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**Wayfarers' Tales: Reflecting on the doctoral journey**

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**Abstract**

This paper provides a temporal snapshot of two midterm PhD candidates as they both grapple with paradigms and methodology, research questions, external challenges within the research field, locating their voices as doctoral students, and maintaining energy and focus to continue their doctoral journey. These two candidates, one of whom is interstate, share the same supervisor and have come to know each other through telephone reading groups, email communications, and face-to-face meetings with their supervisor, and attending conferences and other collegial opportunities. The catalyst for this paper was a reading group discussion of a paper by Pirrie and Macleod (2010, p. 367) applying the descriptors of 'journeyman, wayfarer, fellow traveller or craftsman' to the conceptualisation of the identities of researchers at temporal moments in the research process. We were also inspired by Kamler and Thomson's (2001) paper where they respond to each other's emails in a conversation formulating ideas and perspectives about 'writing up' research. Additionally, we have considered the work of Ryan, Amorim and Kusch (2010) and Lindsay, Kell, Ouellette and Westall (2010). We have linked their work on reflective learning to our experience of reflecting 'aloud' in a supportive learning community and our subsequent individual reflexive learning. At the heart of our reflections is a relationship between supervisor (Jennifer) and doctoral candidates (Christine and Cheryl); the relationship is a fluid community of practice (Wenger, 1998). A community of practice that depends not so much on direction from the supervisor, but rather as a space where concepts and ideas can be spoken aloud in a safe, critical and supportive environment. Members are able to listen, both to themselves and to each other, before reflecting and finding their own way. At other times each juggles their own professional and personal identities as they become teacher, journeyman, fellow traveller and recalcitrant.

**Key Words**

Doctoral research and pedagogy, reflective practice, communities of practice

## **Introduction: A united voice**

Doctoral candidature is frequently referred to as a journey (Edwards 2006; Wellington 2010). Both journeying and learning can be solitary (as opposed to isolated) or social. Jennifer is an experienced supervisor and the act of arranging a collegial 'community of practice' consisting of herself and two of her doctoral students – Cheryl and Christine – was a considered action, born of experience, to ensure that neither fell by the way side and to provide support to counteract the solitariness of the off campus student. Christine lives within a half hour drive of Deakin University's Waurin Ponds' campus, Cheryl lives and works interstate. Wenger (1998, p. 4) understands 'learning as social participation'. Bringing together two doctoral students via telephone reading groups, email, the occasional face to face meetings at conferences and working meetings at Jennifer's home facilitated the occurrence of social learning along with an informal critical-friend relationship that benefited both candidates.

This paper consists of a selection of the emails exchanged between Jennifer, Cheryl and Christine during the first half of 2011. We show that this form of community of practice can be regarded as situated learning. Gonzci (2004, p. 28) cites Lave and Wenger (1991) and Chaiklin and Lave (1993) who have argued 'that knowledge is built through participating in a group that already has competence and are willing to allow the learner to become, progressively, part of the core of their community'. Jennifer is encouraging both Cheryl and Christine to 'become' part of an academic community, which is an important part of the doctoral journey.

## **Situating myself: Jennifer**

*Often the solitary one ....  
must for a long time  
move by hand along the waterways,  
(along) the ice-cold sea,  
tread the paths of exile.  
Events always go as they must!*

The Wanderer (Old English, the Exeter Book)

Many moons ago when I was studying Old English (for pleasure!) - I found myself deeply moved by the poem the Wanderer, which is found in the Exeter Book. In this long poem there is a long description of what it feels like to be cast adrift and have to travel, in isolation, from the known into a dark and silent unknown. Whilst many will have taken this journey before, it still seems that the person undertaking this wayfaring is alone with their thoughts, their doubts, and moving into uncharted waters, alone, and frequently without a guide. Perhaps this is why the poem resonates with me- and I wonder is this how my PhD candidates see their journey – as I constantly badger them to take off into uncharted waters, in directions that seem to have no meaning to them?

Supervising can be incredibly challenging as well as incredibly rewarding. As Deakin has long been a distance education centre, almost all of my supervising experience is with candidates located overseas. I have supervised several candidates whom I have never met – and this in the days before Skype or video links! In these situations to shift thinking about a PhD from an isolated solitary journey, shared only by a supervisor you have never met, to being part of an ephemeral wider community, is, in my experience, only partial and limited. Deakin provides various online seminars and occasional summer schools but still for some people, engagement does not overcome the sense of isolation. So for me having two candidates virtually in the same space and time zone, with similar research interests, has provided the opportunity to try to establish a community of practice. Wenger, in his more recent work (2010, p.180) has further developed this idea as a social history of learning. This encompasses ideas of 'structure, complex relationships,

self-organisation, dynamic boundaries, and ongoing negotiation of identity'. Participants define for themselves a 'regime of competence', which includes their own criteria and expectations by which to recognise their membership. These ideas resonated with me, as we attempted to form a virtual community to share this doctoral journey. Whilst the two candidates were at similar stages, their research fields and interests in methodology, at the outset appeared to be quite diverse. Would they want to form links as they each progressed through different stages of their research?

We began by forming a regular reading group – at a distance, and far more linked phone meetings. Hopefully this has really enlivened the process, for us all and supported the 'becoming' part of joining the academic community.

