EMBOLDENED TO CONTINUE: FURTHER EXPLORATIONS IN PEER PARTNERSHIP LEARNING: A CRITICAL SYSTEMS APPROACH

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Abstract:
Building on 1998 research on peer partnership learning (McMorland and Byrne 1998 ANZSYS Conference), this paper explores the implications of this style of learning for individual and collective transformation. The paper explores identified emergent outcomes of peer engagement and identifies and discusses some of the transformative dimensions of this peer learning experience, namely, the transformation of individual participation and the transformation of context and worldview. We discuss the integration of experience and inspiration in the learning process, and the relationship of insight to action. After a discussion of our inquiry methodology and grounds for claiming the authenticity of our inquiry, we close the paper with personal observations of the learning outcomes we have each identified from our peer partnership practice. As a working paper, the final section also identifies some of the issues we next face in collaborative inquiry-in-action.

Introduction

This paper is the third in a series of reflections on peer learning. It is the first attempt to write collaboratively involving all four partners. In practice the paper does not fully reflect an as yet common view: we have discovered that making understandings and ideas, that were assumed to be shared, explicit in writing takes them to a new level of awareness that requires further exploration to honour adequately the nature of our investigation. This, then, is a working paper of continuing inquiry-in-action.

In 1998 we presented a paper <u>Diving Deep: Reflections on an Extended Exploration of Peer Learning</u> to the ANZSYS Creative Systems Practice Conference. This paper extends that reflection and attempts to answer some of the questions raised in a further paper <u>Peering into Ourselves: Critical Reflections on Peer Learning</u>, accepted for the UK Systems Society Conference July 1999. The 1998 paper described and discussed processes of peer learning that we had developed in our partnership group over four years of regular engagement. The second paper reflected more specifically on issues of subjectivity and authenticity as we searched to understand more precisely the process of collective learning we were experiencing. We seek in this paper to extend our inquiry into individual and collective transformation and, in particular, to discover ways in which the face to face intimacy that characterises the peer partnership might be translated into other forms of learning relationship.

We start our discussion with a brief outline of the key processes of peer partnership. We then explore what it means to take the private experience of our small group into the public arena. We discuss the criteria by which the authenticity and rigour of our inquiry might be validated by external review. We present the deepening learning that is emerging as we become more skilled in peer partnership and move this learning into action. We end the paper with individual comments and reflections on the outcomes of peer learning, and discuss how such learning can be transformational in different contexts, and applicable at different levels of social organisation.

Peer Partnership

Peer partnerships were established in New Zealand as part of the Organisational Learning Foundation's search for radical alternatives to existing organisational paradigms. The challenge was to provide a forum for groups to explore new forms of collective learning. Traditionally dependent on, and used to working as 'experts', we recognised that in the domain of collective learning we had little expertise. We recognised a need to learn together, and our lack of collective skill in this. We did not know how to learn these skills and so set up the peer partnership as an inquiry domain specifically to answer the meta-question "how <u>do</u> we learn to learn together?" We have held this question at the centre of our activities for the past four and a half years and continue to be both enlivened and challenged by it. We have met monthly, for sessions of 3-4 hours a time for the whole of that period, and we continue to do so. The format of each session follows a pattern of gathering, check-in, dialogue and inquiry, check-out.

Figure 1 depicts the 'structure' of our meetings and suggests some of the emergent outcomes of each of the phases of engagement. Details of peer partnership process are reported fully in McMorland and Byrne (1998). In this diagram we highlight the emergent processes from each phase.

Figure 2 depicts various stages of group transitions we have identified and the dominant metaphors that we have used to encapsulate our experience as the process of learning together became indeed one of 'diving deeper'.
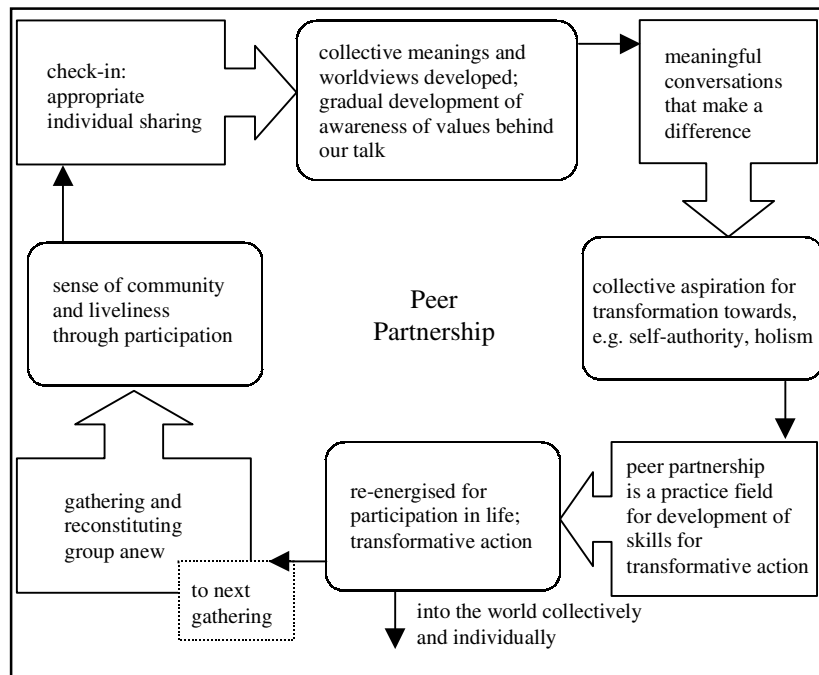
Figure 1: Cycle of Practice and Emergence

