A step too far? Mythopoiesis, spirituality and professional reflective practice
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Abstract
This paper is based on a personal journey. It begins with reflections on the development of a module on reflective practice within a Masters degree and ends with discussion of issues arising from a seminar series on researching spirituality as a dimension of lifelong learning. It suggests that, especially for those who have a ‘transpersonal orientation’, questions about spirituality may be an integral element of reflective practice, and the implications of such questions should not be ignored in the context of professional learning.

The real magic of discovery lies not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes.
Marcel Proust (c.1899)

A human face with a third eye. This eye sees what the other two do but in addition it sees beyond normal perception – not just ‘I see’ but ‘I see why’.
(An image of reflective practice, Masters degree student, 1998)

Introduction

Approach
I first became knowingly involved in reflective practice in 1994. I have used ‘knowingly’ because I had long engaged in reflection on my own practice in terms of thinking/worrying about it. However, in 1994, as director of a Masters course (MEd) in Continuing Education, I was responsible for restructuring it into distance learning format and decided, at the same time, to introduce a new module entitled Becoming a Reflective Practitioner. I will include commentary on this because it constitutes the baseline from which I embarked on a journey that has not only broadened my view of reflective practice but helped me to articulate my own particular orientation to professional learning and practice (Hunt, 2006).

I still worry about what I do – but I now believe that a key function of reflective practice is to enable practitioners to grapple with their own meaning-making so that they can say: “This is where I am now; this is how I got here; and these are some of the reasons why I think/feel/act as I do”. It seems congruent with this belief to ground a paper on reflective practice in my own experience of such practice. Thus, my purpose here is to chart some aspects of my own journey – and to ask whether or not, by entering into the realms of spirituality, it has gone a step too far beyond established conventions of reflective practice, especially in the current outcomes-driven rationality of much professional education.

Background
In 1994, the MEd had been in existence in a ‘face-to-face’ format for fifteen years. Designed to enhance the professional development of mid-career educators from a range of settings, a key espoused value of the course had always been to encourage

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students to link theory and practice. Much of this had hitherto been done in weekly seminars which drew extensively on students’ experiences as educators and learners. The *Becoming a Reflective Practitioner* module was intended to underpin and accredit a process whereby distance learning students would be similarly encouraged to bring their own experiences to the foreground, reflect on them in the light of academic and policy literature, and critique ‘practice’ in the light of ‘theory’ - and *vice versa*. To some extent, evidence of this process was required in assignments for all modules but it was not ‘rewarded’ separately and could easily become occluded within the final grade by other marking criteria, especially when a student’s writing style and/or grasp of theoretical issues was particularly good. The reflective practice module was therefore to carry 10 of the 80 coursework credits.

I joined forces in the development of the module with two colleagues from the local college of nursing and midwifery which was about to become a department in the medical faculty of the university where I then worked in the department of adult continuing education. They were setting up a new Masters course (M.Med.Sei) in Clinical Nursing and Midwifery and wanted to incorporate the module. It was later also included in three other courses, including an MEd in Medical Education.

I now shudder both at the naivety with which I approached this development and at my failure to recognise that I had stepped onto something of a bandwagon. At that time I had a passing acquaintance with Schön’s (1983) work on ‘the reflective practitioner’. I knew about reflection as a stage in the learning cycle (Kolb, 1984; Boud et al., 1985) and I recognised the usefulness of reflection as something which, to use an old adage, might enable practitioners ‘to have 20 years’ experience instead of one year’s experience 20 times over’. Primarily, however, I saw the reflective practice module as a practical solution to the issues outlined above and was largely unaware of either the literature about, or the developing critique of, reflective practice.

In the next section I will refer to some of this in order to contextualise within its own time the framework for reflection we recommended to students; and to indicate how it relates to my own subsequent thinking about the nature of reflection in professional contexts, including links with spirituality.

**Literature and practice**

*Bandwagon?*

By 1996, as Bright pointed out, reflective practice had been:

> adopted by the teaching, nursing, police, counselling, social service and clinical pharmacy professions, and appears in virtually every professional training mission statement or policy document as an espoused objective of professional training (Bright, 1996:163).

