen this way, maladaptive behaviour is simply the communication of untenable pain arising from inter-relational and/or internal harm. RP provides a non-judgmental framework for this healing work, which starts with supporting the shamed person to understand their responses, differentiate feeling from unmet need, separate behaviour from true identity, and become aware of triggers and defective perspective. In this way, one may learn to negotiate pathways for reconnection in the safety of non-evaluative 'I-Thou' encounter.

5.2.7 Shame Resilience Theory (SRT)

Brown (2006) is a shame researcher who also studies topics such as courage, vulnerability, and leadership. She advocates for a style of human connection that is akin to Buber's (1995) 'I-Thou' encounter, in that it is whole-hearted, reciprocal, vulnerable and authentic. She also calls for a psychoeducation to support self-understanding and self-compassion. Brown (2006) sees shame as part of the human condition, as both a cause and an effect of conflict, which can be internal or external. She asserts shame as the disconnect of a species hard-wired for connection. In Brown's (2006) 'Grounded Theory Study on Women and Shame', over two hundred participants collectively described shame as a sense of entrapment, powerlessness, and isolation. Her research led to her theory that shame is healed through the restorative, resilience-building steps of i) self-compassion, ii) psychoeducation, iii) encounter and iv) advocacy.

The more that I become grounded and empowered by self-knowledge, psychoeducation, and capacity to reconfigure script, the more I am confounded by the lack of professional development available for leaders in this realm. I attest that capacity to lead is enhanced by critical consciousness and encounter. Concepts of

affect script psychology (ASP) (Tomkins, 1963), the compass of shame (Nathanson, 1992) and SRT (Brown, 2006) are enlightening and emancipating in a relational job. I am now equipped to recognise a disconnecting shame response and act in a critically conscious and informed way. When fear of failure, judgement and imperfection are triggered, shame rises for recognition, melts away, and is far less likely to inform my practice. I mask up with less and less frequency and am more comfortable where error and fallibility collide. In chapter six I will examine how shame, similarly induced by tight control and perfectionism amongst teachers, was significantly lessened by the speaking of it. Skilful negotiation of shame builds relationship and is a transferrable learning for all relationships.

5.2.8 A Story of intergenerational and Cultural Shame

On my arrival into the main office one Monday morning, with my long 'to do' list in one hand and my mug of 'get cracking' coffee in the other, my secretary greeted me with a meaningful look. Ms. Smyth had rung to make an appointment for herself and her husband to meet with me as soon as possible. Ms. Smyth had been confrontational on a number of occasions in the past and I was

wary. I asked my secretary to ring her with a morning window, but not before a quick check in with her son's teacher, who had nothing to report. She assured me that Sammy, who was in fourth class, seemed fine in class.

But Sammy was not happy. Sammy was being bullied. An older boy in the neighborhood was calling him names, had threatened him, had kicked him and pushed him around. According to Ms. Smyth, this had been going on for years outside of school. Now, it was happening inside school. She informed me that it had been reported to every teacher, but nothing was ever done about it. It had not come to my attention before. She said Sammy was afraid to come to school and that she would take her complaint further if I did not take it seriously. She accused me of doing nothing, that the anti-bullying flag was a joke. The meeting continued along this vein, with her husband nodding in agreement. I took some notes. I scheduled another meeting with the class teacher, parents and myself, where we would outline and collaborate on a plan of action. I told her I would investigate the matter, using our restorative approach, so that I might have a deeper understanding of it to better aid our planning at the next meeting.

Sammy's teacher, Ms. Jones, had only a vague memory of a mention of bullying at the parent/teacher meeting, which was unhelpful. At the time Ms. Jones had investigated and spoken to Rafael, the older boy. She had thought the matter was at an end because there were no further reports. I made a mental note to once again remind all teachers to record all reports of bullying on our school template designed for this purpose. All records should be systematically filed according to school protocol. In the early days of our new anti-bullying procedures, there were still outliers amongst school staff and adherence to restorative protocol was adhoc.

I had two restorative conversations that day. Rafael, a sixth-class pupil, was accustomed to the restorative meeting process. He was one of our pupils accessing a differentiated behavioural plan. He was making progress in RP and I was proud of his growing self-regulation and honesty in meetings.

I asked him to tell me about his conflict with Sammy. He told me that he was angry with Sammy over stuff that had happened in the past. He agreed that, as an older child, it was unfair of him to carry on like this. He wanted me to know that Sammy's friends called him

names, called his mother names. He wanted that to stop too. I asked him if he would be prepared to have an honest meeting with Sammy. He said that he would. I thanked him for taking the matter seriously and for being honest. I told him I would get back to him. I told him that his behaviour towards Sammy must stop immediately and that, if he experienced name-calling, I expected him to report it to me.

Following this meeting I had a chat with Sammy. Sammy was uncomfortable. It was our first restorative meeting. I was eager to put his mind at ease. I showed him the RP question card and told him that there was no need to be worried, that I knew he had a problem and that I wanted to help him fix it. I told him that I knew no one was perfect and that we all did things we regret. I told him that I liked honesty and bravery more than perfection and that we could only fix things when we knew the whole story. Rafael was already familiar with the premise of honesty for meetings.

Sammy seemed worried. He knew his parents had come in. I asked him to tell me what happened, what he had been thinking at the time, what he had thought about since. He said that Rafael had started to push into him when the lines were leaving school the

previous evening and that he invited him to come onto the green in their estate for a fight. He told me his friends stuck up for him, but that he felt afraid coming to school that day and was afraid to go out to play on the green after school. So, he told his mum about the situation. He said he was also afraid of his mum because she always got very cross. At this point, he started crying. He said there were a lot of people affected by the situation and that he should have reported it to his teacher. I thanked him for his honesty, reassured him, and asked him if he had anything that he would like to add. He shook his head. I told him I had spoken to Rafael and expected an end to the confrontation, that I would have another meeting with his mum and dad where we would devise a plan. I reassured him that it would be better now because we were all going to fix it.

Mum and Dad came in the following day for a meeting, this time with Ms. Jones present. After a recap of the concerns raised the previous day, I gave Ms. Jones an opportunity to speak about how she had dealt with the issue the previous time, assuming it was over. Amidst many interruptions she spoke about class channels for reporting and how class anti-bullying lessons stressed the importance of reporting. I suggested that we check in with Sammy

regularly as part of our action plan. The action plan included further individual meetings with the boys, antibullying lessons and circle time in their classes and a follow-up meeting with parents in a month's time. I recommended that the parents discuss with Sammy if he would like to have a meeting with Rafael. Both boys would be prepared for the meeting in individual pre-meetings. I would ensure that Sammy felt safe and supported in the process. The process would involve further individual meetings to check in with both boys. However, Mum was adamantly against this and Dad said he would ask Sammy if he wanted a meeting with Rafael. Mum reiterated that she was against the idea and thought it was ridiculous that Sammy would have to endure such a thing. She believed that Rafael should receive a hard punishment and that should be the end of it.

The following morning, there was a timid knock on my door. Sammy popped his head around the door. I welcomed him in and he sat down. He told me that he wanted a meeting with Rafael. Surprised, I asked him if he had discussed this with his parents and he said that he had. We proceeded with the pre meetings, where I helped him prepare his responses to the RP questions. I told him there would

be a talking piece, so that he could decide who would go first and how they would both decide on a plan to eliminate conflict between them. We set the time for the meeting and I went forth to meet with Rafael for his preparation. I was careful to remind Rafael to be kind to Sammy and to respect his courage, that I wanted it to be a positive meeting. I knew from experience I could count on Rafael. At 12pm, Sammy was the first to arrive. He asked if he could speak first. I was unprepared for what transpired.

The next morning Ms. Smyth arrived in my office unannounced without checking in at reception first, as is customary. Interrupting my phone conversation, she began to voice her new complaint. I was shocked, surprised and confused. I had thought she would have been happy that her son had sorted things out and that the bullying situation was under control and being monitored. I was wrong. She told me I had disobeyed her wishes and endangered her son by forcing him to engage with an older child.

I was taken aback. I asked her if Sammy was in school and if he was alright. She confirmed that he was, but that she was not fine at all. She had not given permission for the restorative meeting to progress. I explained that I was of the impression that she had given

consent, as Sammy had said as much. But she felt I shouldn't have trusted the word of a ten-year old. I reasoned that Sammy had never given me reason to doubt his word before, but that I would take on board her grievance and seek written permission from her in the future. After an appropriate spell, I firmly brought our meeting to a close.

After she left, I reflected on the meeting between the two boys the previous day and the related complaints from Ms. Smyth. More than ever, I could see that Sammy was a brave and authentic person who had taken matters in his own hands and transformed inter-generational shame. Here is an account of my witness to one of the most beautiful encounters of my career:

Principal: So, Sammy, would you like to share what happened between you and Rafael?

Sammy (resolutely): I want to say sorry to Rafael.

Principal (confused): I'm confused Sammy. I had thought that a few unfair situations have happened, where you got pushed and threatened. You were scared.

Sammy: Yes, that's true. Me and Rafael have never been friends. But something happened that I want to say sorry for.

Principal: Okay Sammy. What happened?

Sammy (starting to cry): I am sorry Rafael that my mother called you names and called your mother names.

Principal: Take your time Sammy. I can see you are upset.

Rafael (surprised and getting upset): It's ok Sammy. Forget about it.

*Sammy: My mother called you a fat black ****. She told your mother that she was a bad mother. She said that it was no wonder that your dad left. She shouldn't have said that. I'm sorry.*

Rafael, my sixth class 'toughie' then cried in a way I had not seen him do before. Both boys were crying. Both were saying sorry. I was redundant. And to be honest, I admit that I was welling up too. Two glasses of water and a few chocolate biscuits later, many tissues were used. I asked each of them the restorative questions as planned and between them both, they devised a plan. In the future, they would say hi and remember the respect that they have for each other. There was no plan to become buddies.

I was privileged to be 'living-centre' of 'I-Thou' (Buber 1996) encounter that day and was cognisant of why a well-established relational culture of RP is the bedrock of the pedagogy of the interior. I could not have been prouder of the boys' ability to self-

search, empathise and turn up in a brave authentic way. Rafael's domestic situation had impacted greatly throughout his life and his family had been exposed to frequent bouts of racial abuse.

Sammy's parents, less than two years later, separated. The boys never had an issue again and I like to think that they bump into each other now and then, say 'hi' and remember their remarkable exchange. Ms. Smyth remained steadfast in her judgment of my leadership style and of RP. Often, leaders must accept our losses and the negative perception of others as we adhere to our vision and values.

5.2.9 Implications for Leadership

Leaders live in the spotlight in a relational time-pressured overloaded work environment and are evaluated every step of the way, as we can see from the story above. Teachers, parents, pupils, and board members account for a high number of potential daily assessors. They are measured against inspectorate standards and are expected to be pillars of the community. They must engage in difficult conversations, fight for resources for their pupils, appeal for appropriate staffing, stand up for policy, procedure, and systems, under a mask of composure, resilience, and competence. They

grapple between the poles of traditional and progressive notions of leadership and handle a body of people who may themselves be projecting their own unconscious harm induced by their younger self's experience of punitive models of education.

Confusion about the leadership role is rampant at every level, including the Department of Education and Skills, as the undefined immeasurable duties attest. Leaders have become adept at suppressing stress and putting on "the face to meet the faces" (Elliot, 1915) that they meet. When inter-relational harm occurs, they are, more than any other, rigidly bound by rules of professional conduct and confidentiality, which is shaming and isolating. Often, they are not deemed worthy of the same dignity as others, who may perceive them as having power to deliver on personal agenda. In certain schools, principals are shunned or avoided on social occasions, which is unjust and unkind. Some staffrooms have little conscience about biased partial stories spread to justify grievances. It can be perceived as 'whining' if a leader divulges their stress. One of my teachers once jokingly remarked, 'that's why you get paid more than I do'. I suggested, in good humour, that he should first do the payment per hour math if he wanted to hold fast to that claim.

There is little recourse to support for the leader in the event of consistent low-level segregation, gossip, or non-cooperation, which fits the bill for bullying were the shoe on another foot. It is seen as one of those things that come with the job. Regardless of how thick one's skin is, however, the impact accumulates and it depletes and damages relationships. Members of the school community often do not consider the impact of public chastisement or of creative character assassination that is implicit in gossip. Leaders feelings and needs matter and when there are no channels available for 'I-Thou' encounter or reconnection, the compass of shame responses are activated for the leader and make the role of 'living-centre' difficult. Themes of power, affective resonance and democracy are difficult topics of conversations, but necessary ones. As part of our staff recovery following the relational breakdown at the peak of my professional dilemma, we invited an expert to be the 'living-centre' of four facilitated sessions. This adjusted the power differential and provided a more democratic space for this much needed work. We are grateful for the wisdom of our late chairperson in providing such. It was clear to her that the school leader, normally facilitator of restoration, is often bereft of participation and support

themselves, distanced from relational repair and personal healing through encounter, by virtue of their position and role.

The absence of compassion and empathy at times of inter-relational stress is astonishing when we consider our communal shared experience of it. Shame of the normal happenstance of collegial conflict compels us to sweep the adverse experience under the carpet and continue airbrushing in a life of fakery. We all fear the collective judgment of peers. We cannot ignore unjust practice and ethical conscience. Personal and professional values must be critically interrogated through professional dialogue for we are all as responsible for everyone's rights as they are for ours. I refer to our staff Dignity at Work charter as 'Rock n' Roll, which reminds us of the 'r' and 'r' of both our rights and responsibilities. It takes time to transform the culture of a school and the relational health of staff permeates all layers of the school community. Nonviolent communication and personal advocacy is necessarily a work in practice for nonviolent communication is a right and a responsibility for all.

5.2.10 'I-Thou' Renewal

The following story summarises the peak of my leadership dilemma. Details surrounding it are deliberately obscure to protect identity. In short, it began with a grievance, which escalated into a staff relations problem. It occurred at the height of COVID schooling. The timing of the unfounded allegations directed at me amidst an untenable workload, COVID outbreaks, safety measures, remote schooling, and the burdensome responsibility of catering for the welfare of the entire community, all conspired in cumulative impact. I remember counting only one week of summer holidays that particular year and, in retrospect, realise that I was burnt out early on. My body manifested the stress, which I endeavoured to mask, in headaches, sleeplessness, vertigo, tiredness, and impaired concentration.

Although the situation with the staff member was unsurprising due to inherited difficulties, the shame it induced took me completely by surprise. I regarded the relational breakdown as an enormous failure on my part, did my utmost to resolve it, but failed. My measure of personal imperfection and of falling beneath professional standards took no account of personal limitation. I questioned my competence and capacity for leadership. At the

time, I surmised that other leaders were skilfully avoiding such problems even though I knew this was far from true. Leaders hold the unenviable task of decision-making, which is a duty, not an abuse of power. It is not possible to please everyone all of the time and those who occupy a position of authority are as much afflicted by its implicit powerlessness as they are by its apparent power. Furthermore, in cases such as this, leaders are bound by confidentiality. An unhappy staff member is not. I powerlessly observed from the side-lines as untruths and defamation seemingly spread like a virus. With no voice for defense or for self-advocacy, I felt diminished, dispensable, unseen and immensely isolated. I gave serious consideration to leaving my position in a school in which I was deeply invested. I was compelled to take time out to pause and ponder. I was fortunate to find respite in a yoga retreat centre run by psychoanalyst. Here, I discovered self-compassion, faced my limitations, and interrogated the self-created scripts that were depleting my confidence. I embraced the pedagogy of the interior in the pause, ponder, wonder and 'I-Thou' encounter with self. Upon my return to my duties, restored resilience and strength informed my resolve to expand 'I-Thou' encounter in the form of

group powwows. Encounter through this medium reinstated collective values and purpose as we reflected on an unrelated topic of preparation for teaching and learning. Retrospectively, it is clear that the contagion of affective resonance and unavoidable bystander effect caused by the conflict impacted all players and created barriers to authentic encounter. But our solid relational foundations and protocols for encounter allowed for the relief of swift restoration. The chairperson and board of management played an important oversight role, without which I may have decided to leave. Our community benefitted from the wisdom, integrity, and commitment of board members. The chairperson, a devoted community leader herself, embodied grounded commitment to core purpose and modelled a 'living-centre' (Buber, 1996) approach by facilitating 'I-Thou' encounter on many levels, including the provision of psychoeducation sessions for staff which enabled deep interrogation of the communal rights and responsibilities of being a team member. She taught me that inner power, passion, and purpose are crucial for leadership, and that 'groundedness' and tenacity arise from that source. The following excerpt from Roosevelt's famous speech is dedicated to the memory of her

influence and vision of leadership that sustained and empowered me throughout this difficult time.

*It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out
how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds
could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man
who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and
sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes
short again and again, because there is no effort without
error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the
deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions;
who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows
in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the
worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly*

(Roosevelt, 1910)

5.2.11 In Conclusion

Leaders will always be susceptible to cyclones of complexity. Pause to ponder, wonder, and encounter self and other is a must, but is often ignored. Moreover, assumptions pertaining to power and to democratic ideals require unpacking to become fully comprehended and enacted. In the riptide of transition towards democracy, myriad perspectives and contradictions confound. I

assert that schools that bypass opportunity for professional dialogue find a collective values-based philosophy a challenge. Inadequate communal visioning for relationality increases potentiality of depletion, burn-out and shame. Poor self and social awareness impact on negotiation of meaning, on identity and identification. If democracy and relationship are fundamental to learning, then a peripheral, ad hoc, uninterrogated approach to its instantiation is as unethical as it is ineffective.

As a result of the pedagogy of the interior, I have learned to be cognisant of other's limitations alongside my own. As I provide differentiation for pupils, I have learned from this experience to allow for the same amongst staff members. One size does not fit all. Timing, change, degree of resilience, and workload all coalesce to make or break. Yet, complexity can also offer up the blessing and potential of enhanced mutually supportive relationships.

Compassion, attentiveness, and nurture are key characteristics of the pedagogy where perfectionism, shame and unmet needs are unpacked. We are an amalgam of our life experiences. I have embraced and re-integrated me-child, me-teen, and me-educator by looking through different lenses and learning to re-script. My

giraffe view has shown me a route of compassionate encounter
with self and other. I endeavour to continue to expand inner
knowing by being open to the learning concealed in disruption and
by using the embodied intelligences of senses, head, heart, and gut.

CHAPTER SIX: ENCOUNTER WITH RESEARCH



*Pedagogy of the Interior:
Awakening Beauty through Encounter*

This chapter portrays the layers of encountering incorporated in *Pause to Ponder*, an in-school research based on action research epistemology. It is divided into three sections. The first section encapsulates encounter at the levels of the professional growth community (PGC) and the critical thinking and book talk (CTBT) (Roche, 2015) circle time. It outlines the collaborative learning, planning and refinement of the approach to critical thinking at each level. Section two represents the encounter with the art and the philosophy of Tan and summarises his picture books specially chosen for the research, namely *The Red Tree (2001)* and *The Lost Thing (2001)*. Section three depicts encounter with evolving themes and the parallels of relatability and commonality that unfolded in the interweaving layers of pupil, staff and leader perspective.

6.1 Phases of Encounter

6.1.1 Phase One: Professional Learning and Dialogue

Guidelines for engagement in professional growth community (PGC) meetings were collectively agreed by the eight staff participants at the outset of *Pause to Ponder* to ensure a culture of integrity and respect for all (*appendix 10*). PGC meetings encompassed iterative planning and ongoing review and refinement of our version of

Roche's (2015) critical thinking and book talk (CTBT) which involved eight staff members and seventy-eight sixth-class participants. We engaged in dialogue pertaining to evolving themes that arose in the reciprocal democratic space of the CTBT sessions. The PGCs incorporated free flow discussions on predetermined relevant theory and videos (*appendix 11*). We teased out the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of the research design by exploring extracts which I selected for their perusal from the scholarship of Roche (2011), Brookfield (2017) and Dix (2017). We set ourselves the goal of reflective scripting in a shared Google document, as well as in personal reflection journals, which became the fodder for reflexive thematic analysis. Tan's books *The Red Tree* (2001) and *The Lost Thing* (2000) were chosen for the CTBT sessions but not unveiled until day one. Instead, similar books were explored and discussed as we became familiar with a style of surreal disturbance and the medium of picture books. PGC meetings were held weekly prior to and after each of the CTBT cycles, one of which took place in term one, 2021, and the other in term two, 2022.