Figure 2: Peer Partnership Transitions

Iterations of development	Metaphors over life cycle of group
Exploratory	Rafting, going along
Creative	Diving into the depths
Reflective	Being the depths
Transformative	Spun together: strengthened for action

Engagement with self and other and critical reflectivity have been the key outcomes of the collective learning we have experienced. These capabilities are being strengthened as we develop skills in self-awareness and self-presentation through the check-in process, and skills in group-awareness through the use of rich and extended metaphor. When adequate language has failed us, image has been generative of our experience and enabled us to build stories of our common understandings. We came to an early understanding that *being with* one another was the process through which the collective domain could be tapped and collective consciousness experienced.

Transformative Outcomes

We have said that the peer partnership process is one of meaningful dialogue sustained over sufficient a period of time to develop a depth of intimacy amongst the group that allows entry into deepening awareness of *collective* experience. We also claim that it is this opening up to the collective unknown, yet vibrantly emergent, that is transformative. We observe this transformation in several ways.

From individual isolation to intimacy and membership of the group
One transformation is that of our individual isolation which we overcome through the check-in and subsequent deep conversations out of which intimacy develops. The intimacy we speak of has a distinctive form. It is a quality of relationship which emerges from the process of check-in and in the context of which the individual is able to re-present themselves, to re-member themselves, in the presence of others. For both protagonist and listeners, the process of profound check-in requires commitment to self and receptivity of the other. The check-in is a narrative process of self-disclosure and it is through the relationship of trust that holds within the peer partnership that intimacy can emerge. Each person takes the time they need to authenticate themselves in the present, disclosing themselves to themselves and to the group. The personal narrative of check-in takes many forms: sometimes it is 'story' – an initial recounting of significant events of the past out of which personal significance is drawn and themes that link into others' check-in are identified; sometimes it is making connection with personal dilemmas through symbols and images, often but not exclusively linked to childhood or family memories (as for example, when one of us, faced with a significant career choice linked the situation to a childhood memory of standing at the gate of her childhood home, aged 6, wondering whether to run away to the right or left). This image resonated with other members of the group and evoked much exploration of choice points and transformational moments. The role of the listeners in the check-in is not to give advice, to look for solutions or to critique the communication; rather it is to be fully with one another, to experience the person who is revealed in the act of self-disclosure. It is to be non-critical, yet not blind.

The check-in, we have found, is an essential process for deepening our openness to each other and a necessary prelude to deep conversation. The conversations that emerge do not focus on the specific subject matter of each check-in; rather they return the group to the central question of inquiry through identification of general themes within the overall check-in process of that session. Conversations are informed by the state of group consciousness that is evidenced through the check-in and build on progress made in preceding sessions. 'Meaningful conversations' are characterised for us as those that advance our understanding of collective experience, and which make links between the work in the group and our individual, and sometimes collective, work in the world. They are meaningful because we can discern their impact on relationships beyond the group (retrospective appreciation), and because we have come to understand the quality of deep engagement that has the potential to be transformative (prospective appreciation) if we are open to opportunities in different contexts. An example may help to illustrate this. One of us provides group supervision to the senior management team of a mental health rehabilitation agency. Her experience of peer partnership check-in has shaped the process for this supervision. The senior management team has also discovered quality of talking amongst themselves has to be transformed if it is to catalyse action, as well as sustain the health and wellbeing of the group. We have experimented with adapting Maori protocols to create the container for 'safe exploration of difficult conversations'. A noticeable contrast between peer supervision and peer partnership situations is that the intimacy that has started to emerge in supervision is often shattered by staff changes. The need to reconstitute the group at each change of personnel (through both loss and addition) means that deep engagement glimpsed in one session cannot necessarily be

built on, in the next. The privilege of the peer partnership is that we have been able to sustain commitment to the process over a substantial period.

