Leaders as Seers and Witnesses:

A Changing Way of Researching Leading

Sandra Sytsma

School of Education and Professional Studies

Gold Coast Campus

School of Education and Professional Studies

Gold Coast Campus

Griffith University, QLD 4222

Email: sandra.sytsma@griffith.edu.au

Phone: +61 7 55529783

Abstract

This article presents a case that in developing leaders, researching the topic of their leading through exploring the inner dimensions of the selves, or their *being* as leaders, can support both the changing of their meanings and their adoption of more authentic leading practices in the becoming of the outer world. This view is supported by the findings of a study in which participants cooperatively explored their changing meanings and actions as leaders over almost a year. Such inside-out or reflexive research can be developmental and reformist.

Key Words

Changing, researching, leading

Introduction

This article proposes an alternative way of researching the topic of leading that could be reformative in leaders' personal and professional development. This way situates leaders within a research journey in which they and their practice are both subject and object, both seer and witness (Wilber, 1997). Rather than being detached consumers of research into leading, leaders are here conceptualised as intimate and inspired composers actively embodied in personal and shared research processes that illuminate and give rise to insight about their nature as leaders and the nature of their leading. This is in keeping with the definition of leaders as those who go ahead and light the way. In reflection of the in the moment quality of this approach to research, the gerund, *leading*, is used here in place of terms such as leadership to signal the process and the personal in the being and becoming of leaders.

In contrast to the traditional external and structural emphases on leading that demand its weight and measure, the way described here demonstrates how the internal journeys taken within leaders, facilitated through participative research, can promote and record processes of change that influence increasingly actualised authentic practices in leaders. It is a way put forward in response to the increasing numbers of leaders falling by the wayside as they seek to measure up to systemic mandates and standards. In the relentless drive for quantitatively demonstrated efficiency and effectiveness, leaders are burning out as victims of change. In here supporting leaders in researching their own leading, this way encourages and empowers leaders in initiating inside-out change and becoming active stakeholders and drivers in change processes. This more holistic approach to change is seen as having both personal and systemic benefit in improving change resilience and sustainable practice. As Fullan (1991) notes, structural change alone often leaves the presenting core of problems unchanged. Zohar (1997, p.2) agrees that restructurings in organisations on their own are often merely surface solutions without fundamental shifts. As Caine and Caine (1997, p.3) lamented, despite many reforms and changes, "much stays the same". These comments suggest that while organisational structures may change, the people who comprise those organisations may

not. Thus, for those who would light the way, the challenge of changing through researching leading requires exploring its nature and practice beyond the organisational surface to the inner core or "I" where meanings can change and little may then stay the same.

The Search of Changing Meaning

This challenge of change was taken up in a recent study (Sytsma, 2007) in which it was proposed that to lead a life of changing meaning is to live a transformative life. It posited that for leaders who are changing meaning, nothing internal or external to themselves can remain untouched. In the ongoing search for more powerful and inspirited meaning, all aspects of life are becoming different while, at the same time, becoming more harmonious and integrated. This study involved a group of five leaders in education, including myself, participating in researching the changing meanings of our leading. This happened through a closed emailing list operating over a period of almost a year. In this article, I report my personal explorations into changing and a new way of researching leading, both prior to the study through the literature and during the study in the process of engaging with my colleagues. These guided my facilitation of the group journey iteratively such that we searched and searched again in clarifying and developing our changing meanings about leading. To give my partners voice here as co-researchers, I feature some of our meaning making about researching leading in the three "Leaders Speak" stories that are included in this article. The voices of the participant leaders, speaking in first person, illustrate the case for a changing way of researching leading that this article makes.

Exploring a Changing Way of Researching Leading

The etymology of the word *search* (*Collins English Dictionary: Complete and unabridged*, 2003) reveals that searching (another gerund and another process) involves an iterative

"going round", after the Old French *cerchier* and Late Latin *circāre* (to go around), and the Latin *circus* (a circle). To me (an "I" included and present here as co-leader and co-participant in the study), leading has the quality of re-searching because it involves taking the forward and spiralling path of searching and searching again through time to inspire, deepen, broaden and change meaning, and thus practice. Yet I am constantly reminded of the paradoxical nature of Wilber's (1997, p.282) Buddhist caveat that "seeking of any sort, movement of any sort, attainment of any sort: [is] all profoundly useless." The implication is that what is being searched for already lies within and the proper role of re-search is to re-cover and re-member the leader's essential unity in diversity. In how I am coming to understand it, the searching again of changing in leading is not about rearranging structures or merely "fiddling with external indicators", as Duignan (1997, p.16) put it in referring to how he saw organisational change occurring, but also about going deeper and reassessing internal meanings. To lead and to research leading, then, is not to travel abroad or without, but to turn the journey within and to discover that spiritual inner-outer unity in which leaders and led are already always moving. As this article demonstrates, it has been my inside meanings about change that needed to change so that my outside world could follow.

In reflecting on a changing way of researching leading, that is, research that is changing in itself and research that creates change in leaders, I am challenged by Quinn's (1996) sober warnings about change:

> Change is everywhere, and we are surrounded by circumstances that seem to demand more than we can deliver. We are all regularly lured into playing the role of powerless victim or the passive observer. In such roles, we become detached, and our sense of meaning decays. We look at everything in a superficial way. We see little potential and have little reverence. To choose to play either of these roles is to choose meaninglessness or the slow death of the self. (p.xiii)

As a researcher in leading, I choose not to accept without question any system of research practice that dictates how research may be conducted and reported, and how change in research may be ordered and controlled. I do not want to be a victim or mere observer of change. However, conventions deserve respect in that they honour those who have gone before and I have been humbled by the need in research for discipline and intellectual rigor borne of mind and heart. As Doecke and Seddon (2002, p.97) confirm, "any knowledge worth having is the result of complex mediations [and is] the product of sustained intellectual work." I perceive research into leading as a contested space in which I have declined the straight-jacketing of the academy's usual cultural apprenticeship in favour of stretching my wings in changing ways. Integrity has become a balancing act as it should be: a leader should live in change, on the edge of possibility.