### **Situating myself: Christine**

My research interest is the learning experiences of Applied Learning educators. I have come to consider this ironic. Applied Learning involves strategies for making learning relevant, authentic, collaborative, situated in real life and connected to communities. My PhD journey is one of gaining understanding of philosophy, methodology, learning to write at a doctoral level, collaboration, negotiation and *becoming* by connecting to the academic community. Baker and Pifer (2011) have written about the transition from doctoral student to independent scholar and the importance of relationships in that transition process. My PhD journey includes evolving as a researcher. In the community of practice with Jennifer and Cheryl, my identity as a student develops. As a sessional tutor at Deakin my identity as a scholar is developing. Each of my identities informs the other. Importantly each identity works well in allowing me to be an observer of an 'other' self.

### **Situating myself: Cheryl**

Daily I negotiate the blurred boundary of two identities: (1) a full-time, non-police employee in a police organisation and (2) a part-time, off-campus PhD candidate conducting research with a police organisation. My research centres on fostering transformative learning through reflective practice and critical thinking as tools in developing professional practice. Hence, the nexus between my work, research and study.

At work, I see myself as a token insider – different, not fully accepted, yet tolerated – or alternatively, an outsider-insider. It is taxing to maintain an outsider's standpoint in a police organisation. In response to frustration and a desire to name and reframe everyday experiences, I enlisted a professional supervisor (my critical friend) and engaged in Masters and now doctoral research. Within the context of academia, I also hold the status of outsider-insider. But I have realised and applied my 'agentic action' (Billett & Pavlova, 2005, p.196) to challenge my status by regularly attending conferences, writing refereed papers, and achieving a publication. I thank Christine for bringing this to my attention.

Reflecting on my practice, and usually critically, is a way of life. My journey throughout my PhD is nurtured by continuous reflection through journaling and conversations with Jennifer and Christine, and my critical friend who has a PhD and provides much needed professional advice and collegial support, but with an ever-present critical eye. I have struggled with finding my voice and identities as a PhD candidate and member of the academic community. However, through the community of practice I share with Jennifer and Christine, and my critical friend, I have realised the seductive nature and impact of 'ideological-discursive formations' (Fairclough, 1995, p.25) on my subject position as an outsider-insider in both work and academia, which has enabled me to continue to negotiate my subject positions and identities.

## Conversations: Christine and Jennifer

Christine writes to Jennifer after attending a faculty Higher Degree by Research (HDR) summer school in 2011.

*Dear Jennifer,*

*I know that I haven't done some (well maybe all) of the things that you have asked me in the last six months or so. While I have gathered my data and I am transcribing, I just can't seem to manage to write anything – or even get organised enough to do so. My life is busy in many ways - from the 'other things' I do and the places and journeys those 'other things' take me. I know yours is too. I know that you have said that I must write – anything - to promote the habit of writing. That writing is a way of learning to write – I think I heard that again at Summer School these past few days – I am not sure who said it – I think it was in the workshop this afternoon. That writing our thesis is the way we learn to write academically.*

*By the way, I really enjoyed summer school. I recall when I first started my thesis you told me go. You knew I didn't really want to go. It was something else to 'fit in' my life. I wasn't convinced I would get 'enough' out of it to justify the detour. I enjoyed meeting (and re-meeting) other students and talking to them. I certainly enjoyed the food. I have also come away with several things that I hope are going to sustain me in getting back on track. I **just know** that you will be very pleased to hear that!*

*The keynote address was very engaging. One of the things that resonated with me was the speaker's emphasis that being in an "uncomfortable space" can be very beneficial for research. Having unknowns and the unfamiliar can make us squirm, poke, prod and question in a very fruitful way. As you are well aware, I have been lacking in confidence about doing research outside 'my comfort and knowledge zone'. Considering that I have spent most of my life 'doing things I know nothing about' this is a bit perplexing to me. I was really pleased to hear her say that feeling uncomfortable was good. I was also pleased to meet a New Zealand student who said that she had put aside her extensive science discipline knowledge to do research in education which was out of her own comfort space. She also will be starting from scratch in learning the fundamental, tacit knowledge that underpins her area of research.*

*The presenter in my first workshop spoke about using metaphors for research design and researcher positioning. I came out of her session with a metaphorical burden lifted from my shoulders. You have been very patient in not showing your despair at my lack of enthusiasm for methodology, theoretical frameworks and the work of writers like Bourdieu. I think that the facilitator's suggestion of using a metaphor, by which I can first understand my own work, so that I can present my thoughts in an orderly fashion to others will be very valuable to me. You see I have wanted so badly to have some fun. Writing my Masters was fun. That has not been the case so far. Please don't bother saying "how would you know you haven't written anything". Using a metaphor will give me a chance to have some creative fun – and in some ways it may have already helped me to make clear the difference between methods and methodology. I'll tell you more about my metaphor later; I want to think it through more first.*

*The next workshop facilitator presented on ways of writing at the interstices: writing up or colouring in your thesis. She gave reassurance that it was alright to be confused. That it was alright if the writing up did not proceed in a linear fashion. That questioning and interrogation of the data might frequently lead to (in my words) "and that's not all – there's more" in a free-set-of-steak-knives-kind-of-way. An activity that she set us to do was represent the current moment (where we are at in our thesis) in a four square 'cartoon'. To start with I panicked because I didn't want to draw the reality; I didn't want to admit that I have detoured off the 'PhD highway' into side-streets full of interesting, but PhD irrelevant, activity. But drawing the reality was easier, just as telling the truth is*