6.1.2 Phase Two: Planning

In this phase, the two five-day cycles of CTBT were planned. Again, the rules of engagement for CTBT were collectively devised to be read as a preamble to each session (*appendix 12*). Schedules, timeframes and supervision were organised, as we troubleshooted minimising potential interference. I designed the CTBT aspect of the action research to correlate with the pause, ponder and wonder components of the pedagogy of the interior so that transformation and renewal became possible through 'I-Thou' encounter. The layout of a typical CTBT session can be sourced in *appendix 3*.

Each day had a specific focus. Day one was a 'First Impressions' snapshot incorporating pause and ponder. On day two, we wondered and expanded imagination together in 'Quizzical Questioning'. On day three, we interwove 'My Values' and deepened encounter of self with others and arts. On day four, we became creative in a multi-media 'Readers Response' through scripting and sketching. On the final day, we reviewed and refined the semantics of the CTBT process using the feedback of the 'Pupil Perspective'. We planned to explore and examine each book using images cast on the classroom whiteboard. Hard copies of the books were also available and magnifying glasses were supplied to enable

all to capture the miniscule details embedded in Tan's art.

Additionally, one IPAD per two pupils was facilitated for a 'think, pair, share' prior to whole class discussion. Pupils roamed and rumbled amidst the images and used Google in their search for meaning. Furthermore, a laptop for optional reflexivity was available all day in a corner of the classroom for the intermittent afterthoughts so that we could harness the slow-burn vibrational resonance of it all.

6.1.3 Phase Three: Ponder and Wonder

At first it felt strange to explore fiction that didn't align with usual formulae. Pupils and teachers struggled to find the 'correct' interpretation or the intended moral of the story and were initially fixated on the author's meaning. Tan (2015) attributes meaning as afterthought to his work, claiming that his readers illuminate meaning in their encounter with his art. His books are beautifully pitched for the 'untraining' of minds that are accustomed to uncritically absorbing other people's morality and meaning. Encounter with his art was a rollercoaster of mystification and joyful unravelling once we learned how to jump out of Tan's head and into

our own. Dialogue afforded a collective co-construction of myriad participant hypotheses.

On day one, one pupil commented *"this makes no sense"* about a page where a giant fish hovered weeping and unseen over busy urban hustle and bustle. On day two, there was tentative stirrings of identification in the remark *"I know that feeling"* referring to a picture of a child in a bottle washed up on a beach. On day three, another pupil declared *"this is the best book I have ever read. Where can I buy it?"* The act of exploring and uncovering in uncharted liminality took a little practice and prompted awakening and unfolding wisdom. Critical encounter with Tan through the medium of his art, taught us how to be comfortable in fallibility and curious about the beauty of complexity. It also allowed every person a view of their own inner world as it reflected and refracted amongst others in the non-hierarchical common ground. A sense of identity was grounded in permission to call it just how one saw it and enhanced a social integration that resonated long after the critical thinking sessions concluded each day.

We reflected in creative ambiguity in the deep uncertain realms of Tan world and through the pedagogy of the interior. A summary of

each of each book and attendant CTBT ponder and wonder now follows. Staff revealed the surprising personal and professional learning that occurred for them in a space where they had not heretofore anticipated anything other than pupil learning. We learned that philosophical thinking is best approached through tangible, applied, reflective practice and lived theory as opposed to solely a theoretical approach. Teacher feedback portrayed their sense of a new way of seeing and being in the democratic educative experience. They shared *“I see the children in a totally different light”* and *“it doesn’t feel like there are objectives and outcomes...it’s a whole new experience really”*.

Furthermore, communication felt different. They surmised that *“it deepens understanding of thought processes...in the way you give feedback...in the power of questioning.”* They found that it *“enhanced tolerance”*, that disagreeing with other *“does not diminish the other when communicated nonviolently”* and *“confidence in personal opinion and voice grew”*. Teachers’ initial concerns about classroom management dissolved in the organic process and natural flow of sessions in a way *“that put us at ease too...and we found ourselves getting lost in the chat and looking*

forward to our own turn to share.” They felt it was “like giving up control...which is sometimes good, even in our personal lives”.

Teachers progressed from *“feeling the need to be super organised”* to *“literally coming in for the dialogue and chat”*. There was *“pure pleasure in the connection”*. *“So much happens in the ‘I-Thou’”, the “vibe”, the “paradigm shift”, the “affective resonance” where “feelings were contagious”*. The function of pause, which was something they were not used to using *“allowed the thought process to unfold before others’ interference”*. They noted that *“teamwork was creative and inclusive and we were energised by excitement.”*

Teachers also remarked that they had begun to *“see everything in a new light.” “The quieter, middle of the road pupils who demand less attention behaviorally and academically...were allowed to shine”* with *“increasing levels of respect and true seeing of each other palpable in just a quick exchange”*. It was *“as if something clicked”* and *“a new tolerance, empathy and collective support”* was evident even in the yard and playing fields as a result. It instilled *“a sense of sameness”* and *“vulnerability”* and there was *“less competition”*. They felt that they approached *“learning from a completely new*

angle as opposed to being the domineering person at the top of the classroom calling the shots, in judgement and in command". One teacher described it as "one of the most enjoyable teaching experiences I have had in a while... I woke up bright and early and excited about our circles today...It has made us value discussion". Another added that the "benefits of working closely enhances communication, honesty and motivation...there are deeper bonds between staff and pupils...Mixing staff dialogue with CPD (continuous professional development) is a good blend and is not just delivery style CPD".

6.1.4 Phase Four: Iterative Review and Refinement

Pupil perspective was harnessed and merged with our own in phase four in an iterative and ongoing way, which is still in progress to this day. We reflected, made minor adjustments and the approach to critical thinking is still evolving. The self-propelling and innovative force that critical thinking became as a result of the research was enlightening for all. As a process of disruption and beauty, consciousness awoke in the PGC and in the organic development of critical thinking in other classes. Now, as a component of the CTBT, we have added 'art talk', to our repertoire of disruptors for critical

thinking, with the potential of endless future ramifications for ‘film talk’, ‘music talk’, and so on.

We noticed that the deep pondering in uncharted territories created a different, quieter, more reflective atmosphere in classrooms throughout the days of CTBT. Some pupils rambled to add their ‘afterthought’ in the class laptop at intermittent intervals during the day and one noticed how *“every time someone said something it would change your perspective of the story”*, which showed how his personal meaning-making evolved through encounter. In the same way, teachers added their ponder and wonder afterthoughts into our shared Google document. Tan attests that art elicits feeling, which is the primary function of the arts. “How it makes you feel is the necessary passage to meaning” and “involves not just asking questions of the text but asking questions about yourself” (Tan *as cited in Curtin, 2023, p.25*). Curtin (2023) takes this idea further and avers those personal stories “of shared cultural histories and experience” are told through the arts and that, upon encounter, their pathways

generate new ones, intertwining with and reshaping
collective understanding of literacy, identity, and culture as

we teach and learn about ourselves and others in and
through these storied spaces (pp.58-59).

6.1.5 Beauty, Disruption and Encounter

Tan is my favourite author of child/adult literature. I chose his work for *Pause to Ponder* because his work demands fallibility. He denies his readers answers and instead opens up endless questioning and imaginative possibilities. His illustrations and concise narrative pose a canvas for a new way of seeing and thinking from multi-angles. Similar to the songs of Robin Frog (1976) and Prufrock (1915), his work awakens, calls us to ponder, wonder and endeavour to make tangible the obscure, and we learn about the parts of our interior that lie in slumber. There are few landscapes that compare with the obscurity and unpredictability of 'Tan's world as we shall see. His art afforded us opportunity to interrogate values and ideals and to evaluate them against the backdrop of global complexity and untenable demands of contemporary life. We found ourselves emancipated from unconsciousness, substituting certitude for beautiful curiosity, vulnerability and risk, loosening the noose of 'all-knowing'.

As the noose of 'all knowing' is loosed

Unknowing and power arose

Through encounter

Through Awakening

Revealing therein

Beauty

Awaiting.

(Moylan, 2023)

Together, as a cohort of eighty-six research participants, we embarked on “a collective journey into mutual ambiguity” (Brookfield, 2017, p.76) using the four lenses conceived by Brookfield (2017) as essential for criticality: i) the lens of personal experience; ii) the lens of theory; iii) the colleague lens and iv) the pupil lens.

6.1.6 Democratic Learning

Roche’s (2011) approach to critical thinking and book talk afforded yet another perfect complement to the SPN philosophy and to our restorative culture. She describes her teaching “as a moral undertaking” that sees students as “co-participants, co-researchers” of a shared democratic classroom space (Roche, 2011, p.337). This aligns with our school ethos in which student and teacher voice is

endorsed by employing nonviolent language, restorative dialogical circles, appreciation of nonverbal communication and “reciprocity of teaching and learning” (Nash, 2015, p.41). In the provision of democratic spaces, we witnessed identity and personal philosophy develop. We noticed through our encountering a deeper, more nuanced growth evolve from the multi-lens approach, as we incorporated the personal, intrapersonal, and interpersonal lenses. It became evident throughout the process that the new dialectic was transforming disposition, vision and agency and awakening inner power, passion and purpose. We consciously and forensically examined the ‘what’ and ‘why’ of depletion and resistance to change, the ‘where’ of residing power, in a ‘why not’ attitude to curiosity, risk and disruption. Relational growth offered a new way of seeing, being and interacting. It was personally enlightening for me to appraise the ethical and practical semantics of systemic change, critically and collaboratively. The pathway to personal and professional growth and enlightenment was revealed from the inside-out and bottom-up layers of the pedagogy of the interior.

6.1.7 Critical Literacy and Courteous Language

Roche (2015) advocates for the prioritisation of critical literacy in the curriculum. She disparages the predominance of reductive strategies of decoding and comprehension, “regurgitative-style workbooks” and programmes that reduce “teachers to mere technicians delivering other people’s ideas” (p.7). She draws on Buber’s (1996) philosophy of learning and his ideal of teacher as ‘living-centre’ to describe a dialectical and dialogical encounter, which is wholly present, embodied and relational. She advocates for a Freirean problematising style of learning that invokes criticality and contextual meaning for learners. Roche’s (2015) courteous language replicates the principles of restorative and nonviolent communication. It demands that all participants use the language of respectful dialogue to agree or disagree. For example, “I agree/partially agree with Martha because...” or “I disagree/partially disagree with Paul because...” or “I am now beginning to disagree with my earlier comment because...”. Each statement must include an explanation of stance. Pupils responded respectfully (and quite happily) to the uncommon invitation to agree or disagree with their teachers. It was refreshing and fun. Significantly, we found that the newly learned critical dialogue skills

quickly became a natural way of encountering and this was organically transferred into other day-to-day sixth class business. Kindness and consideration of others' position surfaced and we truly began to see into the hearts of one another in an unprecedented way.

Pupils were impressed by democratic learning and particularly by the fact that their teachers had their first sight of the chosen books at the same time as them. One pupil surmised, "everyone is a learner" and added "nearly everyone" when he critically noted he could not speak for everyone. Comments at the end of cycle one included:

"I know myself more and how I feel."

"I learned a life lesson; not to change and be yourself."

"It was a safe environment where people could respect me. I could share my opinion and other people could agree and disagree."

"I liked that we were all equal."

"I really enjoyed the time to spread emotions".

"I loved sharing ideas on the afterthoughts laptop because I can get expressive, and I don't feel like I am centre of attention."

6.1.8 'I-Thou' Encounter

Rich and nuanced opportunities for pause, ponder and wonder, were afforded in our research *Pause to Ponder*. In cycle two, ‘I-Thou’ (Buber, 1996) encounter initially flourished, momentarily fled and was then renewed again through ordinary disruption, as we will see. We endeavoured to relinquish the fear of imperfection, loss of control and of time constraint by leaning into the opportunities that disruption provided. In the democratic space, we transitioned from independence to interdependence. Edling and Mooney Simmie (2020) attest that reflexivity requires a willingness to “double take” on experiences, individually and collectively so we can “unlearn, relearn, improve and change”. In this way, teachers (and leaders) reformed the “unthinking practice” that makes us “clones and functionaries” and increase “possibility for real and symbolic violence, for unethical practices, for bullying and for reproduction of disadvantage and inequity”. They further suggests that “the often uncomfortable work of critical reflexivity” (pp.150-151) allows us to position self and practice:

within a world-orientation and cultural milieu for teaching
with heart and integrity, engaging in intellectual activity that
requires a clash between theory, practise, research and
experience, and operating at the risk laden interface between

the personal and the public with compassion and insight and what Greene (2017) called 'wide-awakeness' (Edling and Mooney Simmie, 2020, p.151)

6.1.9 No longer "Locked Inside My Head."

The following tells the story of Jack's awakening and emancipation, which occurred as a direct result of permission for authenticity, autonomy and critical thinking in *Pause to Ponder*.

Jack had always been one of the friendlier pupils as he advanced through the class levels. Each day, we enjoyed daily banter in the meet and greet opportunities at the beginning and end of the school day. But one day, this abruptly stopped. He fell silent for two years, head averted when he passed me by. My efforts to engage with him seemed suddenly intrusive and I respectfully retreated and observed from a distance with the staff team. His silence coincided with a psychological diagnosis. We understood that his parents were helping him come to terms with his autism and he was digesting the new information silently through withdrawal. He found his voice again during *Pause to Ponder*.

During the pupil information meeting, something sparked in Jack. He was adamant to negotiate a way to be part of the process but

wondered how. He explained that he didn't like talking in class.

When I suggested that he could share his thoughts on the laptop, he said he hated writing. Knowing that he liked to draw, I proposed that he express his feelings and thoughts through sketches.

Immediately, our daily conversations were immediately reinstated, and a deeply rooted ambition came to light. He wanted his art to be framed and displayed in the school 'Hall of Fame', traditionally a display for children whose art had attracted national award. I told him I was open to discuss the prospect. Subsequently, I was showered with sketch books, copies and copious numbers of drawings.

Jack had a signature style and he was talented. His work comprised of abstract caricatures bound in chains. His practice sketches showed the progression of his style. We slowly worked through his portfolio. We chatted, filtered, discarded, selected, and disputed on a daily basis for weeks. I insisted he develop a theme to help others understand his concept better and, though Jack may have originally thought he might be allowed a short cut, I reminded him that the 'Hall of Fame' demanded due diligence and talent. I should explain that I am no expert on art, but I do like art that initiates pause,

ponder and wonder, so I asked him to choose the one that best portrayed his thoughts and feelings. True to his tenacious nature, he delivered. His piece, a self-portrait, portrays him bound by masses of inter-tangled chains. He aptly named it: 'Locked Inside Your Head' (*appendix 13*), which he confided, was how life felt for him sometimes. Everyone loved it, but none more than he, who revelled in seeing it proudly exhibited in the Hall of Fame, which by happy perchance, was situated between his classroom and bathrooms, which he began to visit with more regularity. I suspect that Jack responded well to a democratic environment which permitted him to think and be in a way that suited, even if it meant that he sometimes chose to temporarily withdraw with the 'pass for today' option. His confidence and sense of belonging grew and strengthened, and he more frequently elected to emerge from his shell for authentic encounter.

Incidentally, during one of our chats, I had asked him when and why he had become interested in art. He told me that he had never realised he liked drawing until the day his SNA gifted him his first pack of felt tips. When I told her this, she cried, as did I, and we both instinctively knew that Jack would have thought our reaction

excessive. Jack's showcase picture was the first in his series to portray the breaking apart of the chains. It seemed to me that his vulnerability and sense of difference was no longer confined, and he was not as bound as he had feared (Tomkins, as cited in Alexander, 1995).

6.2 Beauty in Art

6.2.1 Shaun Tan

Tan is an award-winning artist, writer and filmmaker based in Australia. As a younger person, he was attracted to books that all shared the same

simple confession that life is strange and funny, friendly and scary, and that meaning is something you have to find yourself; it can't be delivered like a sermon or a vaccination' (Tan, 2015, p.111).

He alludes to a great confession of literature and one that he finds comforting, in so far as

Life is hard. As much as it is joyful, wonderful, and astounding, it can often be depressing – people suffer, irrational things happen, fairness is far from guaranteed, and disappointment is commonplace. Just admitting this openly can be immensely

consoling, especially for a child given that childhood is so emotionally tumultuous – there is a kind of relief to be found in an honest, safe and thoughtful examination of weakness, failure and fear. (Tan, 2015, pp.112-113)

One of our pupils commented that *“the author is trying to show that some stories need to be told even if they are sad, because when we hear good stories when we are sad, we can’t connect to them”*.

Another pupil sagely added *“anyone who thinks they are happy all the time is in denial”*. Undeniably, Tan is aware that his books evoke all sorts of thinking, but his aim is to disrupt and awaken with his surreal style of paradoxical beauty.

Pupils were comfortable in the terrain of complex and mysterious, often more open to alternative interpretation and possibilities than their adult counterparts. There was an initial quest for a prescriptive moral to a story when we first began, but as Tan (2015) explains, his surrealism is “partly a confession of ignorance, an acknowledgment that life is weird and mostly undiscovered” and that its “okay to be uncertain and puzzled and to not have all the answers (p.112)”.

Initial observations from pupils corroborated this. *“Everything’s a question.” “Nothing is certain.” “Nobody has the answer.”* At the end

of day one, one pupil spoke for the majority when he admitted “*I feel more confused now than at the start*” and we laughed together.

Uncertainty and unknowing was unsettling new territory for teachers, but they leaned into it and began to enjoy the unfolding collective. Tan’s (2015) work speaks to the commonality of human thought, feeling and need, a universality inclusive of age, gender, and race. He speaks of the “connective power” and the “kind of convoluted telepathy” (p.102) that writing and illustrations generate, the “flavor of a thing...that exists behind the curtain of language” (p.108). I propose that the flavour is the awakener and is one of the most important roles of the arts. It connects us to feelings, to source and the interrelatedness of the universe.

Tan attests that the medium of picture books has been pigeon-holed by publishers of the children’s literature market and suggests that there is as much value in an adult’s encounter with their discarded childlike curiosity as there is folly in the assumption that children’s encounter with content, and their response to it, can be prescriptively corralled. He attests that his

stories open the possibility of grafting childhood curiosity

back into an adult consciousness, as much as it encourages

*young readers to hold on to those things that fascinate them
and never let them go (Tan, 2015, p.106).*

It honours intersecting integrating ghosts of former selves and former life chapters, and allows for compassionate homecoming, whilst simultaneously renewing identity and identification. Teachers found themselves recalling and recounting moments from their childhood. We found that at the heart of democracy there is the sense of commonality of feelings and experience, regardless of role or stage of life. Tan (2015) believes it:

is a mistake to believe that childhood is just a series of educational steppingstones, something to be experienced and left behind as we graduate into adulthood. It's more like a bag of things you take on a long journey, always being careful not to forget where you put them. Ideally, our experience of life is an accumulation of all things, all of which remain readily accessible. (p.107)

Endless parallels of personal and inter-personal equivalence were awoken through his art, which emulated a “calm bay of interpretation in an attention-deficit-disorder world of mass media” (Tan, 2015, p.110).

6.2.2 The Red Tree (2001)

The main character of *The Red Tree* is introduced before the starting page. She stands on a stool, against a backdrop of endless empty rolling hills, talking into a megaphone. Letters dribble from the open cone and scatter wordlessly onto the grass. They fall beyond the picture frame of her world and into the reader's domain, and fritter further afield into the next page and the next, the copyright page, as if breaking free of the storyline boundary in a quest for connection. One child shared that "*the megaphone stood out to me. She has all the letters but can't put her troubles into words.*" We are a witness to her meaning-making struggle, and we are instantly hooked, setting out on a mission to find answers for our listless downcast heroine with the flaming red hair. *The Red Tree* is comprised of a fragmented series of surreal pictures that depict an uncaring apathetic world of a girl who seems to have lost her purpose.