Finding any space at all for alternatives in researching leading was only the first step in the study. Justifying a new space in terms of the old, indeed even in its own terms, was a challenge: I find myself a "tweener" (Luke, 2002) in a new sense - an inhabitant of no man's land, or so it feels when I try to see beyond while standing in the present. Thus, I choose also to be more than an observer in change and research, but as a leader to participate as a full person in the making of research and its meaning in change agency; to live fully in the space it creates. To be a vehicle of change, the active process of researching leading demands that I am involved; that I feel as well as think; that I am an inspired part of, not apart from, the process. I concur with Berg (1989, p.206) that "the kinds of social research that rally passion are likely to offer paths for social change. Innocuous, unimpassioned research is less likely to inspire or motivate people or changes in structures." Paradigms change most readily, as in Kuhn's (1970) view, when motivated people seek creative solutions to problems. I have great hope in the potential of researching leading for changing inner meaning and outer practice, and great reverence for the research journey, a spiritual quest into self and others. For my own integrity, I must live and be present in my research: my personal "structure of feeling" (Lingard,

2001) demands it. As a leader, I need to be a "seer" as well as a "witness" (Wilber, 1997) in researching who I am and what I do.

Introducing the Leaders of the Way

My chief guide on this new path of researching leading has been Peter Reason, a scholar with whose understandings of the changing way of researching I have found resonance. As far back as the 1980s, he was interested in research on the edge such that inquiry "may develop a life of its own which can take us by surprise" or could be "a continual invention of response to the possibilities offered by the situation" (Reason, 1988, p.227, 231). For him, inquiry involves the participation of whole people and could "be seen as living processes of coming to know rather than as formal academic method" (p.325). Research, for Reason, is thus a way of life, and a special way of life that moves deeply in the inner dimension. The purpose of human inquiry is less a search for any ultimate truth than as an opportunity to heal, and "above all, to heal the alienation, the split that characterises modern experience" (Reason, 1994b, p.9). Reflexive research brings the outer and inner dimensions together such that we recognise our participation in world-making. This is important to me as leader who would be change-maker more than change-taker. I appreciate that inquiry can be an inspired process of making whole and thus holy, such that "meaning and mystery are restored to human experience" (Reason, 1994b, p. 10). Participative inquiry, in recreating and transforming meaning, has the potential to create a different life and a different world:

> I see this approach to living based on experience and engagement, on love
> and respect for the integrity of persons, and on a willingness to rise above
> presupposition, to look and to look again, to risk security in the search for
> understanding and action that opens possibilities of creative living. I have felt
> at times that such a genuine human inquiry is one of the greatest virtues of
> humanity, and might be the greatest gift that Western consciousness has

given the world. … [that] personal engagement, passion and profound risk-

taking are central to inquiry, and that science and life are not separate. (p. 9)

Reason's personal engagement, passion and risk-taking as a researcher have led to a practice of greater participation and embodiment in inquiry. For example, his meetings with co-researchers begin with t'ai chi for grounding, thus bodily acknowledging their participation in a greater unity. He uses t'ai chi as a moving meditation and its practice harmonises personal energy with the greater universal energy. In the process, a greater connection with the whole which is called grounding is experienced.

Reason (1994b, p.1) believes "the Western world-view is changing towards a realisation that our existence is based on participation and communion rather than separation and competition", and as such, that we need to learn the practice of participation. Bolman and Deal (1995), whose research into leading has led them into similarly soulful journeys, believe that we need to move past the "deep sense of moral loneliness and moral illiteracy' we have created through 'the isolation of individuals" (p.3). In my view, researching leading is an activity of developing humanity through participation which, as Schratz and Walker (1995) propose, should heal the isolation through each and together touching the invisible parts of ourselves where change takes place. Heron (1996), a colleague of Reason, adds that "the basic explanatory model for creative, original research is that of self-direction [as] self-directing persons develop most fully through fully reciprocal relations with other self-directing persons" (p.31). I support this as, in the way I experience it, researching is a form of self-leading in changing meaning. It is in this environment, and in the moral strength of researchers like these I have cited, that I couch my changing way of researching as a way of leading that changes meaning. I will now unfold this changing way of researching leading in detail to demonstrate how it may be characterised. As indicated earlier, the voices of the participant-leaders in the study are brought to the fore (in stories headed "Leaders Speak") such that they may

personally share their experiences (through direct quotations) in the changing way of researching leading.

The Participative, Socially Constructed Way of Researching

Reason (1994b) admits that those who are committed to human inquiry, as it is proposed here, live in a "gap between vision and actuality, always on the edge of what is truly possible" (p.3). My experiences in leading show me that the gap between the reality we dream of and what exists has the character of the Chinese ideogram for danger and opportunity. If looked at in a certain way, this gap is a terrifying abyss but from another perception, it is an opportunity for transforming reality - for bringing the present into a preferred future. However, as made apparent in the emergent self-other nature of the leaders participating in the study, we need others to make the most of the gap; to make the jump to greater wellness and to recreation in wholeness. No matter who we are as inquirers in life, we need others as our mirrors to know ourselves better. As Thompson (1984) points out, on one's own, "one will only see what one is ready to see, one will only learn what is on the edge of the consciousness of what one already knows". To be truly on the edge of possibility, a changing way of researching leading needs participation and, as "no man is an island" (Donne, 1623), must involve more than one explorer.