*less stressful than weaving untruths, so I did. The first square depicted the interviews I have done. The second square depicted that I have written stuff all. The third square depicted that I went to summer school. The fourth square depicted that I found ideas at summer school (luckily the metaphor session had been before the drawing- pictures session or I couldn't have drawn anything in the fourth square). The facilitator laughed with me and suggested some works of Patti Lather that dealt with 'being stuck' during the thesis process and also about double enquiry – that while my thesis will produce new knowledge for others – the process will also provide new knowledge for me. I am a learner in the thesis production process.*

*Anyway I had better get back to the collaborative paper that you, Cheryl and I are going to write; the one using the ideas of Pirrie and Macleod about wayfarers, travellers and being recalcitrant etc. Don't want to get side tracked!*

*Christine*

Sometime later Jennifer replies to Christine.

*The recalcitrant – on not finding time to write*

*The connections between elements of the story and another were not always obvious...*

*I am sorry that it has taken me so long to reply to you but I have been totally absorbed by having two PhDs to submit by the end of the month. Even though I have been travelling with those projects for so long, at the final stages, no matter how many times you seem to go through the thesis, there is always something still to do. However I can assure you that there does finally come a time when you have to stop – and let go – and trust that you have got it all down on the page.*

*But that's not your problem! I am so pleased that you have had a catalyst; something has turned you back to writing! Congratulations! And I agree, now is the time to write!*

*You have gathered so much data and been busily transcribing – keeping yourself busy on task, so as to avoid grappling with the challenges of writing!*

*Now that you have gathered all this data, that you organised from a set of questions and perspectives –now begins the exciting part- how are you going to make sense of it? No matter how close we travel with you, these are your decisions, your standpoints, your reading of your data!*

*And that can be confronting.*

*It is interesting me to reflect back on your journey to where you are now, and to recall how reluctant you were to come on campus, that "uncomfortable space" to be part of seminars and informal discussions, that sense that many women have shared, 'I'm not sure if I belong in that place!' There were so many times when I tried to force you to come on campus or in this case to attend summer school- and how you resisted! And now you are writing to tell me how much you enjoyed yourself, and clearly when I saw you & Cheryl in the distance, you were enjoying yourselves! I think now you see that what you thought was your angst alone is widely shared by many others, and does not necessarily go away the closer you get to the end point!*

*And perhaps the most exciting outcome for me has been that you have begun to write, but more importantly, to see that there is some method in my madness, of the seemingly disjointed and eclectic reading group we have formed as well as my 'that's interesting' response to ideas that seem to be completely disconnected! Methodology here you come – but now not simply at the performative level of knowing this is the next piece of the puzzle you need to slot into your thesis, but that by going back to some of these theoretical spaces, some of these bits will fit together as they did not before. You also write of how much the idea of a metaphor for writing suddenly came*

*alive for you and how much 'fun' you had working on your masters research paper. And I agree, finding to metaphor to work with might well help you in your structuring device, and at last, you might have some fun.*

*I remember as I was writing my thesis, sometime ago now, I was deeply moved by the work of Italo Calvino, and in particular, *Invisible Cities*, which is a series of 'stories that, perhaps, Marco Polo, told to the Great Khan. Marco Polo describes to the Great Khan the cities that he has found on his marvellous journeys, cities that exist in the telling, but would they exist if indeed he tried to go back, or if another tried to find them? Throughout the book you are never quite sure where you are going, or if you have been there before and I think that is what you are experiencing now.*

*Arriving at each new city, the traveller finds again a past of his that he did not know he had: the foreignness of what you no longer are or no longer possess lies in wait for you in foreign, unpossessed places. Calvino (1978, p. 25)*

*You are moving into foreign, unmapped spaces that you are finding quite stressful and destabilising. But as Calvino says, each time you go back and look again, you see things differently; when you try to tell another, it comes out differently in the telling.*

*So your journey has taken an interesting turn – who knows where you will end up next?*