He argued that this ‘suggests a superficial and token acceptance of “reflective practice”, rather than a genuine and committed awareness of what it involves and a serious attempt to implement its principles fully’ (*ibid*.). In the same year, Ecclestone (1996) similarly questioned whether reflective practice had become a mere ‘mantra’ in professional training and development programmes. As she points out, Eraut (1995) had already developed an extended critique of Schön’s work and Furlong (1995) had...
argued that it legitimised the removal of theory from teacher education and its replacement with personal reflection. Ecclestone (1996:154) was particularly concerned about the inculcation by reflective practice of ‘unintended apolitical introversion’, endorsing Clark’s view that:

*by urging teachers to focus mainly on their inner lives, we draw their attention away from the larger, collective, external forces and entities that may be manipulating and controlling them and the entire system of education …* (Clark, 1986, my emphasis).

Brookfield (1995:216), too, was concerned about the lack of ‘a certain critical “edge”’ in reflective practice, noting:

The terms *reflection* and *reflective practice* are now so overused that they are in danger of becoming buzzwords denuded of any real meaning – of taking on the status of premature ultimates, like *motherhood* and *democracy*. A premature ultimate is a concept that, once it is invoked, stops any critical debate dead in its tracks (*ibid.*, original emphases).

Arguing the case for *critical* reflective practice in teaching and teacher education, Brookfield (1995:217-218) claimed that ‘Reflection in and of itself is not enough; it must always be linked to how the world can be changed’. He cited Gitlin and Smyth’s (1989:6) observation:

> Because most teachers do not have the opportunity to reflect critically on practice with others, the inadequacy [of] those practices often remains hidden, and analysis remains fixated at the level of attending to technical problems. Moral, ethical and political issues that may be the cause for alarm often remain invisible or impenetrable to the teacher (my emphasis).

There are two particular notions highlighted in the texts I have just cited that I shall take up again later in the context of spirituality: first, that focus upon ‘inner lives’ may be problematic; second, that reflection ‘with others’ is significant.

*Guidelines*

As will be evident, most of the texts cited above post-date the development of the reflective practitioner module. Back in 1994, those of us working on it were in fairly blissful ignorance of the thundering of the bandwagon we had inadvertently stepped on, and of the gathering critique that was about to be aimed at it. Having begun our discussions in May, our greatest concern was simply to get the module up and running by September – which included being clear about how it was to be assessed.

For my nursing colleagues, reflective practice was already a required element of their clinical work. They stressed the importance of having a common framework and clear guidelines for reflection on ‘critical incidents’. However, wanting to get away from the idea that a crisis was a necessary preliminary to reflection, we agreed on a four-stage process, adapted from Flanagan (1954) and Benner (1984), to enable students to select, record and reflect on what we called ‘practitioner incidents’. Students would be required to submit ‘rough’ written accounts of three of these for formative comment.
before preparing a final ‘polished’ piece for assessment, together with an overview of learning points extracted from reflection on all three incidents.

The guidelines devised to frame this writing remained largely unchanged throughout the subsequent life of the module: in a slightly amended form, they currently appear in a popular textbook (Wilson, 2005: see Appendix 1). The step-by-step structure represents a fairly standard approach to reflection in professional learning settings where the desired outcome is usually some form of change that will enhance practice. However, I now recognise that, because of my own orientation to reflective practice (to which I shall return in the next section) these guidelines are heavily biased towards understanding personal meaning-making rather than organisational or political structures.

The original version contained an additional step. I regard it as vital in the context of a Masters degree programme and it was part of my rationale for developing the reflective practice module: ‘illuminating the incident through appropriate academic literature’. However, the MEd tutors debated at length the appropriateness of this step. For one colleague, who was also a practising counsellor, the implication that the meaning/interpretation of a personal experience would be more ‘valid’ if it could be ‘illuminated’ by concepts embodied in academic literature sat very uncomfortably with a firmly-held belief that people should be encouraged to value their own experiences, and interpretations of them, and not made to feel that these are better or worse by virtue of their similarity to those of someone else. For another, whose background is in the natural sciences, the notion of ‘validating’ the interpretation of a personal experience against those of other people was crucial to his world-view and self-concept. The debate was never fully resolved but it made us very sensitive to the differences in our own backgrounds and world-views and to the impact these were likely to have on our interactions with students (Hunt, 2001a:279).