Length of time itself is not, however, the sole criterion for creating deep engagement. All of us have sustained participation in on-going groups over a number of years, and with varying degrees of intensity. The purposefulness of the peer partnership inquiry, and the absence of individualised 'problems' (and therefore the absence of typical 'helping' behaviours) has kept us focussed on our collective endeavour. Peer partnership requires a certain level of commitment to inquiry, reflection and transformation. It also requires a certain level of sophistication in group participation: requiring skills in maintaining self in the group, and in not imposing self on the group through 'neediness' or projection. Thus the purpose of the group as a learning situation, rather than as one in which individuals are 'helped' is a crucial distinguishing feature from other 'support' group situations. This has meant we have had to learn to abandon any evaluative or even empathetic stance in relation to each other and discover how to be with one another without judgement. We are thus able to characterise the emergent intimacy that in our experience is created out of purposeful connection and deep conversation.

Emergent intimacy within the group
Emergent intimacy is respectful of the other and the self. Whilst being deeply interested in the other, we maintain an awareness of the self at the same time. Intimacy and relationship are then at the heart of the partnership. The intimacy is peer-based, and is both one-to-one and one-to-many. It is an intimacy of process rather than content, or informational sharing. It is the intimacy of *being fully with* and *withholding judgement/advice/sympathy* of the other. These are processes for sensing and experiencing – check-in in this context leads to experiencing/sensing of the whole of the person – not specifically what they say of their own situation, though that is important, but also what they say in terms of connection to the human condition. Thus we come to know one another intimately in terms of our lived experience of the world. Another mark of this kind of intimacy seems to be the absence of what might be called 'statusing politics' – we note that interactions within the peer partnership are different from other group experiences in that gender, age and educational differences are not brought into play. The dominant relationship is that of equality, and it is that which allows us to 'enter into' each other's experience, and which allows us to enter into the emergent world of collective experience without fear. We have become aware that the language we have to name what we increasingly see as the fine nuances of relationship is too clumsy to capture the subtle and profound. John Heron (1999) has challenged us to find appropriate ways of recording these dimensions of interaction. A future task is to develop further what McMorland (1998) has called a 'vocabulary of relationship'.

Transformation of context
A second transformation is of context. Within the group, the contexts of our individual lives are brought into association with each other through the process of check-in. As we hold each other in the intimacy of deep listening, so we build and sustain an emergent container that holds the conversations that develop. The container in turn becomes the context for the group. We share the issues that burn within us or disturb us, the observations we make of our own and our collective lives.

Viewed systemically, we each reflect on our own context, and on the context of the whole. The deep conversation which emerges is richly enabling. In Figure 1 we characterise this as re-energising us for renewed participation in the world. But the process is an iterative one. The group's experience is deepened as we become aware of such action and learn to bring it back into the group further critical reflection. In the latter stages of our work together we have characterised this metaphorically as threads spun together, therein recognising that separate origins/contexts can get woven together into collective awareness. As we actually make space to be with one another fully, individual inquiries into personal contexts become collective experience.

Transformation of world view

Our peer partnership experience is one of epistemic learning where practice leads to awareness of worldviews and on to transitions to address these. We have stated above that narrative is an important dimension of our discourse. One of the disciplines of peer partnership practice we identified earlier (Byrne and McMorland, 1999) is that of developing the inquiring self. A major focus for our self inquiry has been on the personal stories we tell, as we increasingly recognise (as is well documented in the academic literature of Narrative Theory) that there are dominant narratives within our culture which shape our personal representations. We have been developing skills in increasing awareness of our own storying process, and in articulating the worldviews out of which these are told. Thus we have taken very seriously the need to work at the epistemic level of learning (Bawden, 1995), to inquire into the 'no longer-taken so much for granted realities of oneself, the group and the world(s) beyond' (McMorland and Byrne, 1998).

In Bawden's presentation of critical systems learning (1997), he juxtaposed three levels of experiential learning with one domain of inspirational learning. In our deliberations we suggest that the inspirational cannot be separated from the epistemic since in transformative learning it is the epistemic worldview itself that is being transformed. Thus we build into our inquiry an integration of the epistemic and the inspirational, making a link (amongst others) with Senge's articulation of the relationship between 'guiding ideas' in the domain of action, and their mediation by aspirations, beliefs, values and capabilities, in the domain of deep learning, which in turn is enlivened by the implicate order (Senge et al., 1994). Thus we can say, from our lived experience comes appreciation of the inspirational nature of experiential learning and awareness that inspiration and insight emerge from engagement with deep critical reflective practice. An interesting aspect of our group's formation was different interpretations of what experiential learning might mean. One potential member withdrew after the first meeting because he did not feel we would be 'doing' sufficient from which we could learn. Others of us who made a commitment to exploring the unknown, intuited that what we needed to do was work in different ways, to break out of the paradigms of received definitions of learning, in order for new learning to emerge. Our central question 'How do we learn to learn together?' was itself a questioning of our traditional worldview of learning. We have tried to remain constant to the practice of what Mark calls 'futuring'. As we practice what we sense any new worldview will require us to be, we are challenged to experience and explore 'How will I be with others in the deeper new way that the future seems to require?'