Sometimes you just don't know what you are supposed to do

Or who you are meant to be

Or where you are meant to be (Tan 2001)

A lifetime of despair and abandonment is encapsulated in the pictures and text, and yet, it spans only one day. Tan captures the illusion of an eternity of suffering. As one, we shared in a common experience that often makes us feel most apart. *"Did the young girl feel like no one would stop and listen to her and her feelings?"*

"Does she not have a trusted adult or friend that she could talk to?"

The veneer of invulnerability was undermined in the dialogue, and whimsical quizzicality ignited deep existentialistic comments. *"Why does there have to be sadness?" "I wonder does everyone feel like this but just people don't say it." "It takes courage to share feelings with other people." "It shows her in a clown's costume, maybe she sees herself as a clown."*

Concealed within each picture of *The Red Tree* is the literary Easter egg in the form of a red leaf, unnoticed and awaiting discovery. The leaf appears to be a consolation in the bleak and hostile world, present but unseen. In the end, the leaf suddenly becomes visible to her, a vulnerable sapling standing

right in front of you

bright and vivid

quietly waiting

just as you imagined it would be (Tan, 2001).

It is as though she found what she was looking for right back where she started, (as is often the case in life) in the inner sanctum of her bedroom. Imbued with a life force that came into being from her 'seeing' of it, her 'holy grail' was suddenly revealed in the form of a giant vibrant red tree. *"Sometimes the good stuff is right in front of you, and you cannot notice it,"* one pupil noted and another commented that *"everyone has their ups and downs, so if you're happy all the time, you won't be able to deal with a bad day when it comes."* One child displayed depth and discernment in his observation, *"not every problem can be fixed. If you try to fix it straight away, it will get worse."* *"Anyone can't be happy all the time, but you can put on a happy face."* The last comment here points to this child's early comprehension of the pressure to masking vulnerability.

The pupils thought that *The Red Tree* was a *"cool book with cool drawing"*, that it was *"confusing and weird"*, *"deep and sad"*, had *"hidden messages"*, and that it *"kinda makes sense but doesn't"*.

One of the scenes depicting a girl in a bottle washed up on a deserted beach brought forth a suggestion that *"bottling up feelings makes the world darker"* and that *"she felt very trapped"*. The

picture of a supersized sad fish, unnoticed and overshadowing a bustling city street, elicited several explanations. *"She's keeping her emotions in and they're getting bigger and that's why the fish is there". "I agree. The fish shows what she isn't feeling". "She feels like a fish out of water". "The fish looks like it's gasping for air. How did he end up there?"* The picture of her drawing a self-portrait mural prompted that she was *"drawing herself because she doesn't know who she is"*. Another thought that *"she's trying to find her meaning in life by drawing herself, but she cannot complete it"*, which illuminated the deep existentialism of self as an unfinished unfolding self-portrait.

Time was a significant theme in The Red Tree as it was in PGC conversations. In the latter, the pressure induced by its dearth was repeatedly broached, as we shall see. But, in the story, the flip side of time as feeling like an endless drawn-out eternity was explored. *"The snail in one of the pictures gets really big and she starts to ride it."* *"She is going at a snail's pace."* *"The snail is so big, and it represents her suffering because time is slow"*, which led to the conclusion, *"Yea, opposite to time flies when you're having fun."* One of the funniest, most random, and most astute comments of

the entire research was “*there’s a lot of stalking going on, there’s a snail following her in most of the pictures*”, which points to the unexpressed negative baggage that we can allow to follow us around.

6.2.3 The Lost Thing (2000)

The Lost Thing (2000) afforded a varied experience. Pupils questioned if they even liked the book. Teachers wondered if it was beyond the pupils’ comprehension, and yet the learning that it ignited set in thrum a deeper learning experience for all participants. Complex themes of power and critical consciousness were teased out and reflected parallels of the leadership dilemma, as we will see.

The story is about a teenage boy who one day finds an enormous bizarre tentacled creature, a previously unnoticed and uninvited interruption, in a landscape of concrete, industry, machinery, facts, and green skies. The story relays a matter-of-fact account of the boy’s quest to label, categorise and locate an appropriate habitat for a creature, wilfully ignored by a society of absolutes who, having taken the measure of its worth, had chosen to reject it. The unnamed lost thing provides a disruption to routine and norms,

having no function in a technical world submerged in data, categorisation, and consumerism. As we journey through illustrations dense with senseless facts, equations, instructions and 'know all' types, the boy eventually finds a place where he deposits the creature amongst its own kind of lost and forgotten unusual things, surplus to the requirements of a utilitarian bureaucratic world. The boy, a product of his society, progresses in an unquestioning life. In adulthood, his lost thing had become a distant peculiar memory.

The Lost Thing (2000) is symbolic. It tugs at the heartstrings and calls for attention, despite the emotionless understatement of the text. It calls to mind Burnham's (2021) 'funny feeling' that calls out from within the clutter of 'It' world immersion. Perhaps the thing that is lost is the heart of the narrator, his imagination, or his soul. Tan (2015) reveals that it is an autobiographical "warning against [his] own complacency, [his] tendency to ignore the things that are most important", because, like his counterpart in the story, he is "too busy doing other stuff" (pp.105-106). The same sense of loss saturates Burnham's (2021) disassociation and hollowness. Tan (2015) poses the question "where does it belong?" in a world that

undervalues the unknown and by implication, poses a further question: “where can it be re-found after we un-remember its existence?” (p.105). Again, there are no answers available in the story.

6.3 Research Themes

6.3.1 Who is in Power

The Lost Thing (2000) was more unsettling and abstract than *The Red Tree* (2001). Pupils found the sense of loss less relatable but were astute enough to quickly identify with the herd unconsciousness of the society and an unseen power in control of the fictional world. They wondered if “*the world became that way because people are greedy or are people doing what they are supposed to do to survive?*”. Other pertinent questions were posed such as “*who is control?... who says that if you find something unusual you must put it into the machine to get rid of it?... who decides this?*”. It was interesting how quickly they picked up on the Burnham-like malevolence, the sense of a subversive and insidious invisible controller. They ponder and critically wondered: “*Who am I afraid to stand up to?*”; “*If you don’t use your voice, you become a bystander and if you become one, you don’t stand up to the people*

in power doing wrong." It was interesting how readily a connection was made to the internet in one child's reference to *"an invisible power similar to social media."*

We reflected on assumptions of power, its sources, its influence on our behaviours and belief systems, the effects of bystander and affective resonance, and we found that it related to all parallels of school and home life, for adults and children alike. Pupils listed *"older people...people with weapons...the robber... the bully... celebrities...social media...Tik Tok...world leaders"* as controlling and powerful, adding that *"parents, teachers, referees and coaches"* potentially held power for good, bad or in between, depending on perspective.

Delving further, a deeper understanding unfolded. We examined power through the positive lens of purpose and passion. Pupils purported that *"people in power follow their passion," "have natural talent,"* and *"power goes to people who believe in themselves."* When asked what enhances power, it seemed to them that popularity, as a co-dependent concept, played a large part. One pupil likened power to *"hypnosis."* Another claimed, *"it's the followers that give people power,"* and, in a profound metaphorical

interpretation, one boy explained that *“power is like the brain and the other people are like the heart. They need each other to function.”* All agreed with the pupil who echoed our anti-bullying slogan, *“we must all use our power and our voice, and not become bystanders”*. It was clear that the children were highly critically conscious.

6.3.2 Leadership and Power

In the PGCs, we discussed power in terms of the complexity of leading school initiatives in the absence of a leadership title. Oftentimes, my help is requested to imbue authority where collegial cooperation is perceived as being lax. Teachers spoke about the necessary support of senior leadership for overt bestowal of authority and social empowerment in order to preempt inter-relational discomfort or conflict. It was something I had not considered. A conversation ensued that was natural and authentic and I began to see when and how a principals’ power is welcome. Social, peer and positional power is an uncomfortable topic, frequently avoided and misconstrued. The multi-perspective interrogation gave it the exposure it required for, as teachers

mused, “*we all have a different view of power differential*” and “*assumptions, that we need to watch*”.

Another parallel, which was shared in the PGC, is the dissonance between personal values and political agenda. At times, I have felt like a hapless general compelled to enact directives that are a non-priority for our context, and subsequently must standby and witness the battering of my army. Insufficient time is prioritised for discussion and shared visioning. Poor communication impacts relational trust. Unquestioning compliancy makes of us cogs, where we wind up propelling the same systems which perpetrate our overwhelm. Collectively, we agreed that professional competency demands a collective approach to critical thinking and praxis in practice so that ethical and contextual discernment may be enhanced. It follows that humble governance and a ‘living-centre’ approach is fundamental for the business of democracy and shared leadership. Ideals espoused by a sustainable model of leadership necessitate reflexive renewal and alignment of a values-based leadership philosophy alongside ‘I-Thou’ interconnectedness and communal interrogation of circumstance.

6.3.3 Power and Affective Resonance

The second cycle co-occurred with the lifting of social-distancing restrictions during the COVID pandemic. The scent of transition to secondary school was palpable for our final year pupils. Hurling was back on their agenda for the first time in two years. Training and trials for the school team were at large. There was a heady blend of excitement, tension, passion and testosterone. Competition was at large on the playing fields and pitches, and were negotiated, as per usual, within restorative circles and meetings. Blue cards, white cards and detention were deemed necessary at one point by sixth-class teachers. They were frustrated by a sudden bout of disrespect from a group of ‘sporty’ boys. When it seemed that detention had lost its impact, one teacher surmised that *“they took the power away from the sanction”*. She felt it was *“strange how this just popped up”* in the middle of our democratic CTBT.

At the same time, beauty shone through the disruption. While the sportier class members wound up spending break-time in detention, the ‘middle roaders’ (a term coined by teachers to describe the independent learners that pose little or no academic or behavioural challenge) got to ‘rule’ the pitch. Heretofore, social power, the politics of popularity, relational competition and

comparison, and possible passive bullying, had induced many of them to choose alternative activities at break-time. Emboldened by a new confidence and advocacy, they decided to play soccer with the players who had escaped confinement. The teacher on supervision duty overheard an empathic exchange between two boys. One of the fresh players confessed that he wasn't very good at soccer, in his embarrassment of failing to block a ball, but this was instantly refuted by the experienced player who said that he had noticed how he had blocked two previous balls and was doing good.

By the end of three successive days of detention, something new began to happen on the pitch. New norms were replacing old ones. Previously unheard voices were ringing out and new systems were initiated by the 'middle-roaders'. In the absence of those who were busy 'doing time', these pupils chose teams for the first time, even making unprecedented collective mid-match decisions to change up the teams to even differential and enhance inclusivity. They verbally encouraged each other, finding new joy and power in contact sports.

But back in the class, teachers were even more discombobulated. An unexpected domino effect was occurring in one of the CTBT sessions. The 'opt out' clause was initiated by one pupil from the disgruntled detention cohort, which influenced others to follow suit. The CTBT session was subsequently pockmarked and impacted by non-participation. *"Negativity was bouncing off the walls"*, one teacher remarked, *"you could even feel it suck the energy right out of us...they have destroyed democracy"*. I was curious about the turn of events. The following day, when I joined this group session, I was careful not to enforce participation as this would run contrary to research ethics. Instead, I asked them to pause with me and help me understand what was different about this cycle. Most said they didn't know, a few said they didn't like the book, but in general, they all seemed genuinely relieved when the opportunity arose for them to rejoin. It seemed clear to me that those who had become swept up in the affective resonance of the 'opt out' welcomed a 'living-centre' presence and the facility to change their mind and step back into the fold.

Pockets of resistance and non-participation arise, from time to time amongst the staff team also, which we later discussed in the PGC.

On the surface level, resistance remains uncontested. Nevertheless, its negative energy impacts on safety and collegial trust. My colleague's opinions on this parallel varied. *"We need full staff buy in."* *"Some people will never share. It is not fair."* But we agreed that *"with time and modeling, it can change"*. It was clear that enforcement isn't conducive and promotion is a team effort, not the sole responsibility of senior leadership. It was something that had never been aired before and I was grateful for the multiple perspectives. Potential resistance to learning was explored and the potential impact of partial or passive participation. It was felt that capacity and pace for vulnerable and authentic disposition varied from person to person. In the Teaching Council (2016) article *"Common Ground in Crowded Spaces"* (p.19), the 'Cosán' framework of reflective practice on professional learning explored teachers' perspective and found that

teachers who open their practice to collaborative endeavour can experience shared agency and empowerment, but likewise, are undoubtedly more exposed, and consequently, more vulnerable (p.19).

This exposure is pivotal for our understanding and facilitation of safe community for professional growth. It was a process I had inadvertently and foolishly rushed in the past, as described in chapter three.

Back in the classroom, the affective resonance of the 'opt-outers' lasted for only a day. Evidently, there were a few who did not like sharing in the circle and were conscious of appearing vulnerable or foolish in front of peers, which is natural. Moreover, the role of the listener is as important as that of the speaker and hence it is acceptable to occasionally pass. Instead of fearing collective surges of affective resonance, we leaned into the discomfort and collectively interrogated the stimulus, response, feelings and needs. An understanding of the need for an unforced approach transpired, one that allows time for the effects of safety and trust to be assimilated at individual pace. The issue of partial/passive/non-participation was broached by the children themselves who seemed more open to the possibilities of compromise.

Mark: Are you fully participating if you only listen?

James: I don't think so.

Peter: I disagree with James. I find it easier to concentrate when I don't share.

Ron: I agree with James. I would have been bored if I didn't share.

James: I like different opinions.

Ron: I agree, because it's nice to share what you're thinking in your head, and it will get out of your mind, and it will go into someone else's head.

Mark: I agree with Ron. I share because it can organise my thoughts. It's one of the best ways of learning from each other.

Me: How can you show that you are silently participating?

Peter: Maybe have thumbs up or down or use post-its.

James: I disagree. Would that be courteous?

Rafael: Yes, but we should use some way of silently agreeing, disagreeing, or partially...it makes it less awkward for those who do all the sharing.

Ben: We could use the afterthoughts laptop instead

Conor: I agree. Or we could draw pictures or write a story about our feelings.

Our pupils helped us understand that reluctance to share is not necessarily resistance and though it is clear that the outspoken cohort feel uncertain and unsafe in a seemingly passive collective,

new and alternative ways of contributing position and personal perspective are worthy of exploration in the future. Reform is a process of making public the private stance, an inside-out and bottom-up process. Responsibility for shared meaning-making in the vulnerable common ground of crowded spaces (Teaching Council, 2016) demands that we attend to hegemonic habits that stand in contradiction to democratic values. A 'living-centre' (Buber, 1996) leadership style facilitates reciprocal and authentic encounter for the awakening of inner power and for influencing reform so all will gradually "connect with and participate in the bigger picture" (Fullan, M., 2005, p.1). Reflection, a traditionally private experience, should be negotiated through COSAN's 3 Rs: i) research, ii) relationships and iii) reflective practice (Teaching Council, 2016). We need to be prepared to collectively make explicit the tacit and "reach the souls of others in a fashion which raises human consciousness, builds meanings, and inspires human intent that is the source of power" (Bennis, 1986, as quoted in Shields, 2010, p.10). Participation, in whatever form suits the individual, is both an expectation and a safeguard for PGCs.

6.3.4 Refuge and Restoration in Encounter

It is clear that teachers and leaders alike are triggered by fear of loss of control. As we discussed the 'destruction' of democracy, one participant suggested that *"a team-like approach"* was needed. We were surprised when a teacher from another class level then abruptly shared *"yesterday was a really bad day in my room because a girl literally said to me 'I wish you were dead' and this is the person I had put my heart and soul into."* Compassion and empathy instantly flowed as we discussed how tough our job was sometimes, and how we aggravate it by denial of personal feelings and limitations due to shame and sense of aloneness and failure. I listened as collaborative respite and support was located by the team for their colleague and I could see how much more meaningful it was for her to receive it from within the connective embrace of the collective in comparison to the solo 'fix' by the principal. Furthermore, her bravery in speaking out about her experience opened a window for others to do likewise next time. I was simultaneously touched and enlightened by the reciprocal surrender and support. We agreed that we all feel down sometimes, but we need to show our vulnerability more and accept the support that is readily available.

As our dialogue progressed in the PGC so did the general mood. Humour replaced frustration in the empathic nurturing atmosphere. The simplistic view that democracy had somehow empowered the children to adopt an uncooperative powerful stance of 'them and us' was not substantiated upon reflexive interrogation. It dawned on us that the shift in power probably had less to do with us, and more to do with the multitude of inter-subjective, visible and invisible, psychosocial variables at play for each pupil at the end of their eight years in Primary School. We learned that the shift of power poses potentially destructive barriers to fledgling democracy and requires 'living-centre' facilitation to reinstate 'I-Thou' encounter. Our default response to loss of control, when triggered, can initiate a battle cry or an abuse of power, which can amount to a fracturing of faith and a break away from values. This points to the need for investment of time, skillful advocacy and collective reflection. Power, in the sense of its shifting loci, its components and catalysts, how it impacts and triggers personal scripts and responses, offered itself for curious examination and enhanced our growth and learning.

6.3.5 The Problem with Perfection

PGC encounter revealed 'teacherly' fears such as loss of control, fear of error, of judgment and of change. Aspiration and expectation of perfectionism seemed to be the root component of stress and a commonality for teachers and leaders. It was noted that "*we are all super critical of ourselves*". For teachers, the shame of falling beneath standards of 'highly efficient' and 'highly effective' is potentially crippling and isolating. Together, we wondered whether it arose from perceptions of parents or media, or from standards of inspectorial measurement. It was evident that teachers can be traumatised by the fickle whims of public opinion. They feel overwhelmed by the competing demands of curriculum and assessment, events and initiatives, and ever-increasing paperwork, which distracts from the core purpose of teaching and learning. "*Always running and racing*", they questioned "*how much pressure is coming from ourselves.*" They agreed that "*it's not coming down from management.*"

Teachers confessed that they perpetually battled with time, nagged by the fear of not being or doing enough. To top this, they struggle with the added baggage of out-dated inherited perceptions of their role wherein jostle contradictory ideals of traditional and

progressive, of the type that compels one to endeavour to portray the picture-perfect quiet hub of independent learning onto a busy interactive space, or to tick 'fait accompli' on a monthly progress report following weeks of messy mortal interruption. Aspiring for perfection induces anxiety and a focus on matters that misalign with professional purpose, whilst diminishing autonomy and freedom. Brown (2018) purports "perfectionism is self-destructive simply because perfection doesn't exist. It is an unattainable goal" (p.80) and hence perfection induces shame. This is significant for leaders, teachers and pupils, especially because it is mostly self-perpetrated. Brown's (2018) insights illuminate how the pedagogy of the interior may awaken and transform our perception and also made us wonder if we may be unwittingly setting up our pupils for more of the same through an unthinking practice of approval and disapproval.

The problem with perfection is that it instills a fixed mindset bent on preconceived solo agenda that interprets disruption as if it is a personal affront or an obstacle that must be vanquished. What looks like insubordination often has little to do with intent to thwart our linear progress. Pause is essential to avoid rowing against the

tide that, more often than not, will lead to more tension, be it internal or external. This is often the default of the unconscious. The competition imbued in constant comparison causes shame and isolation, which as we could see was easily transformed in the PGC by advocacy and encounter. Power struggle created anxiety and triggered a defensive aggressive response which can in turn, as we saw, instantiated a rebellion of affective resonance. At the same time 'I-Thou' energy was contagious, opened up presence, reciprocity and endless possibilities of alternative solutions. It was clear that by harnessing the power of popularity to establish cooperation amongst pupils, teachers were aligning with the 'I-It' realm which is fickle and transient. Power is not static. Inner power and critical consciousness, combined with humble and fallible disposition evoked dynamic authenticity and kinetic democracy. It energised a community where interactive disagreement was accepted and negotiated as a social norm. On the other hand, compliance induced by over-rule risked depletion of inner power and getting swept away by busyness, efficiency and deadlines. It is the antithesis to the 'I-Thou' way of pure presence and fusion, the pause, the ponder and wonder. Our motto at pupil level is

applicable for all. 'Be an upstander, not a bystander. I am as accountable for non-action as I am for my actions'.