It was nearly a year later before I encountered Brookfield’s (1995:29) model of four different ‘lenses’ through which to view practice: ‘(1) our autobiographies as teachers and learners, (2) our students’ eyes, (3) our colleagues’ experiences, and (4) theoretical literature’. It helped to ‘illuminate’ the debate we had had about this very concept. In a subsequent review of Brookfield’s book, I wrote:

Is it in the nature of reflective practice that one goes through what seems to be an enormous struggle in uncharted territory in order to identify and name assumptions and patterns that shape one’s work – only to find that someone else has already been there, done that and prepared a map? … To come across Brookfield’s beautifully signposted map of this whole territory after we had crossed it was somewhat galling! It was, nevertheless, wonderfully affirming that, albeit by a different route, we had reached the same viewpoint: ‘Theory can help us “name” our practice by illuminating the general elements of what we think are idiosyncratic experiences’ (p.36) (Hunt, 1996:300-301).

As I have indicated, I first got involved in reflective practice for pragmatic reasons and encountered literature about it sometime later. Accessing theory – whether relating to reflective practice or anything else - in order to shed new light on, and to help me to ‘name’, what I know has now become a significant feature of my own learning. However, in terms of what it means to be a ‘reflective practitioner’, it is the...
practical rather than theoretical aspects of the question that have continued to hold the
greater significance and interest for me. I sensed in the early discussions of the MEd
tutors that the personal ‘struggle in uncharted territory’ often involved in getting to
grips with one’s own thoughts and feelings, whether about professional practice or life
in general, represents a different kind of engagement with knowledge from that
involved in much intellectual debate.

As Bernstein (1977:7) put it, ‘It is very rare to have an intellectual dialogue which is
not at some point transformed into symbolic cannibalism; my formulation can eat up
yours’. That is, in a sense, the academic game. By contrast, the ‘embodied’
knowledge generated through personal struggle can result in what Willis (2004:324)
calls ‘unitary transformation’ whereby ‘a person works to define and enrich her or his
authentic “inner self”’. In this situation, the boundaries between what might be
defined as ‘reflective practice’, ‘professional learning’ and ‘lifelong learning’ become
fuzzy.

Ultimately, of course, whether we know something because of a process of reflection
or because we discussed or worked with an issue in a professional or a personal
context does not really affect the knowledge itself. Nevertheless, the context in which
we give voice to that knowledge and, especially, how the context influences what it is
possible to say and do, is highly significant.

I want to suggest that, while guidelines for reflection – through writing or other means
– may help professionals to focus upon aspects of their everyday practice and
whether/what changes might be desirable, there seems to be a growing need not for
more such frameworks but for ‘unfettered spaces’ – spaces in which professionals feel
it is safe to explore, with others, their ‘inner self’ as well as their professional role.
Evidence from a recent series of seminars indicates that such spaces are not only
valued but may be associated with spirituality.

I am aware that, for many people, ‘spirituality’ is an uncomfortable concept but, in the
next section, I hope both to locate and ‘legitimise’ its place within reflective practice
and to illustrate how and why spirituality has featured in my own learning journey.
After that I will return to the seminar series and the notion of unfettered spaces.