Through our sundry engagements with the world at large, some of us are becoming more aware of the transitional age within which we live. As the restrictive and imprisoning dimensions of old paradigm worldviews become apparent, so we have sought to articulate our own experience of an emergent worldview. We are conscious that throughout the world there are many, many people, in diverse contexts articulating their own perceptions of these changes. We make no grandiose claims in relation to this. Instead we report that one outcome of our collective inquiry is that we are forced to confront the emergence of new values and new definitions of ourselves and others. We propose this as authentic knowledge discovered from co-equal aspects of interiority and exteriority of peer partnership experience, and as one expression only of wider systemic processes happening in the world at large.

The systemic quality of peer relatedness challenges the old world paradigm of privilege, status and power in a fundamental way. As peers we are challenged to relate to one to one, and one to many, with equal regard. We have found the way to do this has been to slow down our processes of talking with each other and to go deep. Through check-in and conversations we have started to see the things we have in common, but it is only when we have slowed down enough that we have become conscious of both the ways in which a new worldview is emerging, and the attitudes, stories and activities that we are still engaged in which inhibit such an emergence within ourselves. However, as we experience each other differently, so we are emboldened to reconfigure the collective narrative we construct about our world and our place within it. Though our conversations have been couched implicitly in terms of evolving a new worldview (for ourselves), the actual characterisation of this is as yet still very tentative. One recent conversation identified the elements and relationships in Figure 3 as significant, for the peer partnership and beyond.

Figure 3: Emergent Features of Potential World View

participation rather than observation
love of difference that doesn't lead to conflict
self-empowerment, claim by each of us, equality of power
belief in some kind of transcendence – spirit
holism, interdependence of living systems
desire for real understanding of what the other means – curiosity vs. defensiveness
desire and willingness to practice inquiring deeply and staying engaged with doing that
valuing life (sacred) the wholeness of life – living earth
dancing with other people's knowledge, not giving authority to knowledge of others
honouring, supporting, encouraging, respecting the selfhood of others and oneself
two-way inquiry
global consciousness
value of diversity, community
practice of sustainability, ecology of interaction

These items are shorthand indicators of values and assumptions that we have been explicitly and implicitly exploring, but there is still much more work we need to do amongst ourselves before we could claim any collective understanding. Rather than get caught into the content of whatever worldview might be emerging (and each reader and participant will have their own list and awarenesses of this) we see the purpose of the peer partnership as being one practice field for deep experiential

learning and inquiring, not through the domain of ideas, but essentially through the domain of relationships.

Our discussion so far has highlighted three areas of transformation that we are currently noting. In writing about these phenomena we have also been confronted with the issue of authenticating our research process. Our paper now turns to discussion of some aspects of this issue.

Coming out to a public arena

Amongst ourselves, we have valued peer partnership as a profoundly worthwhile activity, important for social as well as individual wellbeing. We have sustained our journey of inquiry since 1995, and the four of us remain deeply engaged in the process.

At the beginning of the group we made a deliberate choice to use ourselves as the source of inquiry. We had a commitment to experiential learning. We were willing to engage in transformative practice – that is, to put considerable time and effort into really experiencing group process over a long enough period to get beyond the familiar. We felt reference to others' writings at an early stage of exploration would have got in the way of this 'lived inquiry' (Heron, 1998). Furthermore, within the group, we came to the experience with very different exposures to academic discourse on educational practice and research methodology. We wanted to distance our inquiry from institutionalised learning, received concepts and external definitions of the collective domain. Rather than build specifically on others' work, then, we chose to create and develop our practice, afresh, and to trust the authenticity of our own experience. This meant that, whilst we were willing to go into the uncharted territories of our own experience, with nothing other than our general knowledge of organisational learning, we did not ascertain whether or not this was known ground that had already been traversed by others. However, as each of us is a member of other peer groups we have had considerable opportunity to identify the defining and differentiating characteristics of the peer partnership, and to recognise when new learning is emerging for us, in novel situations.

Our experience of various literature sources suggests that our collective experience is different from other learning communities in some respects. We have not experienced, for example, the conflict stages typical of groups (Tuckman, 1965), nor the 'instability of the container' described by Isaacs (1994). There is an abundance of groups that are making substantial inquiry into experiences similar to ours. Like travellers, though, we will not know if we have gone off 'the beaten track' unless we do some 'mapping of the journey travelled' and share travellers' tales with others journeying in similar territory. This has meant that we have had to grapple as a group with the tasks of writing.

Trying to write about our experience has heightened our awareness of the need to articulate processes of engagement that are both profound and subtle. The writing process has produced a shift in our group life. We see that we have moved through distinct stages of articulation. Our first writing has been about the dynamics and processes of our peer partnership, articulating them as it were, first to ourselves.

