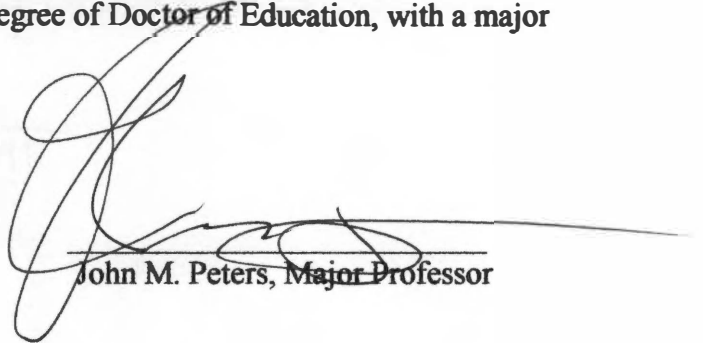


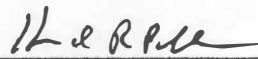
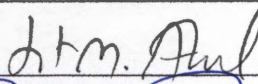
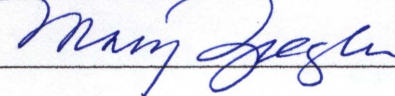
To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Betty B. Ragland entitled "Razor Wire Cuts Both Ways: Teaching Inside a Juvenile Institution." I have examined the final paper copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education, with a major in Educational Psychology and Counseling.



John M. Peters, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council



Vice Chancellor and Dean of
Graduate Studies

To the Graduate Council

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Betty B. Kagan and entitled "Kagan, Betty B. (1925-1995): Teaching Inside a Juvenile Institution". I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education with a major in Educational Psychology and Counseling.

Thesis
2005b
.R24

John M. Peters, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:

[Signature]
[Signature]
[Signature]

Accepted for the Council

[Signature]
Vice Chancellor and Dean of
Graduate Studies

Razor Wire Cuts Both Ways: Teaching Inside a Juvenile Institution

A

Dissertation Presented for the

Doctor of Education Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

**Betty B. Ragland
May 2005**

Lesson Plans for Teaching Reading and Writing

Copyright © 2005 by Betty B. Ragland

All rights reserved.

Preparation for the

Teacher Education Program

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Betty B. Ragland
May 2005

A Dedication

This is not my first journey. I have been blessed to travel
To Warren, my true companion, in this and other journeys

The journey of a lifetime is a journey of discovery. It is a journey of growth and learning. It is a journey of love and compassion. It is a journey of hope and faith. It is a journey of courage and strength. It is a journey of wisdom and understanding. It is a journey of peace and harmony. It is a journey of joy and happiness. It is a journey of life and death. It is a journey of eternity.

I have traveled the journey of a lifetime. I have seen the world from many different perspectives. I have learned many things about myself and about the world. I have found love and happiness. I have found peace and harmony. I have found joy and happiness. I have found life and death. I have found eternity.

My journey has been a journey of discovery. It has been a journey of growth and learning. It has been a journey of love and compassion. It has been a journey of hope and faith. It has been a journey of courage and strength. It has been a journey of wisdom and understanding. It has been a journey of peace and harmony. It has been a journey of joy and happiness. It has been a journey of life and death. It has been a journey of eternity.

My journey has been a journey of discovery. It has been a journey of growth and learning. It has been a journey of love and compassion. It has been a journey of hope and faith. It has been a journey of courage and strength. It has been a journey of wisdom and understanding. It has been a journey of peace and harmony. It has been a journey of joy and happiness. It has been a journey of life and death. It has been a journey of eternity.

Acknowledgements

This is not my work alone. Every step along the way I have been blessed to travel with extraordinary companions, without whose insights and generous contributions this journey would have been impossible.

The Department of Children's Services has provided support for this research. In particular I thank Mountain View Superintendent Gary Morris for his willingness to recommend and shepherd my proposal through the departmental approval process. Principal Ron Pickard provided encouragement and good counsel, as well as rescuing me from computer glitches. Director of Education Mary Meador has given her support and encouragement. Education Consultants Jeff Finney and Jay Stetzel have been valuable sounding boards.

I have treasured the opportunity to learn with the various cohorts of the Collaborative Learning program at the University of Tennessee, especially C3, my own boon companions. In particular I thank Allyson Muth for exemplifying a collaborative spirit.