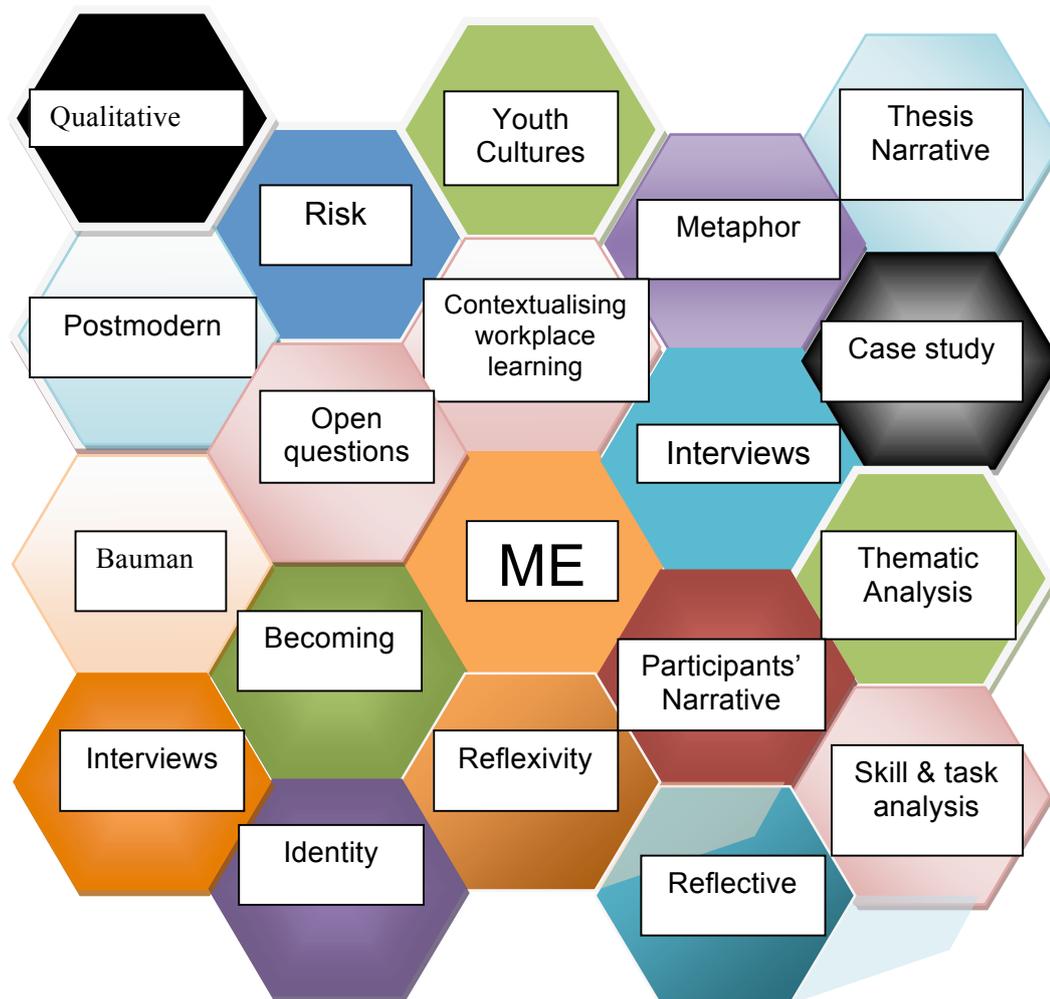
*(I like the idea of the four square cartoon device that might be redrawn quite frequently. What would you draw now?)*

*Jennifer*

Christine's ongoing tussles with methodology prompt her to write to Jennifer again.

*Dear Jennifer,*

*You and I know I find methodology a real puzzle so I drew one! This is my methodology for my thesis. I gave up attempting to resolve methodology in a linear way. You might like the puzzle because it is a 'sort of Deleuzian' representation. The pieces do not fit together in only one way – they are able to seamlessly 'reform' in many ways. As I look at it and write this the thought occurs to me that some components of the methodology could equally be adjectives used to describe my doctoral journey, albeit with different meaning. You and I regularly have **interviews** or meetings. Commencing the doctoral journey is a **risk** (can I do it...will I finish... what will I say?). Gathering data is a **risk** (have I asked the right questions to elicit meaningful data?), writing it up even more so (how can I maintain a coherence and intelligent argument?). My own **identity** (as seen by myself and others) is changing as I **become** the researcher, part of a Deakin teaching team, the doctoral student, and the PhD candidate. PhD candidature requires **reflection** and **reflexivity** (what did I learn from that... what will I change next time...how will I approach next time?)*



*I also understand that compiling my methodology as a puzzle is not necessarily an immediate 'solution', rather it may be another starting point. So many things I think I grasp become yet another beginning. I suppose that is part of the PhD journey too – lots of false crests to ensure that travellers don't give up hope. Hope sustains us as we travel up to what we **hope** will be the start of the downhill run – only it turns out to be another downhill spiral (metaphorically speaking) as we trudge **up** yet another hill in the attempt to understand either new concepts, explore existing thoughts more deeply or reflect and action those reflections.*

*The texts I have read refer to methods and methodologies – and just when I think that I have got methods separated from methodologies I find that there are things like case study which sounds like a method to me but you tell me is a methodology. It has been a bit like being in the school yard when jokes were told that I didn't really understand - but I laughed because everyone else laughed. I thought everyone got the joke but me. Now I know that not to be the case - many of my fellow PhD students struggle with these methodological concepts too. When we are out of ear shot of our supervisors – we confide these things to each other.*

*My mind wants to create or have access to, a very clear linear definition for methodology. Of what it comprises. Of exactly what it 'should' have in it by specific name – so I can tick boxes as I add another ingredient to my recipe for methodology. However I am coming to realise that conversations about methodology aren't linear.*

*Since beginning this journey I have been hoping that if I just listen, read and talk about methodology – the meaning will become clear, I'll come to understanding by osmosis – well it hasn't worked out that way for me yet. Parts of the 'becoming' stage of the doctoral journey seem to be stopping all stations and I want to know 'how long'? I also haven't come across any simple, straight forward explanations that have resulted in a methodological epiphany in any of those great tomes about methodology you keep getting me to read. I want to start with a book titled along the lines of 'The ABC of Methodology' or 'Methodology for Dummies'.*