Reflection has helped us discern the emergent processes we are discovering as we have developed greater courage to go deeper into the unknown territory of our collective lived experience. Presentation of our discoveries and enjoyment moves us, then, out beyond our private domain into the wider arena of public inquiry and scrutiny. We can only claim authority to speak and act on the authenticity of our grounded experience.

How then do we validate this authenticity? The credibility of traveller's tales can only truly be ascertained by those who also have travelled. Detailed description does not 'explain' the experience – the map is not the territory, the advertising brochure is not the journey. So, how do we authenticate our collective experience beyond the confines of the peer partnership itself?

Our own validation tests have been first to develop internal rigour and strategies for reflection on our practice. In the early stages of the group we sought to build critical reflection into each session, which was documented, at least in note or symbol form. We reported to each other applications of 'our meaningful conversations' as these seemed significant to each of us, noting the development of capabilities and dispositions within ourselves both individually and collectively. In the later stages, our reflection has become an on-going dimension of practice, but still an important part of the check-out.

The second form of authentication was to encourage others to set up their own peer partnerships. This was done through the Organisation Learning Foundation. Whilst we shared some information about our inquiry, mostly we shared our enthusiasm for the project and left it to the new participants to discern the structure and form the inquiry would take for them. Three other groups were established. Each group then decided for themselves their own path, question and process. They chose different centring questions and have had different experiences from us. These groups have not sustained membership for more than two-three years each. Feedback from members of these groups suggested that there was not the same commitment to exploring deeply and there was a tendency to treat the partnership as a problem solving group. Given their experiences, there has been some surprise from these groups at the depth of exploration which we have been able to sustain. Our tentative explanation of this is that we were willing to sit with uncertainty, to explore the unknown, and to withhold judgement about the 'success' of our work. We did not require definitive answers to our questions to continue to value our inquiry.

The third form of authentication has been writing for ourselves and others. The first papers (McMorland and Byrne, 1998 and Byrne and McMorland, 1999) were written by Judith and Susan, with interest, but no direct involvement in the writing, from Tony and Mark. Judith and Susan sought to verify, as best they could, that what they had written in these earlier papers was in fact a true representation of our collective understanding. As academics, they saw the importance (and need!) to write, but found that the academic format excluded Tony and Mark from a sense of full authorship. Since then, writing has become part of the group's work, rather than an outside report on it. Tony and Mark claimed the right to be much more fully part of the writing process recognising that half of the partnership cannot speak for the whole. This paper has emerged from different patterns of conversations, and from individual

engagement with the collective ideas. The test of authenticity has then been that of continuing engagement with each other, and the internal consistency of continuing the process across these various groupings.

We have experimented with how to write collaboratively, using different constellations of pairs, 'triangulating' our experiences, and building in feedback from one another. This has been a challenging process: so even though Susan and Judith have crafted most of the actual words of the paper, Tony and Mark have been actively involved in its creation. We have tried to incorporate diverse ideas rather than present a consensual view – and we have seen areas for substantial conversations ahead where unresolved issues have surfaced. We also see opportunities for a variety of future writing projects that are emerging as we continue our peer partnership activity.

The process of writing the paper has not been easy. We noted above that in our peer partnership meetings we had not experienced the 'insecurity of the container'. There has been insecurity in the writing process, primarily because of the complexity of our various contexts and the consequent difficulty of scheduling sufficient time together. Our experience of writing this paper has brought to the fore our need to hone our skills in doing things together, to the levels we have achieved in being together. In this respect, we have surfaced the challenge of true collaboration that participative inquiries all face.

Concluding Reflections
We conclude the paper with personal commentaries from each of us which capture, in our individual voices, at least some of the learnings we feel have been manifest in our lives since we commenced the journeying in our peer partnership.

Mark: Learning outcomes from Peer Partnership
I stand without equipment at the base of a learning cliff in attempting to point to causal relationships between my participation in our peer partnership gatherings over the past four and a half years and the specific learning outcomes that have resulted from my participation. What I can offer is what participation in our peer partnership has meant to me, how my understanding has developed in ways that seem to me at least somewhat attributable to my participation and how some of these understandings have been reflected in changes in what I do.

What has Peer Partnership meant to me?

For me peer partnership has been a container for emergent inquiry into the domain of identity in which both the process and content of inquiry are available for exploration. It has essentially provided me with a practice field for collaboration in self-discovery and self-recreation. When we first started our peer partnership one potential participant chose to withdraw after our first meeting in late 1994 on the basis that we couldn't learn much about how to learn together without having "doing together" time in between the time we planned to invest in "being together". Our travels in the domain of being, as distinct from doing, began as a confusing and apparently aimless process full of such questions as "why am I wasting time sitting here not knowing what I am doing?". As relative experts in our respective fields we seemed uncomfortable with not having an expert to be our guide. Not knowing held little

value for us at that time as a group. We wondered together about what sort of equipment we might need in order to venture further.