Participation in inquiry requires the kind of involvement in researching that creates the "future participation" described by Reason (1994b). In his perception, future participation will mean an experience of self as socially constructed with and through others, "an ecological self distinct yet not separate, a self rooted in environment and in community" (p.37). Through future participation taking "many forms in the process of emerging from the tension between original and unconscious participation … there will be a unity within this diversity" (Reason, 1994b, p.33). Thus, in researching leading to minimise the gap between vision and actuality, the dialectic movement of differentiation and unfolding, and of collapsing and enfolding, amongst self-others can create the future participation that

Reason dreams of. In the way of yin and yang, this movement of changing and of creating many different ways of knowing, will bring epistemological robustness to research and to leading. Many seers and witnesses bring many lenses and thus greater clarity and richness in how we know and practice leading.

The methodologies of participative human inquiry can therefore be seen "as disciplines which can train the individual and develop the community towards a consciousness of future participation" (Reason, 1994b, p.41). Research as leading and reaching forward is embodied in the constantly reconciling vision-actuality continuum. It is the meeting point of being and becoming; of contemplation and action. As leaders participate in a life of changing meaning, their actively inquiring research is in being able to be within (seers) and also to be without (witnesses), on both individual and social levels. As transforming human beings, they operate at a meta-level of leading-changing-meaning. As Reason (1994b, p.50) notes, "this kind of research is a challenge to personal development and may only be possible with those of integrated personalities". This may superficially seem a proverbial chicken and egg statement, but at a deeper level can be taken as saying that the researcher's leading and meaning are constantly changing and moving into each other. Leading-changing-meaning is less a causal process of contingency between leader and context than an emergent constituency of interpenetrating being and doing. By participating fully, the gap between vision and actuality loses its distinction and becomes a leading edge flow that is, at the one time, both potential and real.

The Open, Generative Way of Researching

Living the leading edge in researching changing meanings is what Csikszentmihalyi (1992) describes as optimal experience. To be experiencing the flow of simultaneous action and contemplation, to use Palmer's (1990) words, is to be on the edge of possibility. One might wonder what keeps a leader-as-researcher's consciousness in such a high-energy

but orderly state. No external factor is sufficient to motivate awareness to such a sustained degree. As action researchers Fisher and Torbert (1995) conclude:

> It is difficult to create and sustain a group for which there is no obvious necessity, for which there are no external rewards, in which no one has any unilateral power or authority, and which is dedicated to doing something that each member will find difficult to do (p.97).

In those who nominate themselves leaders, as I believe, the motivation to be continually researching life is intrinsic. It appears to be, on the basis of observations of dedicated leaders, a moral imperative from within, arising from a will to mean and to do work of significance through leading changing meaning and practice. In Collins' (2007, p.5) definition, this is being "a Level 5 leader - an individual who blends extreme personal humility with intense professional will." These leaders are ambitious for "the cause, the organisation, the work" (Collins, 2007, p.7) rather than for themselves and have the will to achieve that ambition. Researching is thus generative and alive, developing meaning through leading. Rowan (1981a), another colleague of Reason, suggests that "research can come from growth motivation. It can be based on anxiety-free interest, and oriented towards personal fulfilment and fullest humanness" (p.85). Researching in this way leads the participative self and others into new realities: research generates change. As Clandinin and Connelly (1994, p.418) describe it, "when we come together in research projects, all of us begin to live and tell a new story of our collaborative work together". For qualitative researchers Alvermann, O'Brien and Dillon (1996, p.117), "in writing about our own and others' experiences, we create (rather than simply mirror) those experiences." From memory-worker Haug's (1987, pp.34-35) view, "we search … for possible indications of how we have participated actively in the formation of our own past experience." Researching, for these leading people, is about together making meaning and generating reality through the activity and reflection of inquiry. It is through such

openness and differentiation that change has a chance. In this, I refer to Myers' (1995) position that supports researching as a process of leading-changing-meaning:

> I hold a different value for meaning, seeking multiple significations for a phenomenon, believing that difference, rather than consensus, has a better chance to support a critical, democratic form of … research … I want my text to be generative and full of potential meanings, rather than tightly-defined by points of reference that must be held by all as absolute truths in order to get the correct meanings (pp.584, 586).

In his interpretative research, Myers seeks meanings that unfold more meanings. Seeking differential and distinctive meanings, as leaders do, opens the way to changing from truths that are framed and habituated as absolute to mutable truths that are always open to renegotiation.

The Legacy of Bateson

As with Reason's work highlighting the participative and active nature of researching, Bateson's (1988) work in particular stands as a model for open and generative researching where becoming different is also about being one. Through his extensive research in biology, Bateson came to believe that in the distinctiveness but complementarity of mind (inner dimension) and nature (outer dimension) there is a necessary unity (as has been noted above). Bateson went further to intentionally make inside-out research serve changing ways of knowing through inventiveness: he aimed to abductively (as distinct from deductively or inductively) create new patterns of meaning. Quite apart from the view of participants' growth and development, his way of doing research, to be explained below, generates change - as I believe it should for participants in researching leading. I further believe that Bateson would see researching into leading-changing-meaning, as the leaders in the study did, as what he describes as a stochastic

process. In Bateson's (1988, glossary) explanation, "If a sequence of events combines a random component with a selective process so that only certain outcomes of the random are allowed to endure, that sequence is said to be stochastic." In researching leading-changing-meaning, leading (a non-random selective process of intention) focuses meaning (from a random stream of potentials) through change, "never [in] quantities, always shapes, forms and relations" (Bateson, 1988, p.9). The potentials-cum-meanings that are actualised from visions are selected by the searching and searching again of leading. As leaders' intentions change, so also do the emergent shapes, forms and relations of meaning. Researching is thus generative in that it changes the "patterns which connect" (p.9).