6.3.6 Perfectionism and Shame

Brown (2018) states that "perfectionism is, at its core, about trying to earn approval" and that perfectionists have "adopted this dangerous and debilitating belief system 'I am what I accomplish and how well I accomplish it. Please. Perform. Perfect. Prove'" (p.79). Educators, who are often multi-talented high achievers, may be accustomed to praise and approval. Brown (2018) suggests that perfectionists become addicted to approval, which is extrinsically motivated. She suggests that "rather than questioning the faulty logic of perfectionism, we become even more entrenched in our quest to look and do everything just right" (Brown, 2018, p.80), which of course is impossible. In our PGC, we pondered collectively on pertinent questions. Are we setting our pupils up for similar dependency on approval? Do we laud the brave at the expense of the vulnerable? Are we perpetrating a message that conveys that vulnerability should be hidden behind a brave face? The hidden curriculum is never innocent. Values travel through the ether and

are assimilated and adopted as beliefs. My own experience of perfectionism and approval-seeking speaks to this.

Moreover, Brown (2018) attests, “perfectionism is a defensive move” that offers no protection. She likens it to “a twenty-ton shield that we lug around” (pp.78-79) that prevents us from being seen. I dislike it when I feel unseen, it depersonalises and devalues my worth and contribution. And yet, many of us in education are afraid to change the habit of presenting perfection and withholding our flawed humanity. We then wind up resenting invisibility and disconnection. As we talked about the perils of perfectionism, we connected and transformed, relating our internal pressure for conformity and performativity to our own uncontested scripts and beliefs. One teacher revealed how, up to now, she had never considered *“how much we actually over-think...how much pressure we put ourselves under. That is not coming down to management, it’s actually us pressurising ourselves.”* As we dialogued, a fresh energy arising from the possibility of a new way of being and practicing filled the room.

We questioned our rewards culture and wondered if extrinsic motivators were depleting intrinsic motivation. We discussed the

example of the 'Active Week' in school, where the sixth class engaged with their teachers in the 'Squat Challenge' to see who could hold a squat position the longest. It was an enormously popular and fun sport. Yet, teachers related that a handful of pupils had wanted to first ascertain what the reward would be, to see if it was worth the effort. Dix (2017) maintains that reward systems are potentially counterproductive. Often "it reconfirms their poor self-image, re-stamps a label of low expectation and provides a perverse incentive to the more subversive mind" (Dix, 2017, p.21) One of the teachers decided to put Dix's alternative recognition board to the test. It is a self-approving class visual where pupils, not teachers, measure and affirm best effort. Dix (2017) attests we should encourage children to be intrinsically motivated to go 'above and beyond' for the sake of self-approval. It is a different approach and one worth further experimentation. Moreover, it will alleviate the inherent punishment of the non-reward or the withholding of reward, which is in truth, an unethical hierarchical practice of external moral inventory.

Brown (2018) explains how "perfectionism hampers achievement" and "is correlated with depression, anxiety, addiction, and life

paralysis or missed opportunities” (p.79). Perfectionism, being ‘other-focused’ belongs to the ‘It-world’ of agenda. As a society we are hugely influenced by marketing, media and consumerism which dictate what our lives should look like. The pedagogy of the interior grounds us, reveals inner power and emancipates us from perfectionism, shame and fear of judgement. “Conversations about perfectionism within trusting and brave teams can be healing and powerful” (Brown, 2018, pp.80-81).

6.3.7 In Conclusion

Teachers shared their feedback about the *Pause to Ponder*.

It has made us value discussion and the benefit of working closely.

It has enhanced communication, honesty and motivation to work together and we have developed deeper bonds.

Mixing staff dialogue with CPD is a good blend, it's not just delivery style.

In the peer learning we gained fresh ideas and new perspectives.

It became clear that prioritising time for the pedagogy of the interior is an imperative, a space where the collective can pause, ponder, and critically wonder in deep sustained and systemic ways.

Liberation from rigid planning, 'templates of doom' and paralysis of perfection is nigh. Furthermore, the vulnerable and subjective reflexivity inherent in SPN research affords a leadership that emanates from the pits and spotlights sustained self-abuse of uncontested practice and wanton waste of creativity and innovation.

In this section, we discovered that adults and children both share common feelings and experiences and that there was comfort and connectivity in speaking about vulnerable themes such as isolation, dark thoughts, and power. We also discovered a new way of seeing things through the perspectives of other and our learning was deeper as a result. Inner power was enhanced through the enactment of democratic principles, and it transformed classroom relationships. We learned how to think reflexively and embrace identity and personal truths. We discovered that our perspective is sometimes defective and collective interrogation of assumption opens up the myopic view that is blinded by perfectionism and fear. We saw how perfectionism relates to shame and how it was relieved and transformed through the airing of it. We questioned our rewards culture and deemed it worthy of further interrogation.

We agreed that democracy involves participation, which can be individualistic, that it comprises both a right and responsibility as a component of collective safety for which we are communally accountable. We uncovered hegemony and unconscious swells of affective resonance and became critically aware of its normal occurrence and potential impact.

We discovered that when we really interrogate practice, we can stand tall in our professional identity. A better sense of ourselves, sense of fellowship, sense of what is calling to us for growth and learning becomes apparent. When we engage our critical consciousness, we become discerning and may adopt what matters and ignore the rest, like a snake discarding deadened skin. When we allow the pause to ponder and wonder, we can smell the roses and appreciate life in all its glory and complexity, focusing on 'I-Thou' encounter. We can embrace the rich potentiality of the present moment and discard the obsession with trying to control the uncontrollable. Teachers can embrace flexible autonomous teachable opportunities for relational learning in the knowledge that we are all a composite amalgam of feelings, circumstances and best self. We are always enough and frequently more than enough.

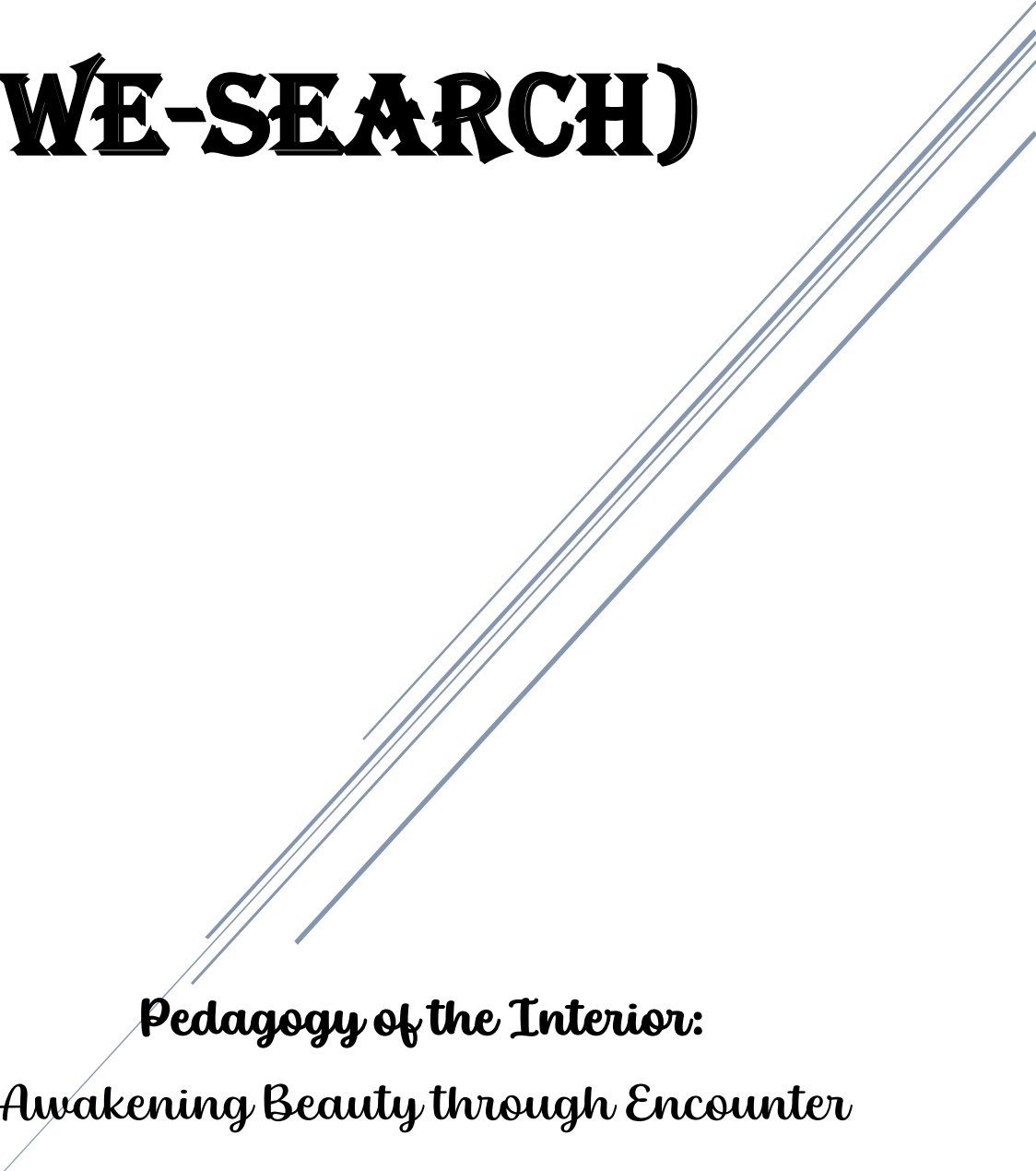
As one teacher commented, *"it's a tough job sometimes"*. We must think with our head, heart and infallible gut. Otherwise, we become like Elliot's unheard hollow ones.

We are the hollow men
We are the stuffed men
Leaning together
Head pieces filled with straw. Alas!
Our dried voices, when
We whisper together
Are quiet and meaningless
As wind in dry grass
Or rat's feet over broken glass
In our dry cellar.
Shape without form, shade without color,
Paralysed force, gesture without motion. (Eliot, 1925)

CHAPTER SEVEN:

CONCLUSION

(WE-SEARCH)



*Pedagogy of the Interior:
Awakening Beauty through Encounter*

This is the concluding chapter of the scholarly personal narrative, *Pedagogy of the Interior: Awakening Beauty through Encounter*. The SPN was divided into seven chapters. The first chapter introduced the pedagogy, research objectives and the gap in leadership education that contributes to the sustainable leadership endeavours of the IPPN. Chapter two outlined the over-arching methodology of the SPN, the embedded research *Pause to Ponder* and methods of analysis. Chapter three encapsulated encounter with scholarship, seen as a necessary philosophical and psycho-social scaffolding for a new way of thinking about leadership and professional actuality. Chapter four represented the *Pre-Search* stage of the SPN, as it examined the data and personal stories of the leadership dilemma. Chapter five comprised *Me-Search*, where private was made public in a critical expose of interior learning. Here, I contested outdated self-imposed rules by which I have been governed and presented the evolving trajectory of a lived pedagogy of the interior as an iterative grounding force for living and leading. Chapter six outlined the phases of the research *Pause to Ponder*, the enactment of growth and transformation in multi-faceted 'I-

Thou' encounter and reciprocal witnessing of a plethora of unfolding identities in the local context of my school.

Now, in conclusion, the *We-Search* comprises the final chapter.

Here, at the intersection of the SPN objectives, scholarship and findings, I review and reiterate the objectives of the empirical work of the research. I present the findings of the tried and tested pedagogy, one that enhances leadership at every level. I make recommendations to enable all players to be conscious leaders of their own evolving identity and become active agents of their role. At the level of 'living-centre' (Buber, 1996), school leaders are models, influencers, and facilitators of a way of conscious being.

We-Search is less about hard facts and findings and more about the collective resonating adventure of the SPN audience and actors in our transforming perspective and renewal of power, passion and purpose. It speaks to the universal predicament of unconsciousness and in particular as it impacts on leadership capacity. I call for change, for emancipation, for the courage to shed the shackles that bind and blind, so that we may embrace a new unencumbered pathway at the dawn of a new curriculum. The we-search intends to resonate, inspire, and activate agency.

The objectives of the SPN incorporate: i) an outline of the generative trajectory of the pedagogy of the interior as it evolved from an inside-out and bottom-up subjective interrogation of leadership experience and 'I-Thou' encounter; ii) an exploration of barriers to transformation, renewal and emancipation posed by perspectives and an outdated unsustainable model of leadership; iii) an initiation of new and varied ways of thinking, being and learning in the educational field.

I attest that the pedagogy of the interior is an immediate and urgent aspect of leadership development and sustainability. It is the first tier of reform as espoused by the IPPN. It is the work of the waiting room of systemic change, and it is a protective pre-emptive way of being that reduces risk of depletion and burn out.

Pedagogical stages interweave and overlap as reflexivity demands such 'toing and froing'.

1. Pause invites us to attend to the calling of beauty and disruption and to enter into presence. In the calm, we connect to self, allowing the peripheral hustle and bustle to subside as we became grounded and connected to self, to purpose and vision, personal capacity and limitation.

2. Ponder invites us to then observe what arose and resonated. It is the phase of awakening where information is explored and assimilated. It requires willingness and openness to whole-hearted engagement.

3. Wonder involves interrogation using multi-perspectives in the uncertain ambiguous creative territory of reflexivity. At the intersection of interior and exterior, we contest what matters. We evolve and grow in awakened consciousness. It is sometimes uncomfortable work, but the approach is imbued by 'I-Thou' encounter, curiosity, and reciprocity.

4. 'I-Thou' is the grounded presence and fusion of encounter, the space in which the "lost thing" (Tan, 2000) is located, "that funny feeling" (Burnham, 2021) understood and "the overwhelming question" (Elliot, 1915) posed. It is reverent, attentive, reciprocal and reflexive. In "I-Thou" encounter, we confront and embrace self and other and truly connect.

5. Transformation restores and repairs. It enlightens and activates a new pathway. It is daring, powerful and passionate. It involves the setting aside of burden that depletes to make room for the energising and new. It allows us to break destructive habitual cycles

of perfectionism and shame, approval-seeking and rescue missions. It permits the magic of true potentiality and transcendence to shine.

6. Renewal is the necessary maintenance of all the steps. All can slip from our reach if we are not vigilant.

The format I have chosen to summarize findings and recommendations has been inspired by the quote “man is neither as free as he feels nor as bound as he fears” (Tomkins, as cited in Alexander, 1995, p.33). Section one, “The Findings: I am not as Free as I Feel” encapsulates the awakening to unconscious incarceration. Part two, “The Recommendations: I am not as Bound as I Fear” elucidates the pathway of emancipation.

7.1 The Findings: I am not as Free as I Feel

7.1.1 Trapped in the Old School House

Often, when I wander through the corridors of my emptied-out school in the late evening, I am cognisant of the emotional archives crystallised in the bricks and mortar. Decades of memories of past pupils and teachers echo in the ether, accounting for individual histories and collective traditions. I am humbled by the archive of

pain, perfectionism and shame perpetrated in a former era where emotions were suppressed and punishments used to humiliate and highlight. I recall with clarity an example of this from my own schooldays. A friend, Ben, who struggled with rhotacism, a common speech impediment which makes 'r' difficult to enunciate, was forced by our math teacher to repeatedly articulate his name (which contained 3 Rs) every day for three years. I do not know which was worse, her apparent enjoyment of his humiliation, our powerless witness to it, or his stoic resignation to her cruelty.

Old experiences create a barrier to transformation, renewal and emancipation. They resurface where there are scanty opportunities for restoration and can coalesce in a somewhat defective perspective of the present. In my case, the adverse experience of overturning the pram instigated habitual approval seeking. I adopted the perspective that the measure of my worth correlated with performativity. Later on, the bountiful praise that accompanied my achievements fueled perfectionism, which in turn fueled fear of error and disapproval, which in turn fueled shame when the bar of my own making was too high. Conversely, I have witnessed when fractured self-image, assimilated by a child whose aptitudes and

special needs fell beneath the curricular expectations of the time, is sometimes projected onto offspring a generation later. Frustration amongst parents is often activated in the schoolhouse of memory and in the reenactment of unresolved trauma and shame in the present. It has been my experience this benefits from the airing within 'I-Thou' encounter. Asking questions, providing space, voice and time, can deconstruct the barriers of historical beliefs, fear and shame, and reconstruct new understandings and pathways to emancipation.

Schools are emotional relational containers where "emotional past is seamed into emotional present" (Hinchion and Hall, 2016, p.431). Everyone holds a perspective on school life based on our individual experience. Hence the SPN speaks to and informs a wide audience. Hinchion and Hall (2016), looking through the lens of Britzman's (2013) concept of the "schoolhouse of the mind" (p.98), explore the psyche of the newly qualified teacher, whose unconscious childhood influences of schooling interweave the perception of their role and "fashion meaning" (p.426). They make the call for a "subjective investment" (Hinchion and Hall, 2016, p.422) in evolving identity.

Transferring this nugget to the leadership realm, we can clearly see how our leadership role and attendant duties have intermingled with spattering of experiences from schooling and teacher/leader education and practices. Since becoming qualified in 1990, I have taught alongside five different principals, each of whom possessed their own unique and individual style. Upon my appointment as principal in a new school, I then further absorbed the practices of a predecessor, with whom I had never worked, and I uncritically assumed his “assigned public function” (Hinchion and Hall, 2016, p.422), alongside the other previous leaders’, in an effort to please, perform, perfect and prove (Brown 2018). As a result of this, my evolving leadership identity was diluted, split and stunted and I now understand that I was not as free as I felt to become the authentic leader I aspired to be.

7.1.2 The Case for Urgent Action

The school leadership role itself is a barrier to renewal. It is an untenable challenge of non-exhaustive, perpetually accumulating assemblage of tradition, expectation, task and responsibility that takes little account of work-life balance or human limitation.

Research (IPPN, 2022) has shown that 61% of school leaders are

experiencing significantly more stress and wellbeing issues than the healthy working population and that this is motivating early retirement and resignation. Furthermore, it is having adverse effect on the numbers aspiring to the role. Ability to attend to core purpose is thwarted by the volume of administrative tasks, the teacher shortages, and the expanding complexity of the role itself. Little or no time is afforded for professional dialogue and critical reflection which in turn impacts relationships and ability to negotiate context, workload, autonomy, agency and professionalism. The external source of pressure is clearly identified as stemming from sheer quantity of task, standards of measurement and time constraint. The source of internal pressure is not so easily pinpointed, but there appears to be a culture of overwork and adverse impact coupled with an unquestioning compulsion to deliver at all costs. This comprises a significant barrier for transformation of the role.

7.1.3 A Dearth of Authentic Encounter

Minimal time is afforded for leadership pause, restoration and renewal. Moreover, minuscule attention is attributed to the deployment of leaders' inner resources to tangibly reimagine and

reconfigure the role from the inside-out and bottom-up. Leaders can often feel isolated in the role, especially when stress is high. Time within the school day for authentic connection and encounter is generally unavailable and most meetings and leadership development sessions take place outside of working hours, which segregates those who do not have the resource of personal time. This aggravates isolation and is inherently unfair. There is no provision for flexible working hours and no accounting for extra hours/days worked. Thus, collective critical consciousness is prohibitive and this in turn presents another barrier for growth, renewal and leadership actualisation.

There are insufficient restorative opportunities provided for leaders to enable them to question their practice, reflect and re-imagine role and identity and reconfigure their complex role. Quality holistic encounter is undervalued and under-resourced in a tide of leadership development that dictates deliverables and timeframes, and demands excellence. Leaders are expected to know their duty before they understand their role, capacity, vision, purpose and context. This is potentially harmful to the principal experiencing

peak stress and adds to the overwhelm. True actualisation through 'I-Thou' encounter is blocked.