One of our emergent theories was that we needed to become present to each other in some way before we set off. This began as relatively short rounds of "checking-in" as per Peter Senge. Over time it was my experience that this process of checking-in proved to be not only a means of preparing to explore the territory, but perhaps our primary means of exploration. We experienced that as each of us learned to check-in fully we collectively created something that was not present when we first came into the room, and that the pathway on from that place emerged out of our not knowing rather than our knowing. This collective experience of not knowing, and the liveliness of the enquiry it generates, leads me to suggest that perhaps the greatest meaning that I have found through my participation has been to begin to value such "not knowing" in myself and others, and to recognise its potential as a guide to deep learning, especially when it is focused in the domain of identity.

In peer partnership meetings uncertainty is normal, questions are solid ground and emerging theories only the basis for more experimentation. The doing aspect between each meeting has turned out to be my life. The experiential aspect we have shared has been learning to tell increasingly authentic stories to each other and ourselves about our lives and ourselves. Our reflections about how we tell these stories and about their significance have generated ongoing material for deeper enquiry and exploration. In telling and re-telling the story of who I am in my life many many times, and especially in opening myself up to listen without judgement to others doing the same, I have discovered and rediscovered how our stories are both our creations and our creators.

How has PP impacted on my understanding?

During the past few years I have increasingly found myself drawn to participate in what I have come to describe as emergent enquiry into the theory and practice of self-recreation. Emergent enquiries are essentially ongoing developmental conversations where there is a shared intention to explore the content of consciousness, the deep structures that shape the content of consciousness, the complexes that are at play within those structures, how to release ourselves from complexes that no longer serve us, who we each seek to become and how to gather, resolve and seal the energies required for this exploration of self-recreation. It is essentially a peer based enquiry, where the authority is held by each participant and the conversation is generally focused on the interplay between emergent theories and practices of the participants in relation to the intent of the conversation.

I suspect that my participation in peer partnerships has provided me with a basic understanding of the value and practice of this sort of emergent enquiry, of treating the content of my own consciousness as territory that could be explored with others, rather than needing only to be justified or defended. I characterise this basic process as separation from the content of my consciousness. This is similar in many ways to what I experience in meditation, except within an interpersonal setting.

Within this emergent enquiry a typical feature of conversation is the commonalities and differences between the content and deep structures that shape our conscious

awareness. Once we have developed a basic level of separation from what I call our "stuff" (conditioned emotionally triggered reactions to experience) and are therefore able to describe our inner worlds to each other as we are experiencing them, I have found that there is enough commonality to make it reasonable to describe emotional and mental landscapes that interpenetrate the physical landscape we are already conscious of sharing. My experiential exploration of these landscapes has been strongly influenced by the understanding I gained of how to work with others in the unknown during our peer partnership meetings. This separation also makes it possible to explore our "stuff" about each other in a non-reactive way, where there is a deep acceptance that it is natural for each of us to experience stuff, and that it is often very valuable to explore it with the person it concerns, rather than to project it onto them or to attempt to suppress or transform it in some way. My understanding of how to listen openly to what someone is choosing to share about the content of their consciousness has also been enhanced significantly by participation in our peer partnership.

The last aspect of my emerging understanding that I would like to share at this point is my growing conviction that there is a presently a multigenerational conflict in the deep structure of consciousness between civilisational worldviews, and that this conflict is mirrored externally in our society. The focal conflict seems to be between the Fundamentalist, Modernist and emerging Integral worldviews. This has been articulated by Paul Ray in his Integral Culture Survey published by IONS in 1996 (Research Report 96-A). My focus here is in terms of the relationship between conflict amongst civilisational worldviews, and deep conflict in the identity of individuals brought up within those civilisations. Peer partnership has helped me to understand how, through practising telling and retelling stories about who I am and what I am doing in my life, I can learn to surface and work with conflicts between deep conditioning with which I am identified (that is constantly being reinforced by our global communications systems) and my own sense of who I truly am, or wish to become.

How have these understandings been reflected in what I do?

It is important for me to point out that the practices that have emerged in my enquiry as expressions of the understanding I have pointed to above take different forms at different levels. Rather than attempting to share a smorgasbord of these practices I will provide a description of one understanding that I perceive to have been contributed to by peer partnership and how I see it as emerging in my practice at different levels. The understanding I'll use as an example is separation from the content of consciousness, as this seems to me to have provided a foundation for many other practices. I don't wish to give the impression that some kind of change is complete, or that I have arrived in some sort of nirvana; only that there has been a definite development in my typical behaviour over the period of my participation in peer partnership.

Intra-personal - At the Intra-personal level I have changed over the last four years from irregular meditation, to regular morning and evening meditation. The key to this has been not so much in terms of force, but the fact that taking time to be with myself is something that has gradually become something quite natural and desirable, in terms of routinely providing me with a sense of well-being.