According to Singer (1995), who studied Bateson's work exhaustively and sought to use his techniques, Bateson employed techniques of unusual juxtapositions and abductive treatment of data to generate information and establish new patterns of relationship. To Mant (1999), such making of connections by leaders involves intelligence. Leaders-as-researchers put forward individual meanings and in the process of developing shared meaning generate new information and intelligence. Singer (1995) believes like Bateson that "research is an active process. We do not collect data, we interact with it" (p.6). In Bateson's (1988, p.153) own words:

> We are so accustomed to the universe in which we live and to our puny
> methods of thinking about it that we can hardly see that it is, for example,
> surprising that abduction is possible, that it is possible to describe some event
> or thing and then to look around the world for other cases to fit the same
> rules that we devised for our description.

Bateson (1988, p.153) described the possibility of abduction as "a little uncanny", but noted that it is really widespread; for example, in metaphor, dream, art, science, religion and poetry. The difference in his research is that he, as an interactive participant in his

own research, used it consciously as a tool to open and expand possibility, to weave patterns that connect. He was part of the pattern - a participating seer as well as an observing witness. Likewise, as a leader researching leading, I have sought to participate in research to enlarge, not reduce, patterns of meaning with other leaders. I want a research reality that produces an enlarging intelligence of what meanings inclusively could be and might be; not of correct meanings that exclusively were or have been.

Congruent with the changing way researching and leading being described here, Singer (1995, p.7) purports that "all knowing has to do with discrimination and all learning is predicated on detecting and acting upon differences" and further that "the differences we perceive are located in the relationship between things rather than within things" (p.7). In the study, the participant leaders were sharing meaning and this sharing involved exploring the relationships amongst their individual meanings. For Bateson (1988, p.7), in the world of the living, "distinctions are drawn and difference can be a cause". Change, for Bateson, is not a product of cause and effect, but a process of differentiation giving rise to new relational distinctions. It must always involve the inner dimension (mind or self) and the outer dimension (nature or others) because of their necessary unity; because of their distinction and relation. Changing the way we see things - the way mind interactively understands nature; the way of science at its purest - generates new categories of relational sense: information as Bateson calls it; meaning in my nomenclature. In Bateson's (1972, p.489) view, "the unit of information is difference. In fact, the unit of psychological input is difference." To Bateson, the array of possible distinctions (potential meanings) is infinite, as are the ways in which human consciousness can select and constrain (lead) into information, always becoming different and always being one. Meaning is always moving through the "banks" that constrain it.

In the study, the leaders' dialogue moved their meanings through their consciousness by creating distinctions while containing them in their common experience. In this way, they abductively generated new patterns of meaning; for example, of what it meant to be a

leader. In Singer's (1995, p.8) words, "[the] search for meaning generates structure, patterns and categories" and importantly to the view held here, "there is no such thing as true knowledge or a real picture of that world that is independent of any knower." Inner meaning unfolds into the outer world of form and, as the participants in the study recognised and highlighted, the leader's meaning - whether it be Hitler's or Gandhi's - is very much realised within the structures of the world. As Singer also points out, differences do not exist without a consciousness to recognise difference. In Bateson's (1988, p.106) world, "what happens … is meaningless if [one] is not there to be affected by it." In the two leaders cited, war and peace came from within but was enacted without by the people who co-participated in their meanings.

I believe then that "no data are truly 'raw' and every record has been somehow subjected to editing and transformation" Bateson, 1972, p.xviii). It could be said that leaders-cum-researchers, in the act of participating, value-add to the data of their lived experience in perceiving it and operating with it. Thus, for Bateson, information is immaterial - that is, not material or manifest - and lies not in the data itself, but in how researchers know through relating to the data. In a changing way of knowing leading, researchers recognise their participation in the process of their in-form-ing. Through informing or meaning in recursive cycles of distinguishing and relating, researching leaders transform themselves in an ongoing changing. In so leading, their focus, after Bochner (1981), is not on a world of given matter but on an iterative and emergent world of mutable form. In the Batesonian mould, "every picture can tell a multiplicity of stories" and leaders' research stories should "address the multiple layers of mutual influence in any relationship" (Singer, 1995, p.11). In this changing way of researching leading advocated here, I have sought like Bateson (1981) and Singer (1995) to generate "post-conceptions" that explore beyond the given and open the way for generating new meaning and changing. As a leader-researcher in the study, I sought to make larger and more integrative patterns of relationship and to create multi-dimensional stories that support and challenge a changing meaning in leaders' lives.

Leaders Speak 1

In our participation in the study, we were creating rather than telling the shared story of our journey as leaders. In our changing way of researching, we were together generating meanings which had previously been non-existent or below the level of our awareness. In interacting with each other, we created new categories of relational sense variously called meaning, information or intelligence to fulfil our purposes. As Jenny reflected four months into the study:

> I joined this project to try to carve out some reflective space in my deluge of work and family commitments. I wanted to come to a deeper understanding of why I continue working how I do and why I have such enjoy/hate; fight/flight; persevere/I'm out of here dilemmas each day of my working life. I wanted to take a chance to reconnect with and articulate the playful, exhilarated source of my wellspring to explore how that resonates or not with my day to day working life.