7.1.4 Trapped in the Templates of Doom

I remember one time, at the end of a whole school training course, when one of my teachers turned to me and said, "*Why couldn't they have just given us a template and saved us the bother*". His comment called for attention. I have questioned the part I played in his revealed position as part of the research. I wondered if our nicely packaged inspector-friendly whole-school planning framework had induced template dependency? Was I a co-contributor to the impoverishment of intuitive agency? Had I, through my own dedication to leadership performativity, become a cog in a political turnstile of deadline deliverables? A mental image of a hypothetical Indiana Jones movie billboard has flashed accusingly since. We are unwittingly trapped *Technicians in the Templates of Doom*, where our critical consciousness is numbed by paralysis of planning, perfectionism and the dilution professional autonomy and identity. A loss of innocence (Lather 2012) eradicated my complacency and unconscious self-delusion and illuminated a further barrier to emancipation.

7.1.5 Psycho-Socio Incarceration

Jack's self-portrait, 'Locked inside my Head, portrayed a twelve-year old's construct of incarceration of a psycho-social kind and he was called to break the chains of his disconnect. Burnham's satire *Inside* (2021) further heightened awareness of the scope and impact of subversive influence of unconscious existence, portraying universal incarceration, a thin veil of exile between conjecture and reality, in the crammed carnival of capitalistic 'it-world' (Buber 1996) and the grasping ego-fueled whirlwind. It elucidated a sense of paradise lost, be it loss of identity, identification or sense of divine, which made itself known in *Pause to Ponder* through the quickening of beauty (O' Donohue, 2003). Like it or not, be we submerged in the unconscious swamp of content, to a greater or lesser degree, it is an indictment of the modern world in which we teach, learn and lead as educators. To ignore its malevolent omnipresence is to persist in the willful slumber of enslavement. Burnham (2021) calls for rescue, for emancipation and for awakening, as do I.

My encounter with leaders, teachers and pupils further attests to the universal predicament of trapped personal power, passion and purpose, illuminating the degree to which we are unconsciously

governed by beliefs and values which do not serve us. We learned that the most potent barriers to freedom are the self-imposed rules, which stem from scripts, borrowed perceptions and unconscious compliance. Together, we deduced that we do not critically interrogate the source of our captivity or indeed our power. We agreed that we are swept up in the ever-accelerating untenable time warp of modern-day living.

Leaders habitually persist beyond personal limitation, placing authentic self-encounter and dialogue with beauty on bottom rungs of priority. When human limitation eventually collides with the unsustainable pace of work, they were seen to judge their performance harshly, experiencing a sense of failure, shame and isolation. This commonality is rarely aired. Opportunities for self-encounter and psychoeducation are overlooked in ongoing leadership development. The paralysis of perfection which besets those in the leadership role is an unrecognised barrier to renewal. Human frailty and harm are hushed, endured, dusted down and ignored, but they resurface and eventually accumulate, leading to depletion and burn out. We are unconscious of the cycle of shame-fueled perfection-seeking that blinds and binds.

7.1.6 Barriers of Perfectionism and Shame

Perfectionism, shame and disconnection are universal barriers as we discovered in the dialogue of the professional growth community. It was comforting and enlightening to openly and vulnerably reflect upon how this can influence self-belief, diminish inner power and limit freedom. Reflexivity and speaking out about the pain of isolation, lostness, powerlessness and perfectionism, dissolved our armour and compassion unfolded in the process.

7.1.7 Mandatory Reserves of Restorative Practice

Training in RP and nonviolent communication is notably absent in initial teacher education. RP could provide necessary training in authentic encounter, the skill of non-evaluative attentive listening, positive advocacy and assessment of unmet needs. It has been my experience that when internal pressure mounts so too, does the compulsion to perform and exert control, which can damage relationships and cause disconnect. RP principles and practice provide a bedrock for the pedagogy of the interior, incorporating psychoeducation, critical and collective consciousness, curious compassionate inquiry and a disposition towards experimentation and risk in a culture that values error as an important component of

living and learning. When we incorporate self-study, psychoeducational and critical reflection, we are enabled to rescript and reconfigure new and varied ways of thinking, being and learning.

7.1.8 Power, Democracy and Hegemony

It was evident from the critical thinking and book talk sessions that we do not always know who or what is controlling us. In other words, we are cognisant of barriers but not their loci. While many sources of external power were cited in our discussions, it slowly began to dawn on the collective that we frequently disregard our inner power, become swept away in affective resonance and bystander, and disregard a capacity to break away from a practice of living and learning that mismatches our values. It became clear that we do not prioritise time to think, to converse and to make change happen, which is first and foremost an inside task and secondly, a relational one.

Two things became clear in *Pause to Ponder*. Firstly, democracy requires full embodied participation, which can be differentiated. Secondly it required safety, trust and nonviolent courteous communication, a space where there are no wrong answers and no

boundaries in the imaginative creative encounter, and where it is natural to agree or disagree without inducing personal affront. We ascertained that democracy is kinetic, the loci of power are fluid and ever-changing. Without critical interrogation, we discovered it was easy to fall back upon old assumptions and habitual hegemony.

We uncovered hegemonic patterns that exist interiorly in terms of limiting beliefs, assumptions and habitual practices, and exteriorly in terms of uncontested assumptions of power. It was clear that hegemony posed a barrier to authentic encounter, inner power and agency. We ascertained that responsibility for reinstating inner peace and outer harmony lies in the realm of personal capacity and disposition toward encounter.

Authentic encounters allowed us to make the tacit explicit and the private public, exposing our sameness and common ground, enhancing empathy, connection and identification. Collectively, we noted that capacity for collaborative critical thinking was natural and invigorating. It expanded possibility and allowed us to engage with the head, heart and gut.

Pause to Ponder inspired confidence, agency, advocacy and democracy. I realise now that we all tend to suffer in silence. 'I-

Thou' encounter proved to be comforting, enlightening and nurturing, and helped us to see things as they are, not as we would have them be.

We determined that it was much easier to discuss uncomfortable topics indirectly, through the medium of critical thinking and book talk or theory talk or practice talk. We found relatable parallels through multi-media and learned about ourselves through the lens of beauty which called for attention. We discovered that when we responded to the quickening of beauty, reflexivity was natural, limitless, enlightening, and transformative. Interestingly, we discovered that our least favoured book *The Lost Thing* (2001) unexpectedly became a portal to deepest learning, where a more complex beauty yielded rich insights. We ascertained that democratic learning afforded "reciprocity of teaching and learning" (Nash, 2015, p.41), and a safe space to be curious, uncertain and authentic, a space where everyone was a leader and a learner.

7.1.9 Denying Presence and Pause

As a leader, I found that I habitually blamed self, getting caught up in rescue mode and approval seeking, constantly aspiring beyond my reach and limitations. I perpetuated overwhelm by resisting

inner calling to pause, to prioritise, to postpone, to ponder and wonder. I realised that I had forgotten how to saunter, to be present, to be grounded. The acceleration of duty and task correlated with decline in periods of restoration. At the peak of stress, I wound up depleted, shamed, disconnected, seeing only the way out instead of the way inwards, which is the direction towards freedom and renewal. Just like the little girl in *The Red Tree (2001)*, I found what I had lost and sought back at the start, in the intimate sanctum of the interior.

I had been awaiting change from the outside, instead of critically assessing the inside, permitting expectation and an uncontested perception of role to govern me. The research established that my personal leadership dilemma arose from lack of due conscious attention to personal capacity, limitation and prioritisation of core-purpose, which includes the ethical duty of self-care and self-protection. I had become lost in an ambush of overwhelm and perfectionism, my sense of purpose, passion and inner power blocked. We are not as free as we feel, but the pull of the subliminal forces of 'it' are counteracted by the calling of beauty and awakening through encounter. We must prioritise pause and

presence to sustain personal and professional growth and renewal. I am grateful for the learning gleaned from complexity and disruption.

7.2 The Recommendations: I am not as Bound as I Fear

7.2.1 Pedagogy of the Interior

I recommend the pedagogy of the interior as an imperative for leading an autonomous agentic life. Taking the time to pause, ponder and wonder about influences, beliefs and values is the pedagogical inner work of deconstruction and reconstruction. In this way we form a grounded holistic approach to negotiation of change and complexity and become conscious agents of our living systems. Approach to encounter must begin, first and foremost, with self-encounter, with forensic self-searching, with an appreciation of the 'unknowing' disposition alongside careful considered preparation for encounter. The pedagogy begins with our initial attunement to inner climate, feelings and needs, uncontested scripts and beliefs, uniformed bias and a willingness to listen and speak without implied judgment. Outcome is not preordained by agenda but unfolds within reciprocal exchange. Pedagogy of the interior is always unfinished work for we are

relational beings constantly in flux and in our encounters with the perpetually changing elements of a world in continuous motion. We must ground and reground, be witness to the variables of the inside and outside, embrace our inner power, define and redefine our space in the world. If we are not vigilant and consistent in our practice of pedagogy, we risk relinquishing our autonomy and agency to the custody of ego, unwanted baggage, uncontested scripts and perceptions of identity that limit and confine.

Through the work of the interior, I found myself pondering and wondering from a new angle of inside-out and bottom-up. I interrogated my circumstances, developed self-compassion and sourced healing and regeneration in the speaking out about shame and fear of imperfection within the reinstatement of 'I-Thou' encounter. Inner power and passion were fortified and core purpose revisited with renewed import.

7.2.2 Leadership Development

I recommend that leadership development incorporate the pedagogy of the interior for the negotiation and renegotiation of identity so that leaders, as 'living-centre' (Buber, 1996) can model and systemise practice through encounter. Change is an inside-out

and bottom-up responsibility for the leader of a school. We shouldn't need to arrive at the breakdown to breakthrough. We must learn to value leadership development of this nature and to request local support for its realisation. Leadership seminars and Union meetings do not answer the calling for they more often than add to the overwhelming bank of 'to dos' and 'should bes' that deflects from core purpose.

Professional development that incorporates intrinsic empowerment is rare. I would love to see retreats or courses that involve consecutive days for this deep and collaborative work. Leadership wellbeing should not be an addendum, but a fully embodied integrated way of being that instantiates presence and encounter. Patron bodies and local boards of managements could endorse the sustainability process in the provision of time and resources. More models of holistic and restorative professional development are a must. There is certainly room for more choice to suit the variety of needs in the leadership role.

7.2.3 Professional Development

First, I recommend that training in restorative practice becomes a mandatory aspect of initial training and upskilling for all schools.

Education is an emotional relational environment of varied, mortal and intersecting feelings and values. Second, we must learn the skill of nonviolent communication (Rosenberg, 2015) so we can identify our unmet needs, the source of our uncomfortable feelings and advocate nonjudgmentally and nonviolently. Thirdly, I call for ongoing psychoeducation of personal and interpersonal realms, that will equip us with the tools to navigate inner peace, outer harmony and inculcate fresh neural pathways for a new way of being. Moreover, the pedagogy of the interior embraces fallibility, vulnerability, negotiates freedom from perfectionism and fear of error. Finally, the EAS services should be promoted as a preemptive habitual aspect of practice to encourage staff to self-search, self-teach and develop inner knowing that activates power for transformation and renewal.

7.2.4 Critical Consciousness

I recommend that critical literacy is an imperative in an unconscious world at every age. Using a framework such as the *Pause to Ponder* provided training in grounding identity and empowerment in a world awash with content, caprice, competing agenda and subliminal indoctrination. A pre-requisite of the journey is criticality,

authenticity, and the daring to change the status quo and the hegemonic part we play.

I attest quality critical reflection and reflexivity to be a skill, that involves a merger of professional and personal. It demands emotional and cognitive interpretation. Like all skills it requires training and sustained practice in a school culture where it is valued. I am interested in a style of learning which is relational and reciprocal, personalised and intrapersonal, participatory and agentic. I believe that democracy, as a social construct of fluctuating variables, is elusive and requires constant interrogation and renewal. In an era, where sustainable leadership and burn-out is escalating, where teachers are overwhelmed from curricular and societal pressure, where issues of wellbeing and mental health impact entire school communities and where pandemic and war have radically challenged and changed the face of education, it is incumbent upon everyone to advocate for a rooted contextual autonomous agency, blending a selective new and the best of the old, reinventing and recontextualising the way we learn and practice.

7.2.5 Power

I recommend that the question “*who is exerting the pressure*”, posed by a teacher in my school, should always be consciously and knowledgably interrogated. Leaders can embrace their power to reform their practice from the inside-out and bottom up, and within all the interweaving places between, to defend their limitations and manage workload, capacity, expectation and pressure, to maintain their role as ‘living-centre’ in the common ground of ‘I-Thou’ relationship and to exert their power for good of self and community.

7.2.6 Learning Laboratories

I recommend that compassionate inquiry, curiosity, experimentation and action research epistemology should be further embedded as a fresh and natural collaborative practice. Imagination is crucial. It widens the vista of possibility and makes space for new realities. We must become attuned to the call of beauty (O’ Donohue, 2003), attend to that ‘funny feeling’ (Burnham, 2021) and take risks. By employing courteous language (Roche, 2015), we can open channels in relational learning for opposing beliefs to co-exist in harmony.

I recommend that schools should research the areas of hidden curriculum. For example, systems of praise and reward should be interrogated to optimise and accentuate intrinsic motivation for, as we found, approval-seeking can be harmful and stunting. In any case, the only approval that matters is our own.

7.2.7 Encounter

I recommend that leaders become the 'living-centre' of 'I-Thou' encounter and as such should prioritise school development, and teaching and learning through the facilitation of systems of encounter. The powwows, the SWISH, the RP circles, the PGCs and CTBT sessions are all examples of authentic encounter. They comprise some of the elements of the bendy laneway of renewal and maintenance that lies ahead for me. Experience has proven that relationship is always the first intervention.

7.2.8 Toolkit

I recommend that leaders add to their toolkit for positive communication and facilitation of the pedagogy of the interior at every level. The following comprise some simple pedagogical tools for ongoing 'I-Thou' vigilance that I will continue to use.

- i) The IPPN roadmap to sustainability, a tool of assessment and distributed action.
- ii) Pictorial symbols of pause in my environment, a reminder to pause to ponder, to wonder, to prioritise or postpone.
- iii) Cutouts of the anagram WAIT (**W**hy **A**m **I** Talking), a reminder to attentively listen and observe non-evaluatively.
- iv) A desktop ornamental snow globe that I shake when triggered, a reminder to postpone action until the snowstorm of emotion and defective perspective subsides and a better view of the situation becomes available.
- v) Desisting encounter that begins with “while I have you...” as a reminder that encounter is reverent readiness, presence and attentiveness.
- vi) Wellbeing retreats and psychoeducation, as a duty of self-care, restoration and renewal.

7.2.9 The Scholarly Personal Narrative

I recommend the SPN methodology as a mode of deep learning, renewal, and emancipation. I look forward to further subjective

phenomenological work of this kind. I hope to read qualitative research that explores i) principals who thrive, ii) perfectionism and shame in education, iii) over-rewarding and intrinsic motivation, iv) critical thinking that incorporates the parent perspective; vi) critical thinking using a variety of disruptors.

7.2.10 A Homecoming to Self

The SPN has been an integrative journey of homecoming to self and forgotten identities. A decade ago, I sat on a bench in the Spring-time sunshine in the grounds of the St Patrick's campus of Dublin City University, awaiting the completion of my daughter's oral Irish exam. A mood of wistful reverie cloaked and awakened me as I basked in the warm rays of beauty. In the pause, I brushed the dust from the veil of memory aside. A forty-something year-old busy mother of four teens and a new principal of a large developing school, I suddenly sensed a strong presence of the young me-adult waiting to complete my own Irish oral and follow up with a few congratulatory pints of Guinness with friends. Then, another forgotten ghost called to be remembered, the flavour of a me-teen being happily smuggled into a Pat's disco in the old canteen by my older sister and her college friends, an encounter as palpable as the

pain of loss for she had left us too soon and too sad at the age of fifty-two.

In the subjective reassembly, it was as if I could see three layers of time simultaneously unfold and interweave. I became aware of the spirit of each 'me' interweave and settle in the mist of memory, content to be seen and 're-found'. Ten years afterwards, as I sat on the same bench as a PhD student in her early fifties, mentally preparing to present my research at an international conference in the college, I once again remembered the beauty of intersecting identities and honoured them all once more. Tan (2015) reminds us that our experiences should be "an accumulation of all things, all of which remain readily accessible" (p32) so that we can remember and celebrate the trajectory of our unfolding identity in an integrative homecoming.

7.2.11 A New School House

This year, my school community will leave our old schoolhouse and move into an entirely new build. There will be nostalgia and mixed emotion as we honour the past and embrace the future. But there is also opportunity to welcome the fresh and new. The husk of an out-dated imperfect building with prefabricated temporary

classrooms, add-on extensions, and plumbing, electrical and Wi-Fi issues will be discarded. A new way of being will become both literal and metaphorical. As a leader, I will take what is needed and be freed of the tangible, emotional, psychological, and spiritual barriers to evolving personal, professional and communal identity. I recommend that leaders habitually engage in renewal so that new pathways become crystal clear.

7.2.12 In Conclusion

The SPN is no neutral story. It was a cathartic, validating and challenging journey of subjective reflexivity, meaning-making, transformation and renewal. Research objectives were explored. They accounted for the roots and trajectory of a lived pedagogy of the interior, the essential I devised and established for leadership actualisation and the dilemma of leadership sustainability. It is my hope that the SPN will be a lighthouse of relatability and resonance, that it will inspire passion and empower agency for the reconfiguration of leadership through new ways of thinking, being and learning. It aims to connect inclusively with all actors and audiences, keeping in mind that experience is often our best teacher and that we are all leaders of our own interior worlds. My

intention is that it may become relevant and enlightening locally, nationally and internationally. I believe there is room on the international table for more personalised accounts and transparency on untenable practices.

My aim was to enter into deep brave honest encounter with the highs and lows of beauty that called for my attention, and to pause, ponder, wonder about a professional role that is meaningful, significant and personal to me. I have learned that sustainable leadership is sourced in 'I-Thou' encounter, inner-knowing and grounding. I turned up to my own table, attended to the clutter of old scripts, barriers and ways of being that have obstructed, confined and depleted me in the past. I have become aware of my limitations and unmet needs and am cognisant of my personal responsibility for making the necessary changes. I have embraced the pedagogical skillset to sustain me in the future.

In essence I have awakened through conscious, considered, consistent practice of the pedagogy of the interior. I am hopeful that I will maintain an awareness of the beauty in all manner of things and continue my lifelong learning. I know that the pathway of sustainability lies in the pause and in vigilant practice of the

pedagogy where I embody 'living-centre' of 'I-Thou' (Buber, 1996) encounter in all aspects of my profession and personal life.

I am grateful for the homecoming to self that the journey entailed, for the inner peace and outer harmony it reestablished, and for the reinstatement of passion, purpose and power. I invite other voices to join the critical powwow for thorough critical assessment of the external and internal influences and of how they interrelate. The telling of personal leadership stories is an academic gap, a portal to new freedom and a grounded model of leadership through layered encounters from the inside-out and bottom-up.

The way I see it, the professionalism of 'why' should replace the habitual uncritical 'what' and 'how', progressing an inquiring 'why not' mindset in a culture that makes experimentation and risk ordinary and safe.

Brookfield's (2017) invitation to 'bomb' one's assumptions by public and private exposure, to journey into discomfiting ambiguity, and to enact 'unknowing' as the spring of knowledge was a compelling formula for breaking the vice grip of unquestioning conformity and revealing what matters and why. I recommend that we quit being too busy to think, to eat, to pause, to look after self as well as other, that we subscribe to

human potentiality and not the mechanical kind, that we change from the inside, attend to the reform of our role, with no regrets and no apology.

To conclude, I present 'The Five Freedoms' as an appropriate coda for the *Pedagogy of the Interior: Awakening Beauty through Encounter*.

The Five Freedoms.