Inter-personal - I have changed from occasional conversations about my inner life with others, where even if these took place I could easily fall into defensive routines (Chris Argyris), to regular organised and frequent spontaneous conversations, in addition to peer partnership meetings, where the conversation will include conversations about "stuff" that is taking place in the content of my consciousness (or that of others participating in the conversation) which may well refer to the other person in the conversation or to myself. While there can be emotional tension for a brief period when the stuff is first surfaced in the conversation it is usually relatively quickly transformed into a new focus for productive enquiry, often yielding extraordinary insights and warmth.

Group - Separation from the content of consciousness in a group setting has developed for me from typically taking a somewhat domineering facilitative role four years ago, if such a role was accessible, to becoming increasingly interested in participating in emergent self-organisation, and being increasingly likely to share information about the content of my consciousness that illustrates what I would formerly have felt were aspects of my personality that needed to be hidden or defended.

Organisation - Four years ago I was full of theories as an organisational development consultant which I sought to work with my clients to convince their organisations to use, whereas today my interest is in assisting in the emergence of networks who are able to enquire for themselves into what is happening and what is possible, and to support their journey in ways that make sense to them. I am also much more likely to seek to attend to what is happening and what I might not be conscious of, rather than to write things off if they do not fit within a predetermined theoretical framework.

Society & Civilisation - When we started out in our peer partnership I was an agent of change in some ways, and very much a conforming member of the dominant modernist worldview in others. As I have become more conscious of the content of my consciousness, I have begun to see much more relevance in the connection between each choice that I take outwardly and the worldview that I am supporting in myself by that action. As a result purchases and exchanges have become much more of an issue, as I seek to deploy resources in ways that are increasingly in harmony with who I truly am, rather than in support of a conditioned "I complex" (a habitual reactive mix of thoughts, feelings and will impulses that tends to be invoked by a particular stimulus). This process is ongoing and provides considerable challenges as I confront my own deep ignorance about what it means to act in ways that are in harmony with who I truly am, or seek to become.

Tony: My Learning In Peer Partnership And How I Take It Into The World
It is important to understand how I have conceived of and used peer partnership as a learning experience. My participation in the experience began with an invitation to join the group to explore how we learn to learn together. The common denominator for participants appeared to me to be an interest in organisational learning concepts expressed through the work and visit of Peter Senge to NZ and creation of the Organisational Learning Foundation.

My own interest in this work, apart from the practical applications and understandings, is the place of reflection in the process of learning from an organisational perspective. It is my observation that in most of the organisations with which I have been involved the focus is on action or doing things and the quality of decisions and the consequent action taken suffers from the lack of critical reflection. This is a concept that I have been working to integrate in the whole of my life for some 15 years. Until I came across the work of Peter Senge and Daniel Kim on organisational learning (where Lewin's Experiential Learning Model, which includes reflection, provided an integrated model and explanation of individual and organisational learning), I felt what I was trying to achieve in my personal life had to remain separate from my organisational/work life. Peer partnership has provided a context for inquiry involving people working in organisational settings where the reflective component of learning is valued, encouraged and undertaken. It is in essence a practice field or a learning laboratory.

My experience of reflective learning suggests there are particular challenges for us all to enter into a conversation in which we expose our mental models and world views, those hidden aspects of ourselves on which our action in the world is based. Within our peer partnership activity I have been focussed on assisting the creation of an environment/culture (within the context of PP called 'the container') that supports inquiry at this deeper level. Alongside that is my awareness of my own participation or self in the context of the conversation. Am I present in the moment to the conversation? What are my own reactions and what is their origin? Am I able to participate in a way that leaves me with a sense of my own integrity, contributes in a positive way to other individuals in the group and to the life of the group and its inquiry?

Moving beyond the context of peer partnership into the world of work, I find myself more comfortable in myself about the value of reflection and able to inquire more freely with individuals and groups into the deeper rooted assumptions and norms held both individually and organisationally. In practice I am still wrestling with the challenge of transferring or facilitating reflective insight/learning into effective group action based on shared understanding.

Susan: Observed Outcomes from Peer Partnership Participation
I value highly the opportunity to deeply experience learning in a reflective and non-judgemental setting which the peer partnership has, and still does, offer me. The space to explore very deeply my own and others' underlying beliefs and assumptions is very precious to me. I find myself jealously guarding the times we have assigned for our gatherings each year. In the context of the busy academic life this is a challenge, but one that I consider well worth having.

As for particular learnings, I have noticed a heightened awareness of my assumptions, mental models, deeply held beliefs about the world and myself, and the taken-for-granted propositions which filter all that enters into my consciousness, even if I don't realise it. These produce what Bohm (1994) calls 'conditioned reflexes' which affect the thoughts I have. I now sense that I have an experiential awareness of this process, rather than just an intellectual appreciation of it. I am much more willing to explore the deep realms of underlying beliefs and assumptions and to surface the deep

structures of my consciousness as I make sense of my experiences in the world, and I am willing to change these, hence producing changes in my conditioned reflexes, and hence changes in what thought presents to me.