> I tend to assume/accept that if I truly share my own work experience, I am a sitting duck. … I really need to talk about all this with educators/others/you … I need to work through some of this with trusted 'others' … I seek to make meaning with others, not alone - a different meaning from my face to face connections. (Jenny 9-8-00)

Rather than changing around the meaning pieces in a tired decor (Zohar, 1997), a need was emerging to make meaning - different meaning - and to do it with others. Our ongoing email dialogue was in essence creating data for us to work with further, inventing changing meanings as we proceeded. Such dialogue reflected Bateson's (1988) juxtaposition and abduction. We would initially lay our meanings along side each other in juxtaposition, but then went on to abduct these into new shared and more inclusive

meanings that moved through the group in true dialogical fashion. The debate about institutionalised, bureaucratic, and enforced leader is an example of this. As Doug (26-7-00) pointed out at one stage, "Sandy's email though certainly challenged my entire belief system on leadership. … I don't mean to sound cynical about leadership but I guess your responses will give me a reality check on my perceptions of it." This initial juxtaposition of obviously different perspectives led onto an integration that enabled us to find personal meaning in leading in institutionalised, bureaucratic and enforced situations in that both higher and lower level leading were valuable. As Jenny (28-7-00) went on to say,

> I for one hear the call and find it as rain upon dry ground … and yet and yet … I am framed by lots of lived hours here in the swamp ground … I know love is the answer, love will find a way etc but for much of the time I am so engaged in what in is my face I am just operating from other angles and I guess subconsciously trusting that in an unaware way my 'love ethos' is underlying whatever headset I am choosing to wear at the time.

Bateson's (1988) stochastic process was also in evidence during the dialogue. One of us would lead off with an idea (a non-random selective process). The rest of us understood in varying ways (random stream of potential) and replied. The idea constrained the available potential into the particular meanings of each respondent. We then participated in a cyclical stream of meaning making, using further selection to shape and refine understandings into greater clarity for all. It was necessary to have sharing to establish common meanings, just as it was necessary to have individual meanings to position, negotiate and change meaning. There was sometimes considerable iteration between leading-off and the eventual result of patterns of meaning which connected. Again as example, the intense institutionalised, bureaucratic, and enforced debate led to a new pattern of changed meaning. As Kris's (26-6-00) post-conception summed up, "you're talking about blending inner, personal meaning or vision with a bigger

system/institutional role of some kind … bringing meaning to a place where there might otherwise be some lack of it." Part of that changed meaning was also a new appreciation of each other and the role each of us played as leaders. As Buber (1965) indicates, when the experience is done, the relational I-thou might be; the outer doing of each moves into inner being, creating unity and wholeness.

The Risking, Vulnerable and Trusting Way of Researching

In Bateson's (1998) view, contextualised (patterned through time) lived-in experience is at the core of transformative research. Experiences over the course of time create patterns that connect past, present and future in a changing flow. Data might not be raw in the sense of being unmediated but in that they come of the real lives of participants. Likewise, Reason (1994b) believes in an inquiry in which the fundamental base is experience, where to know is to know in body, heart and mind. His research is raw in being lived fully rather than only being mediated through paradigms created by others. He talks of "learning to reclaim the body, to live in the body rather than using it as a tool to carry around the mind. It means learning to use words and concepts as tools of consciousness, rather than as consciousness themselves" (Reason, 1994b, p.37). In this embodied kind of researching, the whole person is participating, and when the whole of a person is involved, the sensations of body and feelings of heart are as much at play as the thoughts of mind.

For leaders-as-researchers, there is personal risk in reflexive researching that invites others to participate fully in the life of self. It means moving out into the open, being raw and vulnerable and willing to experience life fully in all its joys and pains. The risk of changing is great in that, as Schratz and Walker (1995, p.38) suggest, "research that starts from the position of treating people's perceptions and feelings seriously may find itself creating situations in which these same perceptions and feelings are put under threat of erasure." Zohar (1997) uses a metaphor of changing rooms to describe

transformative change in which the rooms themselves, not just the furniture, are renewed. Similarly, the risk in researching leading is that the room itself might change: the containing banks may not hold and perceptions and feelings themselves may be transformed. The risk of failing to change, too, is great in that, as Fay (1977, p.214) notes, "giving up … illusions requires abandoning one's self-conceptions and the social practices they engender and support." To give in to illusions is to become stuck - a term used by psychologists to denote an inability to move on - in an unchanging and fixed reality. Fullan (1997, p.230) also warns about not giving up illusions, of closing in to become "balkanised cocoons of like-minded individuals." He suggests a researching that confronts differences and works through the discomfort of diversity to becoming one. It is risky research to ask participants to become different, to abandon the crutches of familiar comfort in direction and meaning in order to acquire a new self-identity (Fay, 1977, p.214) as leaders. In a changing way of researching leading, the outcomes are uncertain: participants may embrace or sabotage the changing self and others, but it is certain that all will be changed in some way through the experience. In the study, the journey itself was purposefully framed as uncertain - that is, there were no clear outcomes that were sought for participants - so as to encourage an exploration of the nature of changing. In such an inquiry, the participating leaders were studying and *witnessing* their own processes of changing as they were living and *seeing* them.

Specifically referring to action inquiry, Fisher and Torbert (1995, p.55) suggest that what is required is "the risk and often the pain of personal development change", a position with which Reason (1981a) concurs. They further propose that:

> Practising action inquiry brings us into contact with our fear because action inquiry is never entirely safe. Action inquiry is inherently risky. It is risky because it is played in real time with real relationships. It is risky because it is played in relation to one's own awareness and the unknown; and it therefore introduces us to alien experiences. … Action inquiry is also risky because it

usually sacrifices unilateral control over outcomes in favour of openness to the influence of others, and of decisions to which the parties are mutually and internally committed. (p.55)

Thus, in being risky, a changing way of researching leading such as action inquiry involves participants being open and vulnerable. As Gibb (1991, p.69) argues, "true inquiry is, in itself, an act of trust and faith." In asking myself why the leaders in the study would take and provoke personal risks and trust, I trusted in their intrinsic motivation to grow, to change and to have significant and renewing meaning. My feeling is that risk and vulnerability are necessary to meaning, in conjunction with trust, which in Gibb's (1991, p.41) words is "to believe in my unlimited powers to create the world in which I live, and to transcend what is." It is as though, in an alive and procreative world, a leader has to be fully and completely in it to have an inspirited life of meaning. Further, Bateson (1988) adds that there can only be meaning if there is a context.