**Orientations**

*Theory*

Building on the work of Habermas (1974) Van Manen (1977) and Grimmett *et al.*
(1990), as well as their own extensive analysis of literature on reflective practice and
‘hundreds of journal entries written by practising teachers’, Wellington and Austin
(1996:307) propose that, within the field of education, there are five different
orientations to reflective practice: immediate, technical, deliberative, dialectic and
transpersonal. These can be represented as endpoints on a three-stage decision
pathway on which the key questions are: (1) ‘Does the practitioner engage in
reflective practice or not?’; (2) ‘Does the practitioner believe that education ought to
be domesticating or liberating?’; and (3) ‘Is the practitioner systems-oriented or
people-oriented?’.
The first question determines whether the practitioner is conscious of using reflection in their practice. If they are not, the pathway leads directly to the ‘immediate’ orientation which ‘places emphasis on pleasant survival’ (op.cit.:309). For those who do engage in reflective practice, the second question determines how they conceive of education and the relationship between individuals and society. Practitioners holding a ‘domesticating’ view believe it is appropriate for a dominant culture to replicate itself through education: depending on their answer to the third question, the endpoint of the pathway will suggest they have a ‘technical’ or ‘deliberative’ orientation. Practitioners holding a ‘liberating’ view regard education as a tool for personal and/or social transformation: answers to question three will suggest either a ‘dialectic’ or ‘transpersonal’ orientation. The purpose of question three is to determine whether the practitioner’s values and interests are associated more with organisational structures or with personal meaning-making.

Wellington and Austin (1996:314) argue that these orientations do not represent a ‘simple classification scheme designed to pigeonhole people and practices’, nor are they hierarchical. Rather, they are intended to facilitate understanding of different points of view, thereby enabling practitioners to identify their own predominant mode of reflection/practice; to respect the modes in which others prefer to work; and to review personal values and beliefs and professional practices in the light of others’. Figure 1 draws on Wellington and Austin’s text to represent key elements of each orientation in diagrammatic form.

**Practice**

I first came across Wellington and Austin’s work when I was in the final stages of writing a PhD thesis that had been many years in gestation. Its roots lay in a large action research project in community education that I had facilitated but it had strayed into an exploration of ‘community’. This is one of relatively few English words that does not seem to have an opposing term: I felt this might be because, deep within the human psyche, it is associated with a sense of ‘one-ness’. From there I tentatively began to engage with the notion of spirituality - but met with enormous resistance from my then supervisor (Hunt, 2001b). His implicit message seemed to be that ‘spirituality’, especially a personal exploration of it, was not an appropriate topic for study within an academic thesis on adult education.

For some considerable time, I accepted the message and virtually abandoned both exploration and thesis. Finding Wellington and Austin’s account of what it means to have a ‘transpersonal orientation’ was part of a sequence of events which encouraged me to re-engage with the thesis. They note that practitioners with this orientation:

Tend to be inner-directed and to focus on self-development and on the relationship of internal to external. They question educational ends, content and means from a personal, inner perspective. Their pedagogy is typically individualised and holistic. …

Artefacts [reflective journals, stories of experience etc] reflecting the transpersonal orientation are introspective and often highly personal. They contemplate questions such as: ‘how can I integrate my personal/spiritual growth with my vocation?’ … In this perspective, knowledge is subjective and internal. The validity of research findings relies on resonance with experience (Wellington and Austin, 1996:311).
<table>
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<tr>
<th>View of education</th>
<th>Domesticating</th>
<th>Domesticating</th>
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<td>Systems/people orientation</td>
<td>Systems</td>
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<td>Orientation to reflective practice</td>
<td>Technical</td>
<td>Deliberative</td>
<td>Dialectic</td>
<td>Transpersonal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manifestation in educational practice</td>
<td>‘build educational structures and employ instructional methodologies designed to efficiently and effectively achieve predetermined ends.’</td>
<td>‘create environments and employ methodologies that help individuals find meaning and success within existing educational establishments.’</td>
<td>‘build coalitions which promote political empowerment and social equity.’</td>
<td>‘promote the personal and holistic development of individuals in a context that extends beyond the existing educational establishment.’</td>
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| Characteristics | Likely to ‘accept institutionally determined educational content and ends.’  
Asks questions like: ‘How can I achieve my goals for students most efficiently? What are the most efficient and effective teaching techniques I can use to transmit information to my students?’ | Likely to ‘accept given educational ends but may negotiate with authorities for changes in academic content.’  
Asks questions like: How can I make learning meaningful and relevant to my students? What meanings are embedded in student behaviours? How can deeper communication with students enhance meaningful learning?’ | Likely to ‘question educational ends, content and means … to be outer-directed and to focus on political and social issues.’  
Asks questions like: ‘In what ways do institutions replicate the status quo? How can we redesign institutions on more democratic principles? How can I help students to liberate themselves from cultural oppression?’ | Likely to ‘question educational ends, content and means from a personal, inner perspective.’  
Asks questions like: ‘How can I integrate my personal/spiritual growth with my vocation? What is my personal responsibility to myself and others?’ |
| Key words / Focus (applicable to other professions) | Efficiency/effectiveness of the work context | Self-development of the individual within the work context | Empowerment of the individual leading to change in the work context | Integration of subjective/objective beyond the work context |