*I'll drop by your office in the next few days and see what you think of my puzzle.  
Christine*

## **Conversations: Cheryl and Jennifer**

### **Cheryl's Voices**

I have identified four central voices in my journal: (1) *Who am I?* (2) *Performing, but having fun* (3) *Stuff them!* (4) *Look out, here I come!* These voices appear linear, and in some ways they are, but in other ways they are not. As I take my journey, these voices stay with me and move around depending upon what is happening and where I am. In writing this paper, I realise that '*mak[ing] connections*', (Deleuze & Guattari cited in Rajchman, 2001, pp.6-7, emphasis in original) involving '*unit[ing] sensation and cognition*' (Rajchman, 2001, p.9), has been a constant theme throughout my journal. I have kept an open mind, chased '*thin threads*' and made numerous connections (Deleuze cited in Rajchman 2001, p.5). I have put aside certainty and I trust that whatever eventuates will take me to where I am meant to be.

#### **Voice 1: *Who am I?***

A critical starting point in my journey is my first voice. I remember writing in my journal:

*Who am I? Do I feel and behave like a PhD student? How should I feel, act and interact as a PhD student? Am I worthy to be one? I'm recovering from an illness that has taken me 12 months to get back to full time work and to focus again on my thesis.*

Throughout my journey I have struggled to locate myself and find my voice, subjectivity and identity as a doctoral candidate because of self-doubt. I always saw others taking this journey, not me. I have attempted to create my '*scholarly identity*' (Kamler & Thomson, 2001, p.14) by writing and presenting papers at conferences. However, being part-time and interstate means I cannot immerse myself in the academic environment. When I do, my voice and identity become stronger, but I am an outsider-insider in my work *and* the academic community.

#### **Voice 2: *Performing, but having fun***

I returned to reading, writing, journaling, and talking to Jennifer, Christine and my critical friend. I was performing according to the '*technologies of control*' (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2004, p.244); adopting the identity of an effective, compliant PhD candidate. But, I was having fun. I was exploring *and* grappling with theories and methodologies. I had moments of clarity interspersed with feeling discombobulated.

*Jennifer,*

*I'm feeling discombobulated. I'm reading, writing, deleting, rewriting. I glimpse clarity and then it vanishes. I know, but I feel that I don't know. I'm trying to write what positions my methodology. I understand theory as a means of classifying, organising and explaining reality or concepts (Gulson & Parkes, 2010, pp.77-78). This helps me make sense of what I'm reading and thinking. But you*

*know, I started this weekend as a traveller; thinking logically about reading, writing and making sense. Instead, I'm a wayfarer - up on the hills, down in the gullies, stumbling into potholes and occasionally enjoying the smooth surfaces - I am learning from the detours and tangents, but I'm in a bit of a discombobulated state.*

*Cheryl*

In reflecting on this, my challenge was articulating my position. I knew which theories and methodologies were relevant to my thesis, I just wasn't "hearing" and trusting myself. I was probably complicating things. A few days later, I sent Jennifer another email.

*Jennifer,*

*Having read and thought some more, I think the theories that will help to explain and interpret things in my research are critical discourse analysis + narrative + metaphor + position theory. Methodologies are critical discourse analysis + experience-centred narrative + bit of metaphor theory. Paradigms that put a framework around my research are interpretivist, critical and deconstructivist / poststructuralist. I feel like I'm climbing a hill, but I can't wait to find out whether it's a hill, a gully or valley.*

*Yours with a smile.*

*Cheryl*

Sometime later Jennifer replies to Cheryl

*Discombobulating*

*I have been thinking about how to reply to your discombobulated state and wonder if you are enjoying being in that space? A consequence of your emails is the ever growing pile of books on methodology stacking up on my office floor, alongside that pile of ejournal articles that we keep winging around the email. Perhaps these should suggest to us that this is indeed a combobulating space or another stage on your journey?*

*It is difficult to know quite how to respond to you at this point for just recently you have had such a series of set backs, one after another, that the elusive 'goal' of a clear idea of where you are going and what matters now seems to be fast slipping through our collective fingers. It is not uncommon to have to make a sharp turn in the research journey, but it must seem at present that no matter where you turn, no doors are opening for you. You began with such a clear idea of what you wanted to research and why, and these were warmly received on one front. Since then there has been somewhat of a go slow, culminating now in a ...halt!*

*Whilst all this has been in the background you have been reading and writing and reading and refining and now – you it might seem that you have to throw it all up in the air again. However I do agree with you that at the end of the day you must write for yourself, rather than continue to grapple with your workplace. Perhaps one of the reasons this needs to be researched is in part the very set of problems you are encountering along the way?*

*Your position as neither insider nor outsider but someone in that liminal space in between, being caused to waft over to one space and then shunted out to another only to be required to go back again, as I see it, would be very discombobulating! Is it possible that your workplace consciously positions you in this way? That by seeing you as neither fish nor fowl they do not need to take the same notice of what you say – as they might of others in the organisation?*

*The nature of doctoral study is to destabilise, to challenge, to 'see anew' as Nias (1987) wrote, whilst at the same time you have to try to hold the line with a degree of certainty in the workplace. One of the hardest questions to answer is always 'what is your thesis about? And I think that as we keep reading and discussing and inevitably changing direction, you must be left very confused in*

*the midst of all this. Your situation makes me think of Joan Scott's article 'Experience' about becoming visible 'Making visible the experience of a different groups exposes the existence of repressive mechanisms, but not their inner workings or logic' (Scott, 1992, p. 25).*

*As you are grappling to understand and deconstruct the discourses in the training sector you are involved in it is interesting to recall the need to historicise both experience and the identities it produces- quite a challenge in your context!*

*But remember, as Scott (1992, p. 25) writes, 'It is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience.'*

*Jennifer*

### **Voice 2 (Continued): *Performing, but having fun***

Jennifer's words resonated. I was allowing myself to be seduced by those 'ideological-discursive formations' (Fairclough, 1995, p. 25).