*The freedom to see and hear what is here, instead of what
should be, was, or will be.*

*The freedom to say what one feels and thinks, instead of what
one should.*

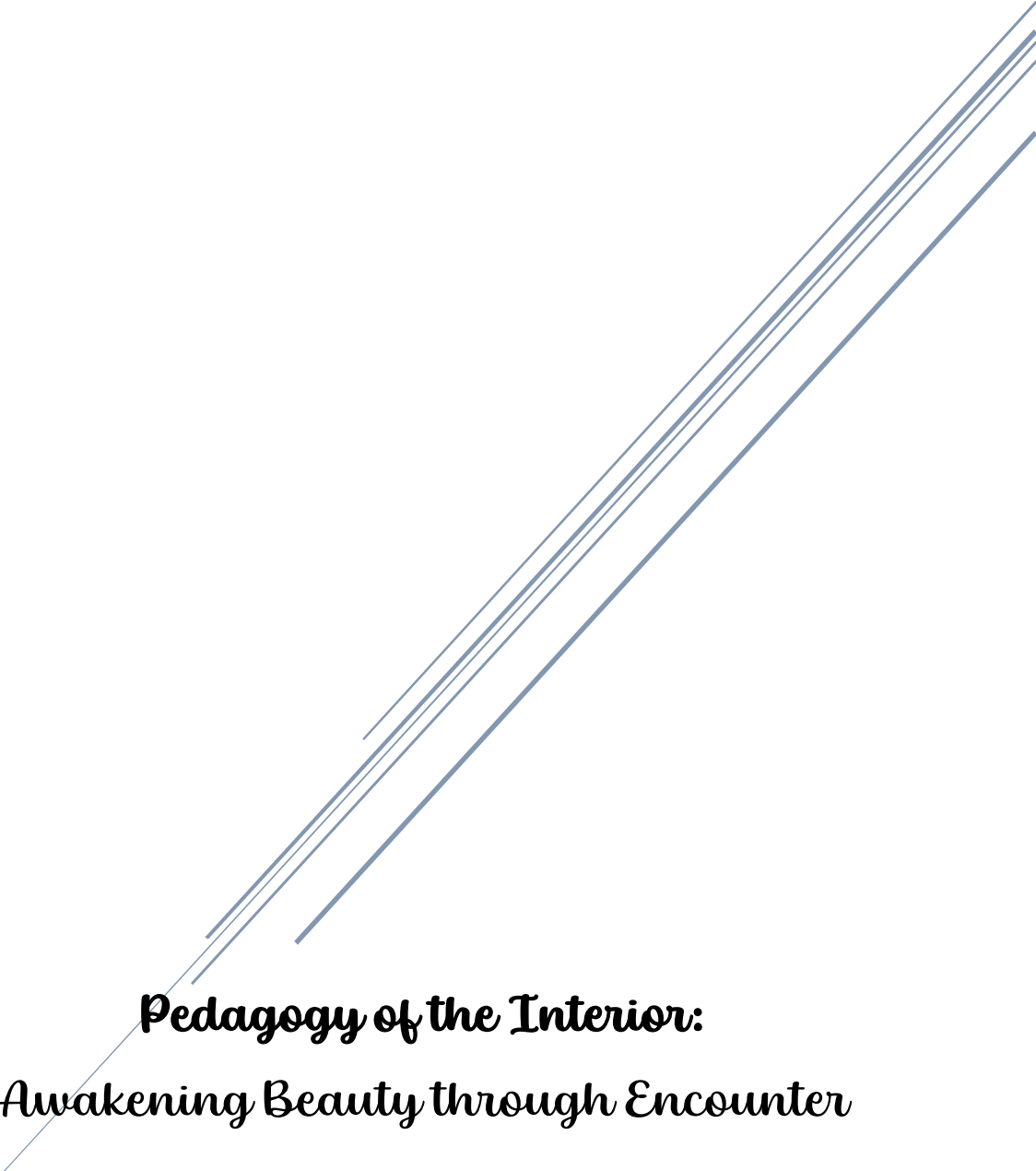
*The freedom to feel what one feels, instead of what one
ought.*

*The freedom to ask for what one wants, instead of always
waiting for permission.*

*The freedom to take risks on one's own behalf, instead of
choosing to be only 'secure' and not rock the boat.*

(Satir, 1976, as quoted in Delaney, 2009, p.195)

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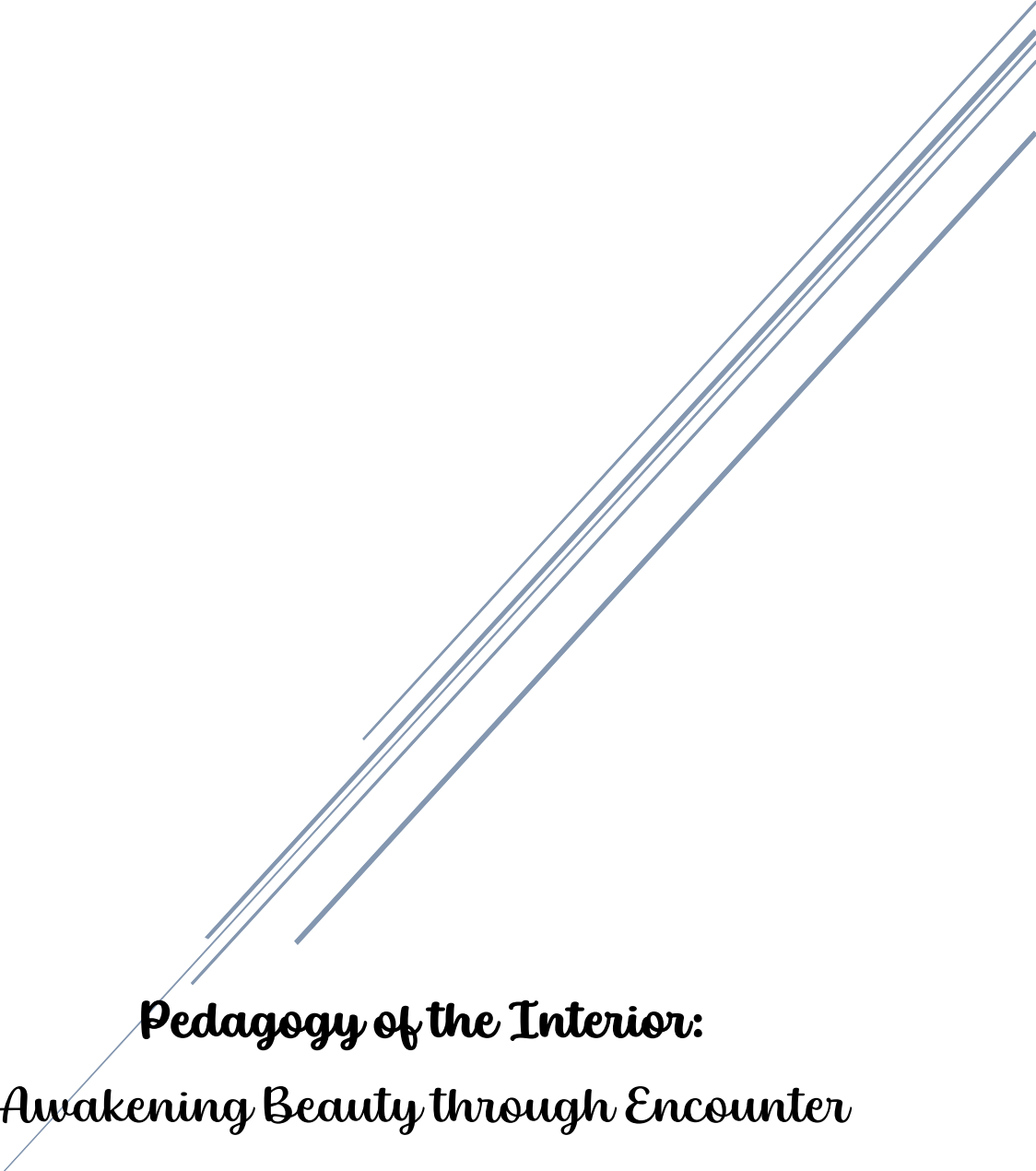
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APPENDICES



Pedagogy of the Interior:
Awakening Beauty through Encounter

Appendix 1: Pause to Ponder Information and Consent Sheets

Information Leaflet

for Parents of

Sixth Class Pupils

Pedagogy of the Interior

Awakening Beauty through Encounter

Information Sheet for Parents

Thank you for considering your son's participation in this research project. The purpose of this document is to explain to you what the work is about and what your son's participation would involve, to enable you to make an informed choice.

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of a new style of professional learning for the staff which is based on critical reflection, dialogue, and deep listening. Voice of the pupils in sixth class and their feedback to the pupil programme, "Critical Thinking and Book Talk", will be collected to enhance our understanding of how voice, relationships, and democracy optimises learning with a view to transforming our practice and school structures. This research is aligned closely with the Department of Education and Skills 'Action Plan for Education 2019' and the new 'Draft Primary Curriculum 2020'.

Should you opt for your son to participate, he will take part in the 6/8-week "Critical Thinking and Book Talk" programme (under the umbrella of the Primary Language Curriculum). The aim of the programme is to enable pupils to become critical thinkers through the medium of picture books. It will improve their literacy and comprehension skills, boost their love of books, and foster the essential skill of learning through dialogue and collaboration. Pupils will be invited to give their feedback during the lessons and after the lessons in Restorative Practice Circles. Lessons and circles will be audio-recorded.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Participation in discussions during the lessons and circles is voluntary. Should you decide that your son will not participate, his contributions to discussions will not be transcribed as data. No member of the class will be highlighted in any way. Once the research has been concluded, you can choose to withdraw your details at any time in the subsequent month. Following receipt of parental consent, each pupil will be invited to give their assent following an information meeting facilitated with them by the researcher.

All of information provided in the audio recordings will be kept confidential and anonymous by staff participants and the researcher, who will make it available only to her supervisors in the School of Education, UCC. The only exception is where information is disclosed which indicates that there is a serious risk to your son or to others. Please be aware, however, that while we can guarantee that we will maintain confidentiality, we cannot guarantee that class members will do the same.

Once the lessons and circles phase of the research is completed, the recording will immediately be transferred to an encrypted laptop and wiped from the recording device. The data will then be transcribed by the researcher, and all identifying information will be removed. Once this is done, the audio-recording will also be deleted and only the anonymized transcript will remain. This will be stored on the University College Cork OneDrive system and subsequently on the

UCC server. The data will be stored for a minimum of ten years. Data may be used for subsequent research studies. The information provided may contribute to the researcher's PhD thesis and may contribute to research publications and/or conference presentations.

We do not anticipate any negative outcomes from participating in this study. We anticipate that it will be of benefit for our school self-evaluation process and for the learning experiences of our pupils. However, should your son experience distress arising from the research process, please do not hesitate to contact your son's class teacher in the usual way.

This study has obtained ethical approval from the UCC Social Research Ethics Committee.

If you have any queries about this research, you can contact me at principal@carrigtwohill.com (researcher) or K.Hall@ucc.ie/domnall.fleming@ucc.ie (research supervisors)

If you agree that your son should take part in this study, please sign the consent form overleaf.

Consent Form

I.....agree that my son may participate in Anne Marie Moylan's research study.

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing.

I am participating voluntarily.

I give permission for my child _____ to partake in the research.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data without repercussions, at any time from now until a month after completion of the research study, in which case the material will be deleted.

I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the write-up by disguising my son's identity. I also undertake to maintain the confidentiality of the group.

I understand that disguised extracts from the discussions during lessons and circles may be quoted in the thesis and any subsequent publications if I give permission below:

(Please tick one box:)

I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from the discussions ☐

I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from the focus group ☐

Signed:

Date:

PRINT NAME:

Pupil Assent Form

I understand that my opinion and voice, and those of my classmates, are valuable for the research in my school, named 'Awakening the Concealed Beauty in Education'.

I understand that research will involve discussions during 'Critical Thinking and Book Talk' lessons and Restorative Practice Circles, which will be recorded on a digital voice recorder.

I understand confidentiality and will try my best to be confidential about our discussions.

I understand that no names will be used in the researcher's thesis.

I understand that I can withdraw my opinion and voice up to a month after the lessons and circles.

I understand that participation in any discussions is voluntary and it is ok to just listen.

I understand that I can talk with my teacher or the researcher at any time if I have any problem or worry.

I understand that my parents have given their consent for me to participate in the research.

The researcher had a meeting with our class to answer any of our questions about the research. I was invited to ask questions and know that I can ask questions, if I think of anymore, at any stage during the research.

I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from the discussions ☐

I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from the discussions ☐

Signed:.....

Date:

PRINT NAME:

Information Leaflet

for the Staff



Pedagogy of the Interior:

Awakening Beauty through Encounter



When we approach with reverence, great things decide to approach us.

When we walk on the earth with reverence, beauty will decide to trust us.

The rushed heart and arrogant mind lack the gentleness and patience

to enter that embrace.

(O' Donoghue, J. 2003, p.34)

Information Sheet for Staff Participants

Thank you for considering participating in this research project. The purpose of this document is to explain to you what the work is about and what your participation would involve, to enable you to make an informed choice.

The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of formal Professional Growth Communities (PGCs) on our understanding and practice of democratic and dialogical learning, as outlined in the new 'Draft Primary Curriculum 2020'. Volunteer staff, I myself, our practice, and our transforming mindset are the central focus of the study. The concept of PGCs, as a valid form of professional development to unify theory and practice, and as a method of informed decision-making, will be investigated. It is envisaged that the benefits for the individual and the school will be manifold and that there will be enhanced well-being and empowerment for all participants.

The pupil participants are our boys in sixth class. Pupils will be peripheral in the study and will engage with the programme, Critical Thinking & Book Talk (CTBT), under the umbrella of the Primary Language curriculum. The aim of the intervention is to enable pupils to become critical thinkers through the medium of picture books. It will improve their literacy and comprehension skills, boost their love of books, and foster the essential skill of learning through dialogue and collaboration. Pupils will be invited to give their feedback during the

lessons and after the lessons in Restorative Practice Circles (RPCs). Lessons and circles will be audio-recorded.

Why I have chosen this cohort of pupils lies in a cumulative observation of this class level down through the years, where I have noticed an enhanced appetite for voice, advocacy, fairness, and justice. Consequently, my rationale for selecting this cohort lies in snatching a unique opportunity to both release and harvest pupil voice for our mutual benefit. I have chosen CTBT because of the opportunity it will afford us to improve our listening and receptive competencies. It will further embed our foundational work on pupil voice, initiating a formal approach to critical thinking and adventures in philosophy in our curriculum, which has been on our agenda for some time. I aim to commence the study in March 2021 and complete it by March 2021.

There will be six distinct phases of the research. Opportunities for professional development and dialogue, individual and collective critical reflection, and deep listening for participating teachers and their principal will be provided in school time or within Croke Park hours. In the process we will charter the transformative effects on leaders, teachers, pupils, and school structures, in tandem with identifying challenges and limitations. Participating staff will be asked to keep a digital self-reflection journal. CTBT training, PGCs and focus group interviews will be recorded on Microsoft Teams.

Phase 1:

We will get to know **what** we want to do. Training in CTBT will be facilitated.

We will have meetings dedicated to discussion on the ideals of Cosán (Teaching Council) and relevant educational philosophy. (The author of the CTBT programme, Mary Roche, has indicated that she would be willing to give an in-person training to the staff when COVID restrictions permit.)

Phase 2:

We will get to know **how** we want to do it. Rules of ethical conduct, rules of engagement in PGCs and pupil RPCs will be collectively agreed for the purpose of instantiating a sustained culture of integrity and respect throughout the project. Data collection procedures, schedules and timeframes and deadlines will be demarcated.

Phase 3:

We will get to **do** CTBT in our sixth classes amidst the backdrop of critical reflection on the level of both staff and pupil.

Phase 4:

We will get to **assess** our learning and engagement through voluntary semi-structured focus group interviews.

Phase 5:

We will **PAUSE**. As researcher, I will engage in deep reflection and evaluation of the project. Through the process of supervision and peer review, I will engage in deep critical reflection.

Phase 6:

We will conduct a **follow up** post research examination of findings. We will analyse a sustained disposition (if any) towards dialogical, democratic practice and critical reflection. We will ascertain if there is further probing required in this research or future research.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no obligation to participate, and should you choose to do so you can refuse to partake in certain aspects or decide to withdraw from the research. Once the research has been concluded, you can choose to withdraw your details at any time in the subsequent month. Following receipt of your consent, you will be invited to an information meeting for further clarification.

All of the information provided in the Microsoft Team recordings will be kept confidential and anonymous by the researcher, who will make it available only to her supervisors in the School of Education, UCC. The only exception is where information is disclosed which indicates that there is a serious risk to you or to others. Please be aware, however, that while we can guarantee that we will

maintain confidentiality, we cannot guarantee that all participants will do the same.

Once the research is completed, the recordings will immediately be transferred to an encrypted laptop and wiped from the recording device. The data will then be transcribed by the researcher, and all identifying information will be removed. Self-reflection journals will also be transferred to an encrypted laptop, anonymised and transcribed. Once this is done, audio-recordings and self-reflection journals will be deleted and only the anonymized transcripts will remain. They will be stored on the University College Cork OneDrive system and subsequently on the UCC server. Data will be stored for a minimum of ten years. Data may be used for subsequent research studies. Information provided may contribute to the researcher's PhD thesis and may contribute to research publications and/or conference presentations.

Participating staff members should feel empowered and valued and, at no point, should they feel unsafe or highlighted in any judgemental manner. This school-based research will promote an air of noteworthy curiosity where we can critically reflect on relational learning, democracy, and our disposition to listening. Collective critical reflection requires a negotiation of vulnerability within a structure of collegial trust where intention is clearly understood. Our job, as participants and researcher, will be to interrogate assumptions, remain curious, continue being non-judgemental and to expect the unexpected, always having faith in the developing narrative of our research story.

We do not anticipate any negative outcomes from participating in this study. We anticipate that it will be of benefit for our school self-evaluation process and for the learning experiences of our staff and pupils. However, should you experience distress arising from the research process, please inform your researcher immediately.

This study has obtained ethical approval from the UCC Social Research Ethics Committee.

If you have any queries about this research, you can contact me at principal@carrigtwohill.com (researcher) or K.Hall@ucc.ie/domnall.fleming@ucc.ie (research supervisors)

If you agree to take part in this study, please sign the consent form overleaf.

Consent Form

I.....agree to participate in Anne Marie Moylan's research study.

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing.

I am participating voluntarily.

I give permission for my Professional Development meeting, Professional Growth Community meetings and the focus group interview (should I decide to volunteer for the interview) with Anne Marie Moylan to be audio-recorded.

I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether before it starts or while I am participating.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data within one month of completion of the study, in which case the material will be deleted.

I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the write-up by disguising my identity. I also undertake to maintain the confidentiality of the group.

I understand that disguised extracts from meetings and interviews may be quoted in the thesis and any subsequent publications if I give permission below:

(Please tick one box:)

I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from the focus group ☐

I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from the focus group ☐

Signed:

Date:

PRINT NAME:

Information Leaflet

for the

Board of Management



Pedagogy of the Interior:

Awakening Beauty through Encounter



When we approach with reverence, great things decide to approach

us.

When we walk on the earth with reverence, beauty will decide to trust

us.

The rushed heart and arrogant mind lack the gentleness and patience

to enter that embrace. (O' Donoghue, J. 2003, p.34)

Research Questions

Main Questions:

- What are the implementation issues surrounding the mounting of an initiative that is designed to make practice more democratic?
- Using an Action Research methodology, can Professional Growth Communities progress the ideal of democracy and agency for all members of the classroom and school community in such a way as to be both a 'democratic and democratising process'? (McAteer, M. 2013, p 17)
- Can the practice of critical reflection invoke an 'action-researcherly disposition' (Sullivan, et al., 2016, p. 29) in a school community and become a form of professional development?

Subsidiary Questions

- Through the process of critical reflection in Action Research, can we uncover the hegemony and tacit power relations at play within the context of our school structures and educational system at large with a view to embracing a brave but informed autonomous contextual approach to the process of SSE?
- How might providing audience, influence and space for pupil and teacher voice contribute to the culture of wellbeing in the school?