**Figure 1: Orientations to reflective practice** (based on the text of Wellington and Austin, 1996)

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I read the account with great glee! Not only did it give a name to the way in which I had worked on the thesis but I felt it ‘legitimised’ my interests. In Brookfield’s (1995:36) terms, it illuminated for me ‘the general elements of what we think are idiosyncratic experiences’ and signified that, despite the view of one academic gatekeeper, other people shared and were likely to be accepting of my approach and topic.

Additionally, I found the notion of different orientations enormously helpful in understanding where students were ‘coming from’ in their selection of, and reflections on, their ‘practitioner incidents’. It also helped me to make sense of differences of approach within the MEd tutor group and within the wider body of literature on reflective practice. Although Wellington and Austin’s model is rooted in teacher education and social science research, I sense from working on reflective practice with doctors, nurses and other health and social care professionals that it also has resonances within these professions. In the bottom line of Figure 1, I have incorporated the key words/focus that seem to be applicable in a range of work contexts.

Interestingly, however, while Efficiency, Self-development and Empowerment are familiar and usually legitimate aims within many work contexts, the notion of Integration, whereby the links between an individual’s ‘inner life’, including their spirituality, and the enactment of her/his working life are made explicit, is much less common. Indeed, simply within the literature on reflective practice cited in the previous section, there is a strong implication that focus on an inner life might occur at the expense of more ‘important’ activities in the world rather than alongside them. I think this is why holding and, perhaps more significantly, giving voice in professional contexts to, a transpersonal orientation often feels like taking a defensive position. Nevertheless, the time may now be right to redress the balance so that the notion of ‘integration’ becomes a more familiar and acceptable element of reflective practice/professional development. Indeed, it is arguable that already:

[A] Grassroots Spirituality Movement is attempting to integrate consciousness, soul and spirit into our societal dialogues. Slowly it is weaving these into our understandings of the nature and purpose of life and reality, into our workday and family lives, into our global politics, and into our future (Forman, 2004:4).

Time for integration?

Seminar series
If the so-called ‘Grassroots Spirituality Movement’ is no more than another bandwagon, then at least this time I am aware of climbing onto it. In 2003, I received funding from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) to convene a seminar series entitled Reseaching spirituality as a dimension of lifelong learning. The following is an abbreviated version of the introductory paragraph of the proposal (in the interests of space references have been removed unless they are to direct quotations)²:

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Spirituality is a highly contested concept but we start from the view that: ‘Human beings are essentially spiritual creatures because we are driven by a need to ask “fundamental” or “ultimate” questions … to find meaning and value in what we do and experience’ (Zohar and Marshall, 2000: 4). We also associate spirituality with the capacity to be fully alive and connected to every aspect of existence, including inter-personal relationships, psychological processes and the global environment. Some people seek guidance and resolution in such matters using religious teachings and traditions (Fowler, 1981); others within a humanistic framework that is often shaped by principles of social justice (e.g. Van Ness [1996] refers to ‘secular’, and Berry [1988] to ‘public’ [action-oriented] spirituality). Some may reject the language of spirituality altogether but espouse what might nevertheless be called ‘spiritual values’ in their lives and work through their commitment to others (e.g. English, 2000: 30, refers to ‘Care, concern and outreach to others [as] integral aspects of authentic spirituality’).

The series spanned two years and incorporated six open meetings in which, overall, there were more than 200 participants; and five closed meetings of the core group of seven members in which we took a co-operative inquiry approach to the exploration of our own understandings of spirituality and issues arising from the seminars. Throughout the series, we sought to ground discussion in participants’ own experiences and not to get immersed in a purely intellectual debate about definitions of spirituality (Hunt and West, 2006).