At this point I also realised I wanted to be creative with my thesis. I was reading Deleuze and the importance of connections and becoming, and re-examining narrative inquiry and D/discourse, and I wrote in my journal: *Numerous threads connecting. Linking threads like a cob web. Look up construction of cob webs.* This led me to the orb spider web and my metaphor, which I integrated into the draft of my thesis. It seems to work. This prompted me to read more about the use of metaphors in qualitative research. Through this, I made numerous connections with narrative, reflective practice and discourse analysis. I was really having fun. While I felt I had a legitimate place and identity, I occasionally felt something was missing or lacking. Then I learned that one of the three research sites had rejected my application.

### **Voice 1 (revisited): *Who am I?***

### **Voice 3: *Stuff them!***

I shared my journal entry with Jennifer.

*Jennifer,*

*I am really annoyed. Who do they think they are? And the reason is actually incorrect. I think it's an excuse. Did they read all of the material? Doubts!! Is my research of value? Am I of value? You know, I think have been focused on others' expectations (audience, markers, supervisors). But, those expectations are based on my assumptions. I've not asked and I really don't know what is expected, except of course what you expect. Well, "stuff them!" I have to be true to myself. I want this to be a journey where I learn heaps (about me) and my thinking and practice. I don't just want a PhD. I want to produce something that is meaningful academically. I want my thesis to be a masterpiece! I can write fairly well and I will analyse and extrapolate meaningful things from the data. Regardless of what happens from here, I'm committed to doing something significant.*

*When I think about the traveller and the wayfarer I realise that most of the time I'm a wayfarer. I love going off on tangents and learning new and different things; some I bring along, others I have to leave for another time and place. If I look at this rejection as a flat tyre, I'll replace it and drive on. I'm going to rethink my thesis because I suspect that one of the other two research sites will also say no. I need to be positive and ahead of things. There is **so** much to take in and consider. I've realised how powerful and useful journaling is (on an individual level) and our conversations are (in a collective sense) in dealing with self-doubt and feeling discombobulated.*

*Cheryl*

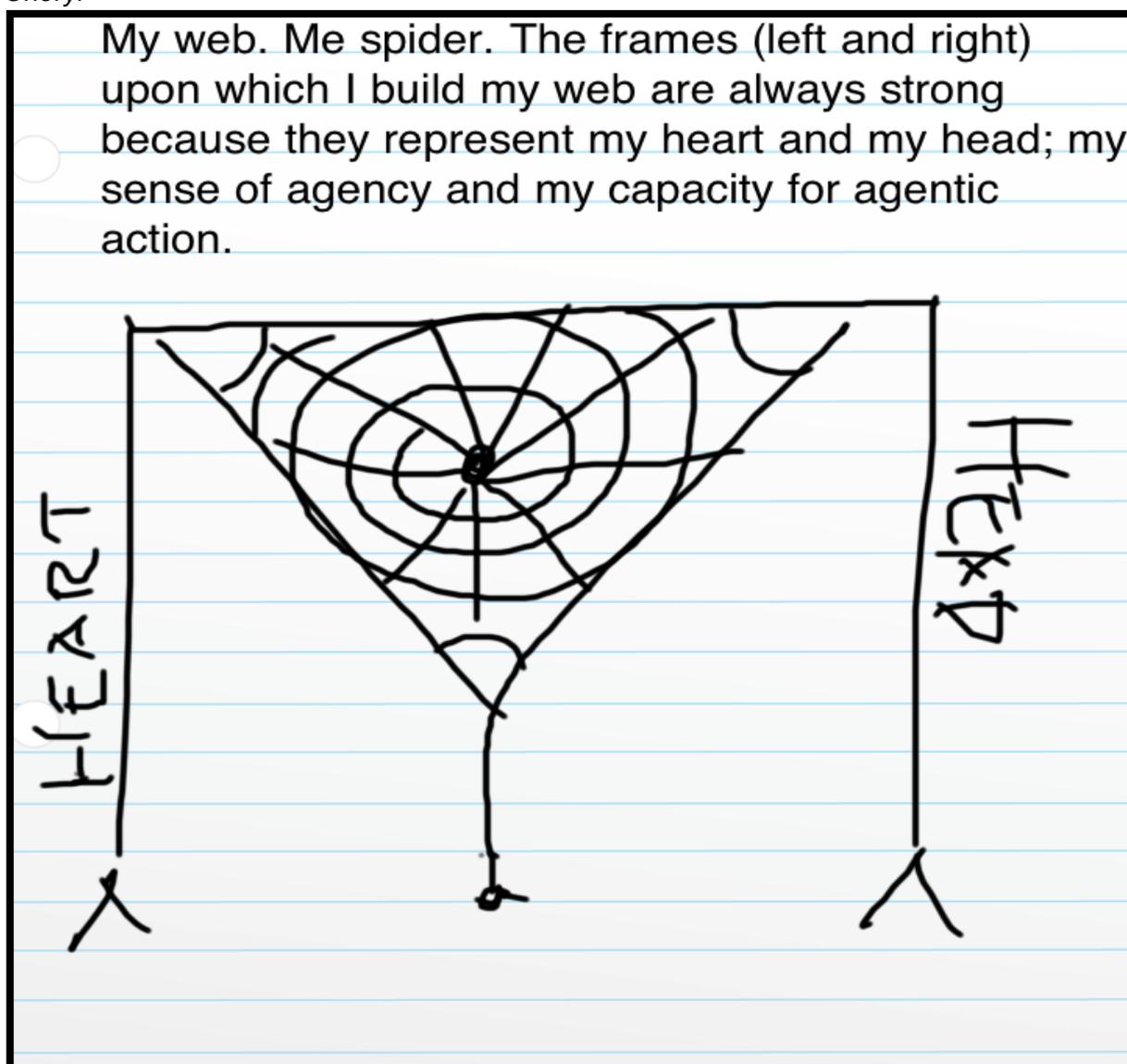
### **Voice 4: *Look out, here I come!***