In my view as a leader, taking risks and trusting each other are the contextual vessels of meaning making: they provide the pattern space in which self and others can mean. The dialogue practice of suspension encourages such a space of meaning to emerge through holding beliefs and values whilst engaging in an exploration which may eventually change them. In the study, the leaders-as-researchers who participated took risks in revealing themselves through relating their experiences of life and developed a trust amongst themselves that protected each other's vulnerabilities. This allowed their space of sharing meaning to enlarge and illuminate the self and others. Together, they developed the potential for changing meaning; for changing the patterns of their lives to something more deeply authentic for them and others.

Bolman, through his research with Deal on leading (for example, Bolman & Deal, 1995), has an interesting insight into the risk-vulnerability-trust cycle. He believes that "it's very difficult to get anywhere without intimacy and trust which enables us to take risks"

(Bolman in an interview with Boehlke, 1996, p.7) and sees potential for trust and risk in empowering relationships. It is as though qualities such as intimacy and trust bring another dimension to what can come of researching together, in that the vulnerability of taking risks and of trusting adds a tension to tough-mindedness. Bolman (in responding to Boehlke, 1996) argues that, with risk and trust, the "possibility exists for deepening of conversation to enable people to grapple with issues which are real and which are corporate in terms of a business point of view" (p.8). An example he gives is of conversation around values and purpose and suggests that:

> … if that's a central part of what leadership is about, which I think it
> is, then you're going somewhere. Those are often issues that groups
> don't deal with well. They're muckier and fuzzier than the numbers …
> Tough stuff to get at. (Bolman in Boehlke, 1996, p.8)

This implies that leaders-as-researchers need a kind of tough love - an embodied heart and head - to be change agents. As Heifetz (1994, p.243) adds of the limit-setting love of leaders that keeps eyes on the work, "compassion … is rarely soft." In the present study, the participating leaders confirmed this in their explorations of what leading meant to them. In taking risks on each other and trusting that their vulnerabilities would be protected, their meanings of themselves as leaders were enlarged and became more multi-dimensional. One leader became more aware, for example, that he could be an enforcer and a papa bear and that both these roles were useful in moving on those they worked with. Thus, a risking and trusting way of researching leading that involved the whole of themselves - their heads, hearts and bodies - supported a changing meaning both in themselves and in others.

Leaders Speak 2

Researching requires our personal engagement as leaders, challenging us to risk full participation in human development. In this way, researching can transform meaning and make a difference in the world, as Bohm (1987) proposes. For us as participants in the study, feeling fear and taking risks were part of our leading a changing meaning:

> All of which brings to mind the notion of risk. Yes, you and others may be hurt; likewise you may be winners. You'll never know until you have a go … no gain without pain … emotional growth is the end result of putting yourself on the line. I believe that emotional growth and strength is the best asset we can have. (Doug 7-8-00)
>
> And my archetype? The Fool, maybe.
>
> Well, here I am, risking being alive.
>
> Fear is something I am much more familiar with.
>
> My days (and nights) are wracked with fears of inadequacy.
>
> Of forgetting important details.
>
> Making mistakes. Getting it wrong.
>
> It feels unhealthy, but is a pattern so deep I can only rarely escape to the plateau of enlightened awareness (all is illusion, I must make a note of that in my diary).
>
> I long for an Elysian idyll. Of true Humanity and calm joy.
>
> But there I go, playing that Fool again. (Peter 20-7-00; 10-8-00)

Attempting to deal with fears of inadequacy and taking risks on yourself and others in seeking true humanity might have felt like a fool's quest, but nevertheless this quest was undertaken. We were researching our leading and changing meaning, and we valued each other being there while we went exploring, laying ourselves open in taking risks and working through our fears as leaders.

In trusting each other, we found that we could bare all, taking risks with each other and being vulnerable. It was not an easy path as Jenny (9-8-00) indicated: "I think at times I feared if I started you all might think - oh god this bird plans to use this group for surrogate counselling! I think I just needed to get a feel for who you/we are. ... I need to work through some of this with trusted 'others'." Through our dialogue, the group developed a loyalty to each other that allowed each of us to be raw, yet protected. For example, it was valuable to have conflict as a growth tool. Jenny (28-7-00), like Fullan (1997b), suggested that confronting differences was useful: "Often I am called to reassure people that the conflict of ideas, beliefs and approaches (headsets) is great ... this is what we are made for in the process of clarifying our extra dimension of distributed intelligence." Still, as papa bear, Doug (9-9-00) said, he felt "quite protective of our little 'club'." The message within us as researching leaders was that it was okay (meaning valuable and necessary) to be different - everyone belonged and was accepted. To me, the degree of vulnerability amongst the group was an indicator of the respect we had for each other. Such an atmosphere of tough love promoted the risk-taking of changing meaning, of being alive as Peter (10-8-00) said. We noted that structural change, in being concerned with the outer dimension, does not promote such an atmosphere.

The Truthful, Valid Way of Researching

The changing way of researching leading, as espoused here, goes deep into participants' hearts and minds and into knowing. So much so in fact, that as Gibb (1991) suggests, "if we think about the data on which a science of total human experience might be constructed, it includes ... the subjective self-reports of trained inner explorers" (p.xxvi). The reflexive researcher who is leading a changing meaning must explore inside self as well as outside others. Reason (1994b, p.11) believes that in a participatory world there will be a "move towards forms of knowing that are self-reflexive, that are both deeply engaged and rigorously self-critical." For example, Roman (1992) sees it as a crucial task

for researchers to elaborate the structural power relations that form the basis of how research is conducted. Through understanding the underpinnings of research culture, the researcher has the opportunity to transform his/her research in ways that have integrity for self and significant others, as I have proposed here.