In the realm of interactions with others, both socially and professionally, I have become much more interested in engaging in deep conversations with others. I no longer want to be bound by such social conventions as, for example, responding 'I'm fine" when asked the question 'How are you today' when, in actuality, how I am is a result of a complex interplay of many aspects. I have had practical experience that my unwillingness to participate in this apparent charade calls forth a personal response from the people I meet, and provides an opportunity for them to slow down and engage in the conversation from the depths of their own being. This makes for a more authentic connection with others, and it is the style of connection which I find much more satisfying, enlivening, and energising.

Within my role as a lecturer I have noticed a desire to focus on the development of an experiential understanding as well as an intellectual understanding in my activity with students in all the classes I teach, whether they be undergraduate, post-graduate or post-experience. I observe that I have a much increased capacity to listen to students (and others!) and to be with them in a non-judgemental manner. I have also seen the value of reflecting on one's own experience, assumptions, and beliefs and so I encourage this same reflection in students. I am no longer afraid to share with them my own reflections, as we jointly craft together a learning experience.

Judith: What I have learned and appreciate from the peer partnership
The peer partnership commitment is one I personally value highly. It isn't easy, however, to ascribe separate outcomes or benefits to peer partnership from the other activities of my life over the past five years. There are associations I make, however, and these are the dimensions to which I ascribe value.

I have had a long academic and practitioner interest in group work and collaborative inquiry, but this experience more than any other has challenged me to *own* my own learning. As an academic, I have had to let go of other people's knowledge and dig deep into my own here-and-now experiences, to discover what I personally know - and more importantly didn't know. That learning has been both intellectual and emotional, both conceptual and practical. I can attest to gaining greater skill in 'being with' others, to genuinely withholding judgement whilst listening deeply, within the context of the group itself. I have found the metaphors that we constructed to be life-enriching and generative of energy and intentionality. I believe in the power of 'meaningful conversations' and know that helping to create opportunities for these in other organisational settings can be profoundly enabling.

Writing together is, however, quite a different activity from talking deeply with one another. We haven't yet learnt the skills of working together on such a project, at the same depth and intensity that we achieve in our conversations. Knowing now the power of the 'being with' (others) dimension, I can see that our 'doing together' does not yet have the same depth of skill or integrity of collaboration. I do not believe we would have learnt so much about ourselves and each other if we had not started on the 'being' work. 'Doing' does not of itself bring about reflective learning. Were it so,

in a busy 'doing' world we would all be better equipped! We have had to develop the skill of reflectivity.   Though learning organisation and adult education literatures abound with ideas about developing reflectivity, it is not a practice that is easily acquired, nor do I believe one can do this alone. Within the peer partnership there has been sufficient time to take these realisations seriously. I have had to listen to myself for a change, had to confront myself as story teller, and do this because I personally wanted to make changes, rather than be reliant on others to circumscribe the world about me. I have come to know personally what Erikson (reference long forgotten) described as the challenges of middle age – generativity vs. stagnation.   And to recognise that if I choose life, then I have to make it happen.   Through this very personal learning I have become much more aware of both the content and process of a PhD study I am supervising on spirituality and work (and probably a better supervisor).   The tensions of 'agency' and 'communion' are tensions I live with, and I have found space in the peer partnership to explore these within myself.   The deep learning of 'reflective experiencing' stands in sharp contrast with my academic training which values published knowledge, over against 'my knowing' and my telling you about it.

It is however out of 'my knowing' of myself as a reflective practitioner that I can act within the world and be transformative of it. Experience in the peer partnership of the care with which one needs to create and sustain the 'container' within which people can meet each other well, has sharpened and enhanced my practice as a group facilitator. It has also highlighted for me a fundamental truth of systems dynamics – that the more people you get, the more complex the systems of interaction!   I have worked on a number of writing projects with one other person (including a joint Masters thesis) and found this a most satisfying and productive way of working. Writing this paper under time and work commitment pressures has been stressful. We find that we have not developed the skills necessary to write as a foursome with the same integrity of collaboration as in the peer partnership meetings, as was our intention. To develop these skills will be a strong challenge. But it is a challenge at the heart of our project. It is hard work learning to learn together, but that these are skills, capabilities and dispositions that we need to learn I am more sure of than ever. My experience in the peer partnership is that this is a time-honoured challenge for human being, and human becoming. It is not knowledge that can be transmitted, but must be discovered from within each of us. For me, the emerging worldview is this: I am an intricate part of the world and have a responsible part to play in co-creating it, but this creative process requires a sharing and learning from and with others. It is this project that I am emboldened to continue.

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