I continued to reflect on my research and I sent Jennifer another email, with a copy to Christine. I was inspired by Christine's depiction of her thesis as a puzzle. It was great. So I tried to 'picture up' mine.

*Jennifer and Christine,*

*Here is a drawing of my web. I've been journaling and reading Laurel Richardson today. I like her approach. She got me thinking. What I choose to research, how I choose to present it, and for whom are essentially about my agency. I'm researching and writing about reflective practice as a tool to develop professional practice (beyond rhetoric). I'm passionate about this. Police represent a vehicle and I guess a different and somewhat interesting one. I realise I have lacked balance locating my theoretical and methodological positions. I've been looking at things from within my head and not my heart. My head = theories and methodologies. My heart = values and disciplines (e.g., social justice, conceptions of difference, power, relationships, D/discourse, identity, gender, and learning that transforms). I anticipate feeling more settled and (dare I say) certain (ouch!) about how I will theorise and analyse my research when using both my head and my heart. Back to journaling.*

*Cheryl*



*Jennifer,*

*As I predicted, the other research site also said no. Well this settles it. I'm going to change the title of my thesis, removing reference to police. I'm focusing on the end being my master piece: my*

*thesis, my web. I need to remember that I'm the spider, I'm at the centre of my web, I'm in control (well to a degree and within reason... can't control participants and organisations). I have the approval of one research site now and I'm going to make it meaningful.*

*Cheryl*

A day or so later, after more journaling and brainstorming on butcher's paper, I have greater focus.

*Jennifer,*

*I've had a productive and stimulating day reworking my thesis. I really like what I've got. It makes sense and I think it will work (as long as all the participants cooperate - just joshing!). I felt like I was in 'the zone'. I'm really excited! It'll be a case study that happens to be set within a police training environment. It's unique in that it is about a paradigmatic shift in thinking and practice. It will be exploratory and explanatory, with a critical analysis. I'll use multiple sources of data. You know, this seems doable and more meaningful. Strike this is an eventful journey! I've learned so much and I feel much better about where I am now. I'm still the spider in my web!*

*Cheryl*

Then I had an exceptionally challenging and stimulating professional supervision session with my critical friend, and I was able to consolidate things even more.

*Jennifer,*

*I had a fantastic meeting with my critical friend early this week. I've realised a number of things. (1) I know I have written about this before, and you've reminded me of this too: those 'ideological-discursive formations' (Fairclough, 1995, p.25). I am seduced and influenced ++ by what I experience every day at work. I engage with people (and a culture) whose D/discourse is technical / rational (black and white, no grey). It's a strong and powerful D/discourse that demands attention. It permeates police work, training and how learning occurs. It doesn't sit well with me and my values and disciplines, and being alone in such an environment means I have to work with it, not completely against it. I can sort of stand apart from it, but, only to a degree. My thinking has been constrained by this D/discourse. My research questions were 'head' (technical/rational) questions. My heart didn't feature. (2) So we brainstormed my expectations, what I was passionate about, and three research questions have been reduced to two and reworded. They better reflect what I want to and will research. I was so excited after our meeting that I couldn't sleep. But then I had to go to work and put on my technical / rational hat again. But, look out, here I come!*

*Yours full of insights.*

*Cheryl*

## **Conclusion**

### ***Final words: Christine***

Earlier in this paper when 'situating myself' I used a reference to Baker and Pifer (2011) regarding the importance of relationships in the journeying process. My community of practice with Cheryl and Jennifer isn't the only one that I participate in that supports me on my journey. I have formed a community (of two) of practice with another Deakin HDR candidate; Conrad (2006) also suggests this type of support mechanism. The other candidate and I have reflected that our haphazard and infrequent catch-ups are very important to each of us. We are also in agreement that sometimes it is imperative to *avoid* forming communities of practice with other doctoral students. Candidates who don't stop talking about their own work and how *productive* they have been and the wonderful ways they are going to ensure that they keep to their timeline can be extremely draining emotionally. It is often not helpful to be in their company. It is important to find fellow travellers who energise, empathise and do not judge.