Consistent with the changing way put forward here, the researcher-leader is intimately involved in the performance of researching. In coming *to* know place-in-space as a researcher and *witness* - that is, coming to know where he/she is situated in power structures - the researcher and *seer* performing research is simultaneously changing those structures through his/her participation. The inner explorer in such a deeply participatory world is presented with a challenge in researching leading: to find a personal truth that is valid for others. To know personal truth in a changing way of researching leading is empowering and liberating, as Freire (1972) would say, because validity comes from within and yet involves those without who are part of the self. This seeming contradiction demonstrates the necessary unity of inner and outer dimensions; like self-and-other, truth-and-validity has a Janus face. Thus, Heron (1996) frames the challenge like this:

> … to redefine truth and validity in ways that honour the generative, creative
> role of the human mind in all forms of knowing. This also means, I believe,
> taking inquiry beyond justification, beyond the validation of truth-values,
> towards the celebration and bodying forth of being-values, as the
> transcendent and polar complement to the quest for validity. (p.13)

Researching must move from trying to validate external verities of doing and becoming towards also incorporating (literally embodying) participants' internal, personal and mutable truths of being. Truth, in valid research as proposed here, is multi-dimensional and temporal. It emerges through the processes of changing meaning and involves self and other; it involves being and becoming. Validity becomes an ongoing quest for

meaning with integrity - notably not to be found in either outer public knowledge or in inner self-declaration alone, but in the moment-to-moment participation of truth making. It comes of the ongoing reconciling of personal meaning and the reality being created of that meaning. As truth is being made, validity is being confirmed. Indeed for Jagger (1983, p.387), the test of adequacy for any research is its usefulness in developing a "scientific reconstruction of the world" from its own viewpoints; that is, of the participants. In other words, in valid research the world as constructed truthfully expresses the meanings that motivated it. When participants' representations of reality - for example, of what it means to lead - are constantly being tested for their accuracy in expressing meaning and for their usefulness in helping transform that reality, truth is in the making.

Dialogical research, such as in the study, democratically encourages empowerment through truth-making reflection on how the participants' situations and roles reproduce or transform relationships (Roman, 1992). The leader who was an enforcer, to continue the example from the study, was also validated as a papa bear. The first image was reproduced by virtue of this leader's position within the school, but the latter image arising through the research dialogue brought another truth about the leaders' relationships with those he worked with. Being validated as a papa bear by those around him was liberating for this leader. As his knowing of himself changed, more of his true, caring self emerged in the school environment. That knowledge, very temporary in itself, initiated further truth-making: how to care without taking responsibility from people.

In researching a leading way of changing meaning, I thus agree with Reason (1988, p.11) who states that "no longer can we claim to hold true knowledge - *episteme* - and we must accept our understanding as *doxa*." Truth as "doxa (opinion and belief)" rather than "episteme (certainty and knowledge)" (Polkinghorne, 1983, p.9) requires validity procedures that move to map and integrate the inner meaning-making and outer action-making dimensions of knowing. However, as Polkinghorne (1983) warns, researchers

who work in such contexts of pluralism cannot assume the validity of their tools of inquiry. He says that:

> They need to begin their work at a deeper level where the assumptions and relationships of the systems of inquiry themselves are examined. This deeper level provides a much broader range of choice in the use of particular methods and designs, but it also places a responsibility on researchers to understand and explain the assumptions they have incorporated into their approaches. (p.9)

It is at this deeper level that the changing way of researching leading operates. In the study, this afforded the unfolding of new and changing meanings but at the same time, required leaders to truth test those meanings with each other.

As I have noted, truth making involves the being-and-becoming whole of a person and thus validity must follow suit: assumptions must be explicated and critically examined by self and others. The critical subjectivity that Roman (1992) implied earlier acts to increase objectivity and enhance validity. Increasing awareness of how *seeing* is actively creating reality allows the simultaneous witnessing reflection of meaning making. As this integrative process of truth-making brings becoming and being more into alignment, validity increases. Reason (1988, p.228) also adds that researching can only be valid if "we have developed and used some systematic procedures for being self-reflective and maintaining a high level of collaboration." For example, in the study, the truth-making moved beyond the participant group and involved countless cycles of validation with critical friends - supervisors, friends, colleagues, pilot study contributors - making it truly a collaborative work. The truth of the changing way of researching leading was being refined and made more true by the validating reflections of all those who were involved. As one participant in the study reminded me, although one can fool oneself indefinitely, one cannot fool all the people all the time. In the case of the study, the truth does not

belong to me alone but lives in all who participated in it and thus validated it. Meeting the challenge of an embodied truth brings the responsibility of making truths that are negotiated and shared; that is, not one truth, but multiple truths (Bateson's patterns of patterns) that are created and validated through relationship. The truths of every inner-outer explorer must be contextually negotiated with others to have any believability.

Such self-other criticality is necessary because, like the participants in the study suggest and as Reason (1988, p.228) points out, "the human capacity for delusion and collusion is quite enormous, and we are quite capable of fooling ourselves if we do not take care." In researching that supports a changing meaning, leaders must take care to avoid the balkanisation of like-mindedness, as Fullan (1997) suggests, and to encourage difference and a diversity of opinions amongst participants as a way of validating the research. The action of seeing being balanced by the reflection of witnessing in self and with others enables a validated truth.