Research Explanation

The Pedagogy of the Interior: Awakening the Beauty through Encounter, the working title of the Research project that I propose to carry out in our school, refers to the unseen intrinsic transformative harvest that arises from reciprocal relational encounters in education. This project aims to depict the journey of one school as it grapples with the implementation of dialogical and democratic learning at all levels in our school community and the empowerment of teachers as agentic autonomous professionals in a changing educational context. As leader of learning, I aim to open the gates of deep transformative learning for a cohort of teachers and their principal where we will examine the benefits, challenges, and limitations of our democratic endeavours.

Professional development and growth constitute just one of many aspects of anticipated beneficence as an outcome of the research for our school community.

I believe that my research is fit for purpose, being conducted at an optimum time for developing a growth mindset and readiness for the ideals a new curriculum. Volunteer staff and myself, our practice and our transforming mindset are the central focus of the study. The pupil participants are our pupils in sixth class. Pupils in this class level will be peripheral in the study, engaging with our pilot programme, Critical Thinking & Book Talk (CTBT), under the umbrella of the Primary Language curriculum. Each CTBT session will be followed by Restorative Practice Circles (RPCs) to gather feedback. These sessions will be recorded using a digital voice recorder.

Why I have chosen this cohort of pupils lies in a cumulative observation of this class level down through the years, where I have noticed an enhanced appetite for voice, advocacy, fairness, and justice. Consequently, my rationale for selecting this cohort lies in snatching a unique opportunity to both release and harvest pupil voice for our mutual benefit. I have chosen CTBT because of the opportunity it will afford to teachers to examine and enhance their listening and receptive competencies. It will also provide consolidation and advancement of our foundational work on developing student voice, and it will initiate a formal approach to critical thinking and adventures in philosophy in our curriculum, which has been on our agenda for some time. I aim to commence the study in March 2021 and complete it by December 2021.

Six distinct phases will incorporate deep engagement with emergent educational philosophy, the establishment of Professional Growth Communities (PGCs) and critical reflective practice:

1. In Phase 1 we will get to know **what** we want to do. Training in CTBT will be facilitated. There will be meetings dedicated to discussion on the ideals of the draft curriculum, dialogical learning, and democratic learning environments and on papers relevant to the CTBT intervention and the philosophy underpinning it. The author of the CTBT programme, Mary Roche, has indicated that she would be willing to give an in-person training to the staff when COVID restrictions permit.

2. In Phase 2 we will get to know **how** we want to do it. Rules of ethical conduct, rules of engagement in PLCs and pupil Restorative Practice Circles (RPCs) will be collectively agreed for the purpose of instantiating a sustained culture of integrity and respect throughout the project. Data collection procedures, schedules and timeframes and deadlines will be demarcated.
3. In phase 3 CT&BT we will get to **do** it in the sixth classes amidst the backdrop of critical reflection on the level of both staff and pupil.
4. In phase 4 we will get to **assess** our learning and engagement through semi structured focus group interviews with volunteer participants.
5. In phase 5 we will get to **PAUSE**. As leader I will engage in deep reflection and evaluation of the project. Through the process of supervision and peer review, I will measure my own learning and transformation as result of the process.
6. In Phase 6 we will get to conduct a **follow up** post research examination of sustained disposition towards dialogical learning and democratic practice via a PGC meeting. We will ascertain if there is further probing required in this research or future research.

Beneficence

The benefits for the school, and specifically for school self-evaluation, will be manifold. Firstly, the school community will gain insight into the power of dialogue and agency for optimising the learning environment from the data gathered and emerging hypothesis. Secondly, the school staff would become

inspired by the potential of self-study action research and communities of practice for effecting contextualised, relevant and meaningful professional development. Thirdly, I envision that ‘through critical and constructive professional conversation’ (Glenn, M., et al., 2017) the alignment of teachers’ values with pedagogy will be a subsidiary benefit of the investigation.

If a teacher is the ‘gatekeeper of change’, then it is my role as principal to be the ‘gate opener’. As principal, having a good relationship with participants and having direct access to them in school is advantageous. As an insider, I understand the dynamics of our context and culture. I know that our journey towards democracy is already underway and thus, the research is meaningful and relevant. Providing scope for improving critical dialogue and enhancing wellbeing and empowerment of staff and pupils is clearly another benefit for the school community. Concurrently, I envisage deep learning on my part and postulate that new insight from the plurality of perspectives will enable me to best support my staff and pupils.

Selection of Participants

Adult Participants will receive an invitation email with a detailed outline of the study and a letter of consent attached. They will be invited to a virtual meeting on Microsoft Teams for a deeper explanation and will be afforded the opportunity to ask questions. Parents of pupil participants will receive an information leaflet and will be informed that their child will bring a hardcopy of

a letter of consent home in their school bag. Pupils, whose parents have consented will be afforded an in-person explanation of the study and may ask questions for clarification and deeper understanding. All persons in receipt of the information leaflet, will know that participation is voluntary and that they have the right to withdraw at any stage. The pedagogical aspect of the study is part of the curriculum and therefore all pupils and teachers will participate in this. Their consent relates to the PGCs, reflection journals and RPCs. Participants will not feel coerced or pressurized to be part of the study and are free to withdraw from the research at any time.

Rights and Dignity of Participants

Participating staff members should feel empowered and valued and, at no point, should feel unsafe or highlighted in any judgemental manner. Adherence to collectively drafted rules of PGC engagement, which are in line with the school's Dignity at Work Charter will be duly observed. "The conventional approach of highlighting differences in the effectiveness of how teachers teach and by implication blaming individual teachers for poor quality teaching or valorising the high-quality teaching of another" (Curtin and Hall. 2018) is not an aspect of our research. (p.368). Instead, our research will promote the donning of an air of noteworthy curiosity so that there emerges a true indictment of our journey in relational learning and our blossoming disposition to listening in our school. Critical reflection is a vulnerable process and has traditionally been a private experience. Collective critical reflection requires a

negotiation of vulnerability within a structure of collegial trust where intention is clearly understood.

Research Ethics

An ongoing sustained culture of integrity, openness and transparency will be central from the offset, ensuring that our research on democracy is a “democratic and democratizing process” (McAteer, M. 2013). I will endeavor to safeguard the wellbeing of my school community from maleficence. I will enlist the school management team to provide oversight for the research. The research will undergo impeccable and collaborative planning at all phases, from research design and selection of participants to the Research Data Management Plan and publication.

Data Collection and GDPR

PGCs and focus group interviews will be recorded on Microsoft Teams. The CTBT and RPC sessions with the pupils will be recorded on a digital voice recorder (it being less obtrusive than a video recorder). We will all keep a digital self-reflection journal, which can be migrated to the One Drive folder at the end of the research. Data from longitudinal studies such as Growing up in Ireland and Children’s School Lives will also be used.

All data from all recordings will be stored on a password encrypted One Drive folder and later deleted after transcription. According to UCC Code of Research Conduct, data will be stored for 10 years after completion. All adult participants, pupil participants and parents will have given their informed consent/assent at the start. Signed consent and assent forms will be scanned and stored in the One Drive folder electronically. Hardcopies will thereafter be shredded. Once ethical approval has been granted and the Board of Management has been informed, collection of consent and assent will commence.

Conclusion

I believe that relationships are central to learning. In practice, this requires a values-based philosophy where ideals are lived and breathed within the school culture. My role as the leader of learning in our school necessitates my support and endorsement of opportunities for learning amongst my staff. Cosán, the National Framework for Teacher learning, developed by the Teaching Council, promotes the 3 Rs: “research, relationships and reflective practice” I believe our research is closely aligned with Cosán principles and will encompass genuine opportunities for trialling the three Rs in our research project. Empowerment and support of our staff is important to me as leader of leaders. Distributed leadership, class level communities and committees currently play an important part in best practice. I believe my staff are comfortable with sharing their input, their ideas, and opinions. It is my hope that, through the

course of my leadership as researcher and principal, I may “reach the souls of others in a fashion which raises human consciousness, builds meanings, and inspires human intent that is the source of power” (Shields, C. 2010).

Appendix 2: Ethics Approval

10/07/2023, 18:50 University College Cork Mail - Log 2021-038 Approved
<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/2/?ik=9fc97e2950&view=pt&search=all&permthid=thread-f:1700091761695291862&simpl=msg-f:1700091761695...> 1/14

Anne Marie Moylan <119226444@uemail.ucc.ie> Log 2021-038
Approved 2 messages **Ethics Committee, Social Research**
<srec@ucc.ie> Tue, May 18, 2021 at 11:30 AM To: Anne Marie Moylan
<119226444@uemail.ucc.ie>

Dear Anne Marie

The Social Research and Ethics Committee has now approved your application Log 2021-038 entitled “Awakening the Concealed Beauty in Education.”

The committee wishes you every success with your research.

All the best

Liz

Liz Hales | Coordinator, Social Research Ethics Committee, University College Cork |
srec@ucc.ie | Phone +353 (0)21 4903234
<https://www.ucc.ie/en/research/support/ethics/socialresearch/>

Appendix 3: Pause to Ponder Research Plan

Preliminary Considerations and Objectives

1. Planning stage: PGC Meetings
2. Acting stage: PGC meetings and CT&BT cycles
3. Developing stage: Reflective Practice of educators and pupils within individual and interactive, digital and face to face spaces
4. Reflecting stage: Planning further cycles utilising the learning gleaned from the democratic learning spaces of the PGC and CTBT

Steps in the process

- Identifying and limiting the topic:
What we are doing: Progressing the shift from independence to interdependence in relation to our practice through values-based dialogue, engagement with theory, and formal critical collective reflection upon our understanding of our learners and of the learning experiences we facilitate for them. Exploring further beneficence/positive side effects. Observing and learning from the 'bumps in the road' with curiosity.
Why are we doing it? 1) For professional growth through relational and experiential learning so that we may embody our values in our practice through a 'web of betweenness' and become aware of any lived contradictions, power differentials and hegemony. 2) For the purposes of validity and rigor for the SPN. 3) To examine the confines of time, financing, support, endorsement, overwhelm and research how we might embrace criticality, autonomy and flexibility within our establishments to help us create systems that will help us rise above these confines.
So that: 1) We can become autonomous, informed (by use of the 4 lenses), strengthen our professional identity and agency within the school community. 2) We may provide formal systems for further PGCs and value it as a form of professional development. 3) We may look at power in a more reflexive way. 4) We may encourage teachers to pop their head above the summit through reflective practice and engagement with theory and behold the opportunities for further learning and collaboration, and an ongoing action research and participation in events, research, seminars, secondment opportunities etc., and develop leadership

capacity, enhance job fulfillment and wellbeing by living our values in their practice.

- Gathering information and integrate previous learning from earlier collaborative school agreements of a relational theme: COSAN Reflective Practice, COVID Keeps, Ingredients of a good team (respect, kindness, courage, teamwork, professionalism, fairness, individuality), DAW charter, Joe O' Connell seminars, daft new curriculum, group powwows.
- Reviewing the related literature of: Brookfield, Roche, Dix, Delaney
- Developing a research plan
Skeleton framework for AR and collaborative critical reflection
- Implementing the plan and collecting data from
 - 1)Educators learning to critically reflect using the 4 lenses.
 - 2) Pupils learning to critically reflect using picture books.
 - 3)Educators reflecting on their learning and the learning of their pupils.
 - 4)Pupils reflecting on their learning with their educators
- Analyzing the data of
 - 1)reflection circles via recordings and transcriptions and from digital interactive documents.
 - 2)evolving themes relevant to SPN
- Developing an action plan
Cycle 2: repeat the process which is outlined in detail below.
- Sharing and communicating the results via:
Staff meeting where participants will present findings.
- Reflecting on the process
Opportunity to ask questions and put it on the 'W' (Wait) of the PIEW (Plan, Implement, Embed, Wait) and evaluate the systems, the priority, the value, the time, the permission etc. It is a cyclical generative process of observing, doing, evaluating and adjusting.

Pause to Ponder Schedule

Sep 30th: Staff Information meeting and dissemination of staff consent forms.

Oct 6th: PLC (Professional Learning Community)

Oct 12th: PLC

Oct 21st: PLC

Nov 5th: PLC

Nov 12th: PGC (Professional Growth Community) New title new purpose incorporating personal and professional growth.

Nov 19th: PGC

Nov 22-26th: Cycle 1

DEC 2nd: 'A Bit of a Do' Christmas celebratory lunch at my house at 1pm

Jan 21st: PGC

Jan 28th: PGC

Feb 1-4th: Cycle 2

Feb 11th: PGC

April 11th to 6th Collate, analyse, generate theory and further reflexive questioning.

May 23rd to 27th Presentation to staff at staff meetings

May 28th: 'Another Bit of a Do': The Cycle on the Dungarvan Greenway followed by a sea dip and lunch.

A Breakdown of the Schedule

October 6th, 2021

- Check in: Energy levels and thoughts about getting started.
- Supervision Arrangements
- Videos: PDST Critical Thinking & Book Talk (CTBT) Videos
- Literature: Primary Language Curriculum Support Materials re CTBT; Mary Roche article
- Scholarship: 'Developing Children's Thinking through Picture Books (Roche, M.), 'Teaching the Unteachables' (Delaney, C.), 'Creating a Dialogical and Critical Classroom (Roche, M.) with other references to be provided later.
- Exploring picture books and discussing powerful questions
- Some CTBT Tips Summarised

For pupils:

- Read the title and ask 'what is mostly about?'
- Is there a dust cover? Remove it and see if the cover beneath is the same or different. Why is it and why isn't it?
- Examine the endpapers front and back. Would I do the same or different? Why does the author choose those colours? Do they tell us something about the story?
- Examine the openings one by one. Is there a dedication or acknowledgement? Might this person be important? If there is a small illustration on the title page, does it offer us a clue to the story?

- Remember there is no redundant line or word. They have all been very carefully chosen and positioned. What do you think the author wants to tell us? Why do writers write? Why do people write books?
- Does anybody have a question about that story? Is there something interesting to see about the story?

For teachers:

- Do all children have time to think? Do all children feel safe in offering their ideas? Have I familiarised myself with the stories and the possible area topics for discussion? Am I surprised by how well or how badly a particular child or group of children did in the discussion? How many children are not contributing? How can I encourage them to participate more? Can I involve my local library in this program? Did I ensure that all children had time to think? Did I ensure that all children first offer their ideas? Did I facilitate or dominate? Did I listen respectfully and attentively? What could I improve on in relation to my own participation?

Decisions:

- We will arrange another meeting for next week. We may discuss the readings if anyone has a chance to read. We will reflect on any reflections done during the week. We will talk about planning and timetabling.
- We will not read all the Shaun Tan books "The Red Tree" and "The Lost Thing" so that we can approach it fresh with the children.
- We will decide half way through if we would like Mary Roche to come to talk to us.
- We will read the transcript of meeting 1

PLC meeting 12th October

- Pressie time: everyone receives a journaling folder.
- Beginning of the meeting is time for jotting down any thoughts or reflections since last week or response to any theory engaged with
- Circle: energy, share the above in go around and double dip afterwards

- View each video, followed by reflection in circle time (go around and popcorn)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S4R7clM8R7A>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k9e9MnRxTJE>

- Agreed to read Chapter one of 'Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher' and reflect on what might enhance our meetings?

PLC Meeting Oct 21st

- Time for reflection
- A brief check in and dissemination of chapter 2 of Brookfield's book
- Pseudonyms
- Chairing the meetings in future
- How might I ensure that my critical friends will be respectful of me in the vulnerability of my newly formed thinking/ how can I encourage them to disagree with me and question me if I am not making sense and need some guidance?
- Setting scope for evolving stance: 'I wonder...', 'My initial thought is..'; I might change my mind, but it seems to me that..'

PLC Meeting November 5th

- I have decided to deliver all the business of meetings at the start and then commence the recording thereafter. The chair for the day can take charge of the check in and double dips.
- Interactive Reflection is an elective piece, use bullet points.
- Pseudonyms to be written by each of us in the google doc after the meeting.
- Bring IPADS/phone to next meeting.
- Send out the consent forms.
- AR Plan and schedule discussion.
- Rules of engagement.
- Let's get critical and use interactive digital space and participate via suggested amendments.
- Reflection on the two chapters.
- Chapter 3 (Brookfield, S.) assigned for following week.

PLC Meeting November 12th

- Circle: Reflection Time on professional reading/podcasts/anything else
- The CT/BT Plan...lets fine tune it.
- Resources required.
- How to cater for non-participants.
- Turn taking in facilitating and co-facilitating.
- Interactive Reflection...share your evolving thoughts?
- Let's look at the following checklist in a popcorn, do we know:
 - What we want to research?
 - Why we want to research it?
 - How we want to research it?
- I have spoken with V, R and D and they are happy to be your same go to teacher for supervision of your class from here on out and are also happy to take a piece of your curriculum and roll it out for the coming weeks to save you setting work.
- Looking forward to checking out our new meeting room in the GAA clubhouse at 2pm tomorrow.

PLC Meeting November 19th

- CTBT preamble
- Rules of Engagement
- Non-participants
- Role of scribe
- Planning the RP Reflective circle on the 26th
- End of Cycle 1 celebration planning

CT&BT November 22nd to 26th: The Red Tree

Day one: First Impressions

- RPC rules preamble
- Critical Thinking/Book Talk sentence starters: 'I agree with Jack because..' 'I disagree with Jack because..' 'I partially agree or disagree with Jack because..' 'I now disagree with myself because...
- Read the book using the CTBT Tips as prelude to the lesson.
- Go around circle: My first impression.

- Popcorn circle next where children put their hand up when they wish to share.
- interactive reflection 'Here's what I've thought about since and pictures on on a digital forum providing a voluntary follow through on first and second impressions (like RP what I was thinking about at the time and what I have thought about it since)

Day 2 Quizzical Questions

- Rules Preamble and sentence starters
- Read the collective reflection document.
- Read the book 3 times using the pause between readings.
- Go around circle: have you questions for the author? for each other? for the universe?
- Popcorn circle
- Interactive reflection and pictures: more questions and maybe some answers

Day 3 Feeling my Values.

- Rules preamble sentence starters
- Read the book.
- Read the collective reflection.
- Popcorn prompts: what do you think the author wants to tell us? why do you think we think this? Is there another way we could think about it? Is this ok with us?

Day 4 Readers Response

- What I thought then
- What I think now
- Tricks and clues
- How I would like my readers to engage with my work
- The relationship between artist and reader
- Drawing the alternative ending

Day 5 CTBT: Our Perspective Now

- Rules preamble and sentence starters
- Rate CT/BT with fingers up high
- Popcorn: To rate it one mark higher what would you recommend
- How would you rate the opportunities for voice? Fingers up high
- Popcorn: To rate it one mark higher what would you recommend
- Thumbs up or down: did you feel heard?
- Popcorn: How do you know?

- Thumbs up or down: did you liked having the afterthought space?
- Go around: I liked, disliked, partially liked the afterthought space because...
- Thumbs up or down if you think CT/BT is worthwhile?
- Popcorn: What skills might it develop?
- Popcorn: Who were the learners in CT/BT?
- Popcorn: Question for educators
- Thumbs up or down: Should we do it again?

Inter-curricular Links

- Art
- Literacy
- Co Design Books
- SPHE Values, Depression, Hope etc

Teams:

- RD & RM
- SMcC & AA
- GK & NK

(AM & ES to join in random groups)

Recorders: E, F, R

CTBT Cycle 1: The Lost Thing

Dates PGCs:

Jan 21st: Reflexivity

Jan 28th: Planning

Feb 1-4: CTBT2

Feb 11th: Reflection & Theory

Feb 18th: Final thoughts, suggestions, staff presentation planning

Day one 'First Impressions'

- Preamble
- Read the book slowly, allowing a pause at the end. Read it again, allowing another pause.
- IPAD reading: Think, Pair, Share
- Go around circle: My first impression.

- Popcorn circle: have you anything to add?
- Interactive reflection 'Here's what I have thought about since?'