Cheryl's and my research interests are different. We are quite different personalities. We meet however, in a shared space of frustration and uncertainty during a doctoral journey. We are each finding our own way while respecting the other's dilemmas. My knowledge of Cheryl's (figurative) proximity is reassuring. I also gain reassurance from the knowledge of other doctoral travellers. Additionally, Jennifer has encouraged Cheryl and me to learn alongside her, as apprentices might do, and to use each other to make sense of our own research questions and our own perspectives. Frequently it is the process of articulating to each other, rather than the actual response, that results in reflexive learning. Jennifer's approach links neatly to work by Craig (1999, p. 163) who indicates that a group (she uses the term 'knowledge community') such as that consisting of Jennifer, Cheryl and I is 'the individuals and groups of people with whom educators make sense of their practices'.

I have a number of communities of practice –some are with people who are neither on a doctoral journey nor have completed one. However those people are interested in me and my work and I am interested in them and their work. Interactions with them provide refreshing 'rest stops'. One community of practice that has become important to me is the informal and untitled one that has resulted as a consequence of working in several teaching teams within the School of Education at Deakin.

As you travel to new places, you will learn much from those who have walked these trails before you. They will provide you with direction, yet they will respect your journey and let you find your own way. They are the travellers of days gone by and they have much wisdom to share with you. Listen to their voices and learn alongside them (Whelan, 1999, p. 23).

Many of the staff with whom I work have completed their respective doctoral journeys and subsequently know well the struggles involved. They understand the involuntary hijacking of good intention when an interesting side trip beckons (whether as distraction or for the promise of research reward). These people are quietly supportive and respectful. Importantly (to me) they are inclusive – not erecting barriers during my journey and ready to welcome me at the end. A supportive, inclusive faculty environment for PhD candidates can be linked to the old saying of 'it takes a village to raise a child'. As Gonzci (2004, p.28) has said 'progressive participation involves the learner developing an identity as a member of the group'. My changing identity as I move further into academia is being influenced by various relationships and the membership of groups that have become available to me as a result of my doctoral journey (reading groups, teaching teams, fellow students, supervisor as mentor, self as apprentice).

As with all things though there is a downside to collaborative opportunity. Conrad (2006, p. 37) highlights a dilemma of collaborative learning, which resonates strongly when I struggle to make time to work with myself. A dilemma is how, in a busy life, to ensure that I can engage with others while finding interludes of lengthy quiet time to draw on, or into, myself and be creative, reflective and productive. For me it is a balance between drawing on communities of practice (Whelan, 1991) and the words of Caddy (2011) who says 'Never be afraid to tread the path alone. Know which is your path and follow it wherever it may lead you; do not feel you have to follow in someone else's footsteps'.

I hope these narratives of the ongoing and in-process struggles of finding meaning in doctoral journeys might resonate with other doctoral students and their supervisors. As Polkinghorne (1988, p.1) indicates, narrative is 'the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful'. However it could also be said that our human experiences are made meaningful by being able to express them to others as narratives.

***Final Words: Cheryl***

Kamler and Thomson's (2006, p.17, emphasis in original) words resonate with me: '*Identities are continually being made and remade in and as action*'. I am establishing my identity as a PhD candidate through my conversations with Jennifer, Christine and my critical friend, and journaling and writing conference papers and various iterations of the chapters in my thesis. In "looking at" and listening to my voices I realise they are 'taking the form of different and divergent "durations"' (Deleuze cited in Colebrook, 2002, p.41) that represent my 'divergent becomings' (Colebrook, 2002, p.40). By exploring and sharing my 'divergent becomings' (Colebrook, 2002, p.40), my journey has been a generative process as I 'move backwards and forwards' (Colebrook, 2002, p.40) across and through time and experiences. I have overcome health issues, turned adversity (i.e., rejection) into advantage, balanced my head and my heart, recognised the power of 'ideological-discursive formations' (Fairclough, 1995, p.25), and strengthened my voice and position as PhD candidate, member of the academic community, and a non-police employee in a police organisation.

### **Final Words: Jennifer**

Inevitably, as with all research groups, at times we seem to share common understandings, common trajectories, and at other times we seem to find it difficult to find the links that can bring divergent projects together. At times I wonder if indeed trying to sustain a shared project is achievable, but then, as each shift in thinking takes hold, I believe that the process itself has proved worthwhile, in trying to create a sense of community. Looking back over the past twelve months of our journey together, I can see how far we have all travelled, and how differently, I hope, you might see your doctoral journey at this stage. In the beginning there was that need for reassurance and certainty, which now you might look back on and see that both were impossible. We have gone off on so many tangents in our reading, discussions, and writing, following our disparate 'lines of flight', exploring our shared 'habitus' and most recently coming back to settle again, where perhaps, you thought you were at the beginning, back to methodology!

What we call the beginning is often the end  
And to make an end is to make a beginning.  
The end is where we start from....  
Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning  
(Eliot, 1963, p. 221).

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