I have selected the following comments because they are not only fairly typical of the discussions and subsequent feedback but touch on a key issue raised by the seminars: the relationship between academic/professional knowledge and something ‘deeper’.

I often interact with robots and, frequently, I am a robot myself. And until now, I hadn’t even noticed. For most of today, though, I was real. It felt good, and I liked myself. I felt as if I was floating. Most days I feel as if I am walking uphill, but today I was floating. I was simply being and simply seeing, rather than trying, doing, thinking and judging (Feedback: PhD student, February 2005).

I left feeling very excited that I’d found a way to unite all parts of myself and my work. I discovered that the connection was ‘me’! I also left feeling inspired to draw explicitly upon my spirituality in my teaching and my research, rather than to hide it as something not ‘valid’ in academic/professional space. Hearing from other people who are doing similar has definitely increased my knowledge and confidence (Feedback: University teaching fellow, February 2005).

Suddenly all the bits of my life are together in one meeting (Comment in plenary session, February 2006).

We need more spaces like this where people can be open and honest, touch deeper levels (Comment in plenary session, April, 2005).

How do we re-establish contact with deeper levels of what it means to be a professional – express a ‘calling’ and connection with what it means to be human? (Feedback: College lecturer, July 2004).
Such comments give a clear sense of the fragmentation that many people feel in their lives, and of a yearning to bring ‘all the bits’ together and/or to access some deeper meaning: in other words, to seek integration. Because of the topic of the seminars it is likely that many participants already had an ‘orientation’ towards doing this. However, as several pointed out, acknowledgement of ‘deep’ issues in most professional contexts is not usually present or encouraged, though they felt it would be welcome. Participants used words like ‘nourishing’, ‘inspiring’ and ‘energising’ to describe the seminars, often remarking upon how different the meetings had been from those at work. For example:

*I left feeling amazed and inspired by the way people treated one another - the respect and valuing of one another which is a contrast to daily organisational life. I welcomed the opportunity to be in that environment* (Feedback: University lecturer, June 2005)

*It has been very energising – most research and professional development is not about that deeper sense-making process* (Comment in plenary session, November, 2005).

The question arises, therefore, of where and how such nourishment/inspiration/energy and a sense of integration might be found within professional environments. I think this takes us beyond the boundaries of conventional frameworks for reflective practice and professional learning - and I leave open the question of whether or not this may be desirable, though I shall make my own position clear in conclusion.

**Reflections and future research**

In the final core group meeting of the seminar series, we explored what we felt had been particular about the nature of the *Researching spirituality* seminars. We acknowledged that the content had been rich, raising numerous issues about political and personal understandings of spirituality. However, the *process* had been even more significant. We had consciously tried to make the process of each seminar congruent with our own understanding of spirituality as something to do with ‘interconnectedness/community’, ‘a search for meaning’ and ‘situated experience’; and, in our facilitation of discussions, we had deliberately drawn on knowledge within the core group of transpersonal psychology, auto/biographical research and the processes of storytelling.

We saw the seminars as ‘unfettered spaces’ in which participants had been free to review and, if they wished, share their own embodied knowledge; and, with others, to co-create new meanings. The only boundaries had been those of mutual respect, which included attentive listening. In essence, the seminars seemed not just to have been about ‘researching spirituality’ but ‘researching spiritually’.

In terms of academic theory, Heron’s (1996) concepts of co-operative inquiry and ‘levels of knowing’ had been especially important in shaping this process. The former because ‘It sees inquiry as an intersubjective space, a common culture, in which the use of language is grounded in a deep context of non-linguistic meanings, the lifeworld of shared experience …’ (Heron, 1996:11); the latter because it actually gave us a language with which to refer to ‘non-linguistic’ understandings. It enabled us to admit into discussion, and to explore, what Heron calls ‘experiential’ and
‘presentational’ knowledge – knowledge embedded (or embodied) in sensory perception and in imagery.

The concept of mythopoesis (Macdonald, 1981) was also significant. It refers to a process of sense-making by which individuals come to know their world and their relationship with it through myths and images. As Bradbeer (1998: 47-48) argues in the context of teacher education, we feel it is time for the professional to be regarded:

as a consciousness rather than an informed intellect – … as a person consciously and deeply within the myths and narratives of his or her own world both as a person and a worker … [who] attends to, or listens to, the intangible fabric of his or her own experience of life.