Day 2 'Quizzical Questions'

- Preamble
- Read the collective reflection document or parts of it.
- Read the book slowly and allow a pause.
- IPAD reading; 'Think Pair Share'.
- Go around circle: Today let's ask questions of the author/ of each other/ of the universe?
- Popcorn circle: have you anything to add.
- Interactive reflection time

Day 3 'My Values'

- Preamble
- Read the highlighted aspects of the collective reflection.
- Read the book and pause.
- IPAD reading: 'Think Pair Share'.
- Go around: what do you think the author wants to tell us?
- Popcorn: what is your biggest takeaway
- Interactive reflection time: last opportunity to reflect.

Day 4 The Readers' Response:

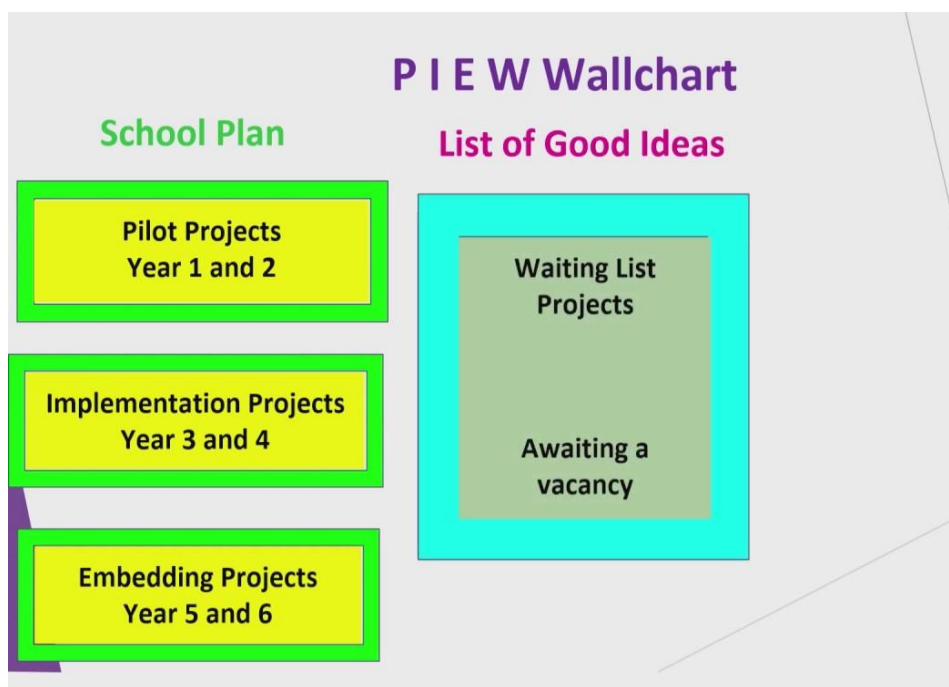
The children will be afforded the opportunity to use the laptop to add further reflection. They will also be invited (either as part of a formal lesson or informally between tasks) to write or draw an addendum or a change of plot to *The Lost Tree* or just draw some related pictures.

Day 5 'Pupil Perspective' (co-facilitator will tally the ratings responses)

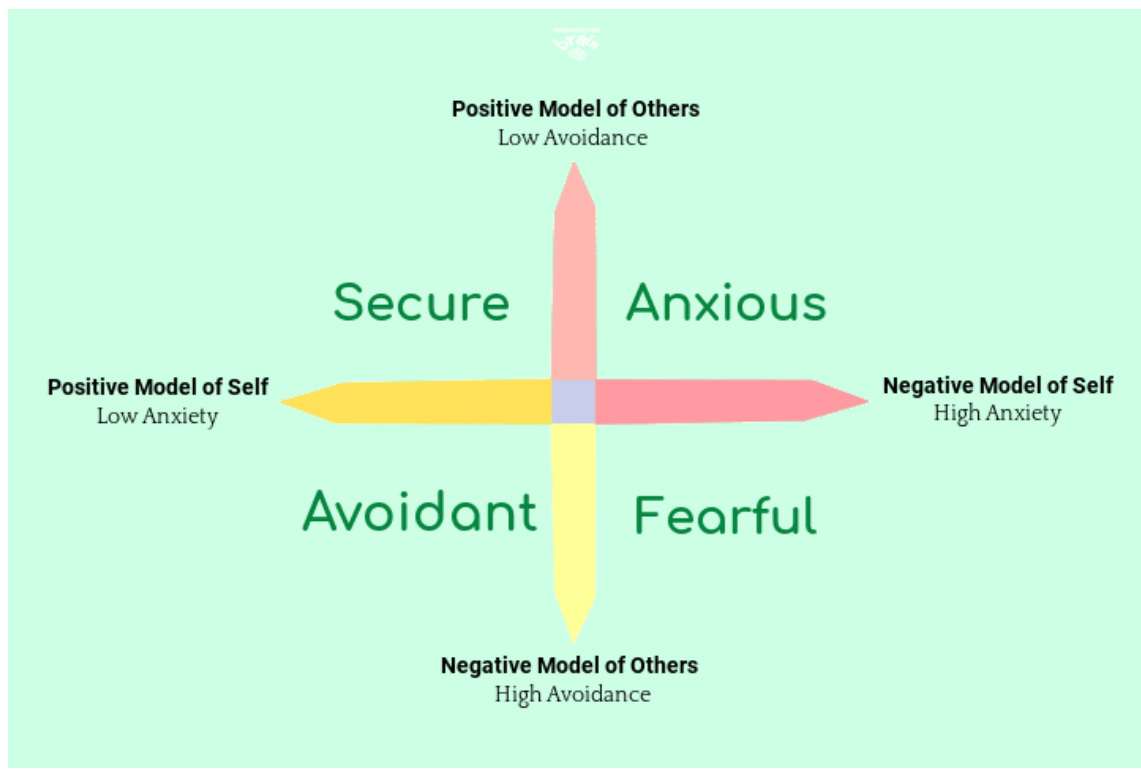
- Rules preamble and sentence starters
- How would you rate CT/BT? **Fingers**
- Popcorn: To rate it one mark higher what would you recommend.
Popcorn

- How would you rate the opportunities for voice? **Fingers**
- Popcorn: To rate it one mark higher what would you recommend?
Popcorn
- Did you feel heard? **Hands**
- Popcorn: How do you know? **Popcorn**
- Did you like having the afterthought space on the laptop? **Hands**
- In what way did you like, dislike, partially like the afterthought space? **Popcorn**
- Do you think CT/BT is worthwhile? **Hands**
- What did you learn? **Popcorn**
- Who are the learners? Why? **Popcorn**

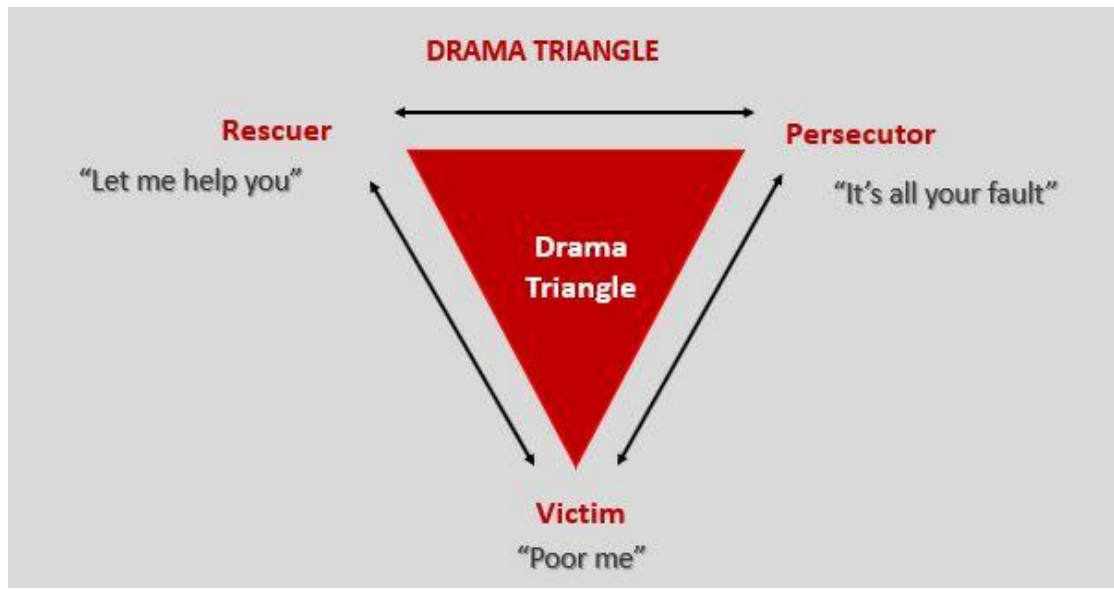
Appendix 4: PIEW Template



Appendix 5: Diagram of the Attachment Styles



Appendix 6: Diagram of The Karpman Drama Triangle



Appendix 7: The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock

*S'io credesse che mia risposta fosse
A persona che mai tornasse al mondo,
Questa fiamma staria senza piu scosse.
Ma perciocche giammai di questo fondo
Non torno vivo alcun, s'i'odo il vero,
Senza tema d'infamia ti rispondo.*

Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherized upon a table;
Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,
The muttering retreats
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:
Streets that follow like a tedious argument
Of insidious intent
To lead you to an overwhelming question ...
Oh, do not ask, "What is it?"
Let us go and make our visit.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes,
Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,
Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,

Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,
Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,
And seeing that it was a soft October night,
Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.

And indeed there will be time
For the yellow smoke that slides along the street,
Rubbing its back upon the window-panes;
There will be time, there will be time
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;
There will be time to murder and create,
And time for all the works and days of hands
That lift and drop a question on your plate;
Time for you and time for me,
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,
And for a hundred visions and revisions,
Before the taking of a toast and tea.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.

And indeed there will be time
To wonder, "Do I dare?" and, "Do I dare?"
Time to turn back and descend the stair,
With a bald spot in the middle of my hair —
(They will say: "How his hair is growing thin!")

My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,
My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin —
(They will say: “But how his arms and legs are thin!”)

Do I dare
Disturb the universe?
In a minute there is time
For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.

For I have known them all already, known them all:
Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,
I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;
I know the voices dying with a dying fall
Beneath the music from a farther room.
So how should I presume?

And I have known the eyes already, known them all—
The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,
And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,
When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,
Then how should I begin
To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?
And how should I presume?

And I have known the arms already, known them all—
Arms that are braceleted and white and bare
(But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!)

Is it perfume from a dress
That makes me so digress?
Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl.
And should I then presume?
And how should I begin?

Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets
And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes
Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows? ...

I should have been a pair of ragged claws
Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.

And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully!
Smoothed by long fingers,
Asleep ... tired ... or it malingers,
Stretched on the floor, here beside you and me.
Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,
Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?
But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,
Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter,
I am no prophet — and here's no great matter;
I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,
And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,
And in short, I was afraid.

And would it have been worth it, after all,
After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,
Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me,
Would it have been worth while,
To have bitten off the matter with a smile,
To have squeezed the universe into a ball
To roll it towards some overwhelming question,
To say: "I am Lazarus, come from the dead,
Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all"—
If one, settling a pillow by her head
Should say: "That is not what I meant at all;
That is not it, at all."

And would it have been worth it, after all,
Would it have been worth while,
After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets,
After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that trail along the floor—
And this, and so much more?—
It is impossible to say just what I mean!
But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen:
Would it have been worth while
If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,
And turning toward the window, should say:
"That is not it at all,
That is not what I meant, at all."

No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;
Am an attendant lord, one that will do
To swell a progress, start a scene or two,
Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,
Deferential, glad to be of use,
Politic, cautious, and meticulous;
Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;
At times, indeed, almost ridiculous—
Almost, at times, the Fool.

I grow old ... I grow old ...
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.

Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?
I shall wear white flannel trousers and walk upon the beach.
I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.

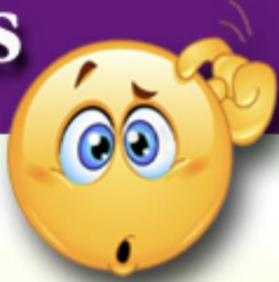
I do not think that they will sing to me.

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
When the wind blows the water white and black.
We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

Elliot, 1915



RP Questions



- What happened?
- What were you thinking of at the time?
- What have you thought about it since?
- Who has been affected and in what way?
- How could things have been done differently?
- What do you think needs to happen next?

RP Circle Rules

- Be Quiet

- Be Calm

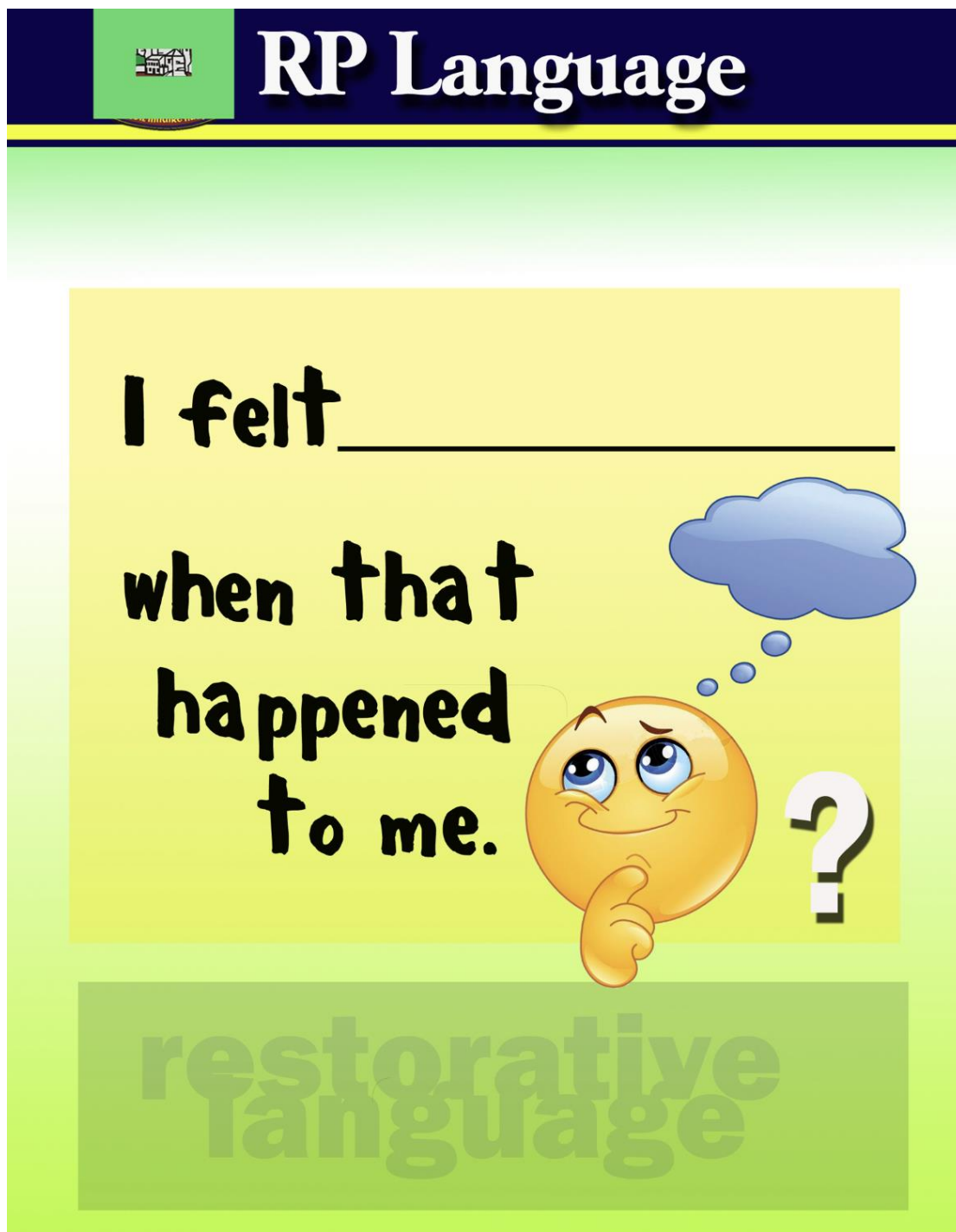
- Be Kind

- Be Honest

- Be Brave

- Be Safe







RP Language

I need to..... belong
be safe
be heard
be respected



I felt _____ when that
happened to me _____

when I was _____ .

I need to _____ .

This is an RP rule in
our school.



RP Language

I need to..... be safe
belong
be heard
be respected



I felt _____ when that
happened to me _____
when I was _____ .
I need to _____ .
This is an RP rule in our
school. Next time
I want _____ .

Scoil Mhuire Naofa

Appendix 10: PGC Guidelines for Engagement

PGC Guidelines of Engagement

- *Listen attentively and without interruption (make a little note of something that struck you that you might like to return to in a 'double dip')*
- *Be confidential, respectful, and open minded about what others share at the meetings.*
- *Use courteous language sentence starters when adding to something that another has said. It's ok to disagree using courteous language. All is a matter of perspective in the present context.*
- *Use the interactive reflection document for further reflection and reflexivity.*
- *Speak with creative and courageous vulnerability in a safe environment in the knowledge that our experiences will resonate with those of our colleagues. Together we can make meaning of and enhance our practice.*
- *Always keep the COSÁN values at the forefront of our discussions: Respect, Care, Trust and Integrity*

Appendix 11: PGC Professional Learning sources

Brookfield, S. (2017) *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass.

Chapter Two: Uncovering Assumptions of Power

Chapter Three: Uncovering Hegemonic Assumptions

Chapter Four: The Four Lenses of critical Reflection

Caitlin Kight (2021) Introduction to Brookfield's lenses. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k9e9MnRxTJE> (Accessed 4 October 2021).

Dix, P. (2017) *When the Adults Change: Everything Changes*. Wales, Independent Thinking Press.

Chapter Two: The Counter-Intuitive Classroom

Chapter Three: Deliberate Botheredness

Chapter Four: Certainty in Adult Behaviour

NCCA (2015) Mary Roche 1. Introducing Critical Thinking and Book Talk. Available at: <https://vimeo.com/148627573> (Accessed 4 October 2021).

NCCA (2015) Mary Roche 2. Getting started with critical thinking and book talk. Available at: <https://vimeo.com/148627871> (Accessed 4 October 2021).

NCCA (2015) Mary Roche 3. Philosophical underpinnings of CT and BT. Available at: <https://vimeo.com/148627954> (Accessed 4 October 2021).

Roche, M. (2011) Creating a dialogical and critical classroom: reflection and action to improve practice. *Educational Action Research: Reflective Practice and Action Research*, 19(3), pp.327-343.

Appendix 12: CTBT Rules of Engagement

CTBT Rules of Engagement

The following presents the carefully co-considered ten guidelines for our democratic CTBT encounter. It was envisaged that this would be read aloud as the preamble to each discussion session.

1. *CT/BT is very interesting and lots of fun, especially when the rules are followed exactly. Rules ensure that all speakers are in a safe respectful space and we are all responsible for that. All adults and children will take part.*
2. *There are many ways to use our voice. Our RP circle rules show us how. We will use our voice during CTBT verbal discussions and in written reflection periods where you can add to the discussion at a later stage on the laptop when it is free.*
3. *You can pass if you do not wish to speak in the 'go around' circle and put your hand up in the 'popcorn' circle afterwards.*
4. *You should never interrupt another person, but you can make a quick note of something that you are afraid you might forget and say it when your turn comes around. This includes teachers who are not allowed to talk in between! When you are finished, please say 'pass to X'.*
5. *Say your special anonymous research number before you speak or write it at the start of your written reflection.*
6. *In CTBT nothing is right or wrong. You can change your mind as many times as you like.*
7. *If you are referring to another person's share you may use the CT/BT sentence starters. 'I agree with X because...' 'I disagree with X because...' 'I partially agree or disagree with X because...' or 'I might change my mind, but here's what I think right now...'*
8. *Be respectful at all times, in your verbal and nonverbal communication.*
9. *And remember to think using your eyes, ears, voice, heart, and your infallible gut.*
10. *Have fun exploring your thoughts, others' thoughts and your changing thoughts and opinions.*

Appendix 13: Jack's 'Locked Inside my Head.'