Embodying a commitment to validation is not easy for participants leading each other in changing meaning through researching. In such research, validation rests more with the people who are engaged in a study than in any method used (Reason, 1981b). It involves the multiple perspectives of real people, not just facts and theories (Torbert, 1991). In all this moving mass, participating leaders - as human beings trying to elucidate and name their complex truths - could develop a "false consciousness" of "interrelated illusions", as Fay (1977, p.214) describes it. In my view, the degree to which the participants find and hold the clear and valid path of illumination, rather than of delusion, collusion and illusion, depends of the qualities and commitment of those participants and of their participation. I support Reason's (1981b, p.245) view that "valid research rests above all on high-quality awareness on the part of the researchers." Leaders-as-researchers need to live with ambiguity but at the same time, always seek clarity. Reason (1988, p.229) adds that being "approximately right'' is better than being "precisely wrong" and that, in inquiry:

> ... it is also better to initiate and conduct inquiry into important questions of human conduct with a degree of acknowledged bias and imprecision, than to bog the whole thing down in attempts to be prematurely "correct" or "accurate". (p.229)

The leading and changing researcher studies meaning as well as action, and in exploring the inner and outer dimensions, goes in and out and round and round. There is an awareness and practice of working together and of "going round the research cycle several times" (Reason, 1981b, p.246) to "achieve a validity of a cumulative nature - yielding a deeper and more extensive truth than that given by a linear approach" (Rowan, 1981b, p.105). Difference is honoured, with a "subtle interplay between different forms of knowing" (Reason, 1981b, p.249) giving rise to contradiction and reconciliation in research that is truthful and valid and which changes meaning. And finally, in this changing way of researching leading, the researcher appreciates that meaning is moving and leads out to invite the researcher's audiences to participate in its validation through testing it against their experiences (Schratz & Walker, 1995).

Leaders Speak 3

Within us, the courage needed for full participation in the study was present, with Kris (5-7-00) commenting on "so much honesty, fierce courage and integrity coming" in the mails. The group was practising Reason's (1994b) "future participation" in being so present and revealingly honest within ourselves and with each other. In our outer work and inner researching, we relished the role of the Fool in changing meaning socially while accepting our susceptibility to fooling ourselves individually. As Peter (15-0-00) pointed out, "I guess I feel safer in trusting collective honesty (you can't fool everybody) rather than personal honesty (but you can fool yourself indefinitely)." I feel we lived Buber's (1965) idea of man, the individual being socially constructed by other. Indeed, Jenny (9-

8-00) even wondered if her persona in the group was mediated through the rest of us: *"I used to be a speech and drama teacher. I may even 'construct' this project to empower all 'players', whatever you write, to be aspects of my 'potential persona' in all this."*

Due to the trust and regard amongst us, the changing way of researching inscribed truth and thus validity in our journey. Kris, in reflecting on her path, was able to honestly describe what the study meant to her:

> … being part of this group was overall, a somewhat 'troubling' experience - I felt a lot like the kid who sits up the back, not bothering anybody, but not really getting into it, making an occasional attempt, which seems to fall flat, so goes back to day dreaming/doodling/fiddling/ reading something else - whatever will pass the time; easier than struggling with the situation at hand. I didn't want to drop out of the group, as 1) I kept hoping that something would happen which I would really be able to latch onto, contribute to, and run with … and 2) I felt personal loyalty to Sandy for seeing the project through, however faintly I managed! *(*Kris 18-2-01)

By way of contrast, this was Doug's truth:

> For me it was extremely valuable to have access to other people's opinions on leadership and that those people weren't in stereotypical leadership positions. It allowed us to explore leadership in a range of its manifestations. I think that at times we were at risk of going around in circles and that at times it became a self help group in which we shared ourselves with each other. That was probably it at its richest. (Doug 19-7-00)

These personal reflections demonstrate the multiplicity of truth telling within our group. A changing way of researching needed our personal truths to be contextually justified and

hence made valid for each other. As a member of the group and co-researcher, I had no qualms in accepting either of the above truths about the study, different as they were. Each truth was testable against the lived and felt experience of each inner explorer - something I could verify as a fellow traveller who also participated in the dialogue. My trust came of our connection; of shared meanings beyond the words that represented them. Thus, participating in a changing way of researching leading involves truth and trust and is, as Reason (1994b) suggests and we as participants ourselves indicated in raising terms like self-help, a way of healing the split between inner and outer dimensions.

Conclusion

A changing way of researching leading was a challenge for the participants in the study group. It was researching that demanded the whole of each participant and that required a surrender of the old self to a new and different self-other. It went deep inside each individual; what came out had a changing meaning … they belonged; they would always be connected in spirit. Far from being distanced observers, in their being and becoming they showed themselves to be leaders who, through participating in reflexive researching and inside-out world making, were also healers. The leaders speak one last time:

> … it came to me that I feel from 'us' a cry from the heart to be (allowed to be) the people/leaders we truly are. It feels a bit like the emergent melody that Jen spoke of … a soft little song that comes out of our choir, and the strange thing is that it's a song in unison … the same song in all and each of us, one that speaks of longing and of love and care for the human condition. (Sandy 19-1-01)

> I felt that shared longing and chord within the group over our time together too and perhaps that is what I value most of the experience. (Jenny 29-1-01)

In a changing way of researching leading, it was proposed at the outset that the task is to search and search again, recovering the essential unity in diversity that heals the spirit. This has been demonstrated within through engagement with the literature of leading researchers and with the real lives of a group of leaders as they participated in a study. For them, searching and searching again brought new and healing meanings both within and without. In generating changing meanings that address more than the structural outer dimension, such a way of researching could profitably be employed by leaders, as seers and witnesses, in seeking change where much does not stay the same.

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