Evidence from the seminars suggests that professionals have a real need for spaces in which they feel free to share and reflect with others not only on the how and why of practice situations – but on the myths, narratives, life experiences and ultimate questions that are integral to the ‘intangible fabric’ of being human as well as a professional. We are currently in the early stages of preparing a proposal for research funding to enable us to explore, within a range of professional environments, whether/what kinds of spaces already exist, or might be created/developed for this purpose.

**Conclusion**

In keeping with my understanding of what it means to be a reflective practitioner, I have drawn heavily throughout this paper on aspects of my own learning journey. I have highlighted events and readings that led me from the relatively calm waters of curriculum development in Masters degree programmes, onto the ‘bandwagon’ of reflective practice, through personal struggles with meaning-making, and into the realm of spirituality. Because this journey is now part of my embodied experience it is almost impossible for me to see its elements as separate so, in my eyes, questions about reflective practice lead seamlessly into those about spirituality – and, especially, about what it means to research/work spiritually.

In the current outcomes-driven rationality of much professional education where written action plans, audit trails and ticked boxes are common requirements, I am aware that to speak of spirit and/or to advocate an appreciation of mythopoesis and intersubjective inquiry as an element of reflective practice may well seem a step too far. Perhaps, though, as the opening quotations to this paper suggest, it is not really necessary to ‘go’ anywhere - but just to look at the landscape of reflective practice with new eyes. I hope this paper at least offers new lenses!

**Acknowledgements**

My thanks to all the colleagues and students who worked with me on the *Becoming a Reflective Practitioner* module, and to all the participants in the ESRC seminar series *Researching spirituality as a dimension of lifelong learning* (RES-451-26-0008): they helped me to explore the landscape of reflective practice and to see it differently.
References


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Guidelines for writing about a practice incident

Practice incident
Write down why you have chosen a particular incident. For example:
‘I have chosen this incident because it was …
• a particularly positive experience;
• an occasion when my intervention seemed to make a real difference to someone's learning;
• a negative experience where things seemed to go badly wrong;
• an experience I found hard to handle;
• something apparently trivial but it made me think, “What's going on here?”

Process
1 Describe what happened. Be objective. Ask questions like What did I learn? How did I learn it? In what ways was the experience similar to/different from others I have had?
2 Make judgements. Capture what was good/bad about the experience. What were its best/worst features? What went well/badly? Ask: How did I contribute to all of that?
3 Analyse. Focus on questions like: How did that happen? How can I make sense of that? How can that be explained?

Personalise
Instead of settling for a general statement like 'It was good/bad', use personal statements like:
• What I understood/enjoyed was …
• What I felt uncertain/uncomfortable/irritable about was ...
• What I did well/not so well was ...
• What I could have done differently was ...

Probe
Instead of settling for a personal statement like 'What I felt annoyed about was the way X dominated the discussion', use probing questions like:
• Why did it annoy me so much?
• Why didn't I do anything about it?

Make a note of other similar situations; identify any recurring themes e.g. particular people, situations, questions that regularly elicit the same emotional/behavioural response. Ask:
• Why?
• What can I do?
• Do I want to?
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<th>Plan</th>
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<tr>
<td>From the above, begin to identify favoured learning methods, 'hang ups', responses etc. and make plans for the future, particularly about what changes might be needed. Focus on one thing at a time, e.g.:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Personal values</td>
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<td>- Working relationships</td>
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<td>- Gaining a better understanding of ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Your role within the organisation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


1 Davies (2004:4) notes that feminist poststructuralist theory now ‘enables a different sense of what is knowable, and what can be done with that knowledge’; writing in this context can ‘reveal a certain clarity that comes with specificity, with the insistence on an embodied (rather than abstract) knowledge of that which is written about, and with the refusal to run away from ambivalence and ambiguity’.

2 The full text is available at: http://www.education.ex.ac.uk/research/documents/ESRCSeminarSeries_info.doc [April 2006]