My committee members have challenged me to consider ideas, perspectives, and frames of reference I might never have encountered but for them. I thank Howard Pollio for introducing me to Merleau-Ponty and for altering the way I look at the world. Janet Atwill has forever changed the way I experience language; I owe her also for introducing me to Bourdieu. Mary Ziegler has encouraged me to attend more carefully to how I engage my readers. And John Peters has welcomed me to travel with him on a path to joint creation of a new way of being.

And most especially I owe thanks to a remarkable group of people who show up each day to teach in one of the most exasperating, heart-rending, challenging, exhausting, and rewarding places imaginable. Without their generosity, courage, and willingness to examine our individual and joint realities, this work would not exist. They have been, not only research participants, but also co-researchers. It is my hope that our work together will contribute to human flourishing—our own and that of others. These people have been, for me and for each other, truly a “community of resources”: Dale Barstow, David Brown, Jessica Davis, Deidre Justice, Rex Kitts, Loretta McHan, Debra Merritt, Louie Neblett, Linda Russell, and Anne Smith.

Abstract

The researcher is an educator working in a juvenile correctional facility. In this study she invited 12 of her colleagues as co-researchers to explore their shared practice and to foster change in the workplace culture. Each participant engaged in a phenomenological interview designed to elicit perceptions of teaching in a correctional institution. The researcher then facilitated group sessions in a collaborative learning effort to construct shared meaning of their joint practice. Follow-up interviews, as well as thematic and language analysis of data obtained from audiotaping and transcribing interviews and group sessions, suggest changes in participants' perceptions of their practice and of their colleagues. Themes developed across data sets include perceptions of the environment, both inside and outside the institution; relationships with others—including students, colleagues, and family members, and personal experience of the practice, all of which are subject to struggles or battles. The length of time engaged in the practice influences how each of these themes is experienced. The use of metaphors and of personal pronouns is also examined; results indicate that the form of participant comments is congruent with the content of those comments. By engaging in collaborative learning in eight group sessions over three months, participants were able to construct joint understandings about their shared experience. These understandings were expressed in terms of *knowing where we are coming from*, *making sense of our experience*, and *recognizing the shape of our experience*. This study suggests implications for workplace culture change initiatives in other settings.

Table of Contents

Preface	1
Chapter I: Description of the Practice	4
The Facility	4
Aspects of Teaching Inside an Institution	8
History	13
Current Events	17
My Practice	20
Chapter II: Analysis--Perspectives on the Practice	23
Subjective Experience of the Practice	25
Objective vs. Reflective Perspectives	30
Frames of Reference	37
Personal Stakes	41
Reflection on the Process	44
Chapter III: Matters of Theory	46
Social Constructionism	47
Language	49
Collaborative Learning	51
Chapter IV: Plan of Action	56
Chapter V: Design	61
The Participants	61
Methodology	62
Analysis of Data	65
Validity	66
Chapter VI: Analysis of First Interviews	68
Themes from the First Interviews	68
Struggle/Battle—An Engagement on Many Fronts	77
Time—The <i>“life span of the job”</i>	81
Metaphors from the First Interviews	84
Chapter VII: Analysis of Group Sessions	89
Themes as Developed in Group Sessions	90
Metaphors from the Group Sessions	94
Chapter VIII: Analysis of Findings--Follow-Up Interviews	102
Themes Developed in Follow-Up Interviews	102
Metaphors from the Follow-Up Interviews	108
Chapter IX: Synthesis	111
Themes and Metaphors Across Data Sets	111
Roles and Positions	113
Group Knowing	119
Chapter X: Revisiting Practical Theory	125
Sins of the Facilitator	125
Blinded by the Dominant Paradigm	127
Collaborative Learning	127
Revising the Practical Theory	136

Chapter XI: Implications for Future Actions	138
For the Practice	138
For the Field	141
References	143
Vita	147

Preface

In March of 1990 I entered a life-world at Mountain View Youth Development Center, a newly-constructed regional juvenile correctional facility in Dandridge, Tennessee. I still remember the first time an electronic door slammed shut behind me, locking me inside a building where no windows open and all doors are remotely controlled. I had crossed the border to another country, and I felt near-panic, tiny icy footprints running down my spine, my hair standing on end, my stomach lurching against my ribs, the metallic taste of fear on my tongue. Suddenly it was difficult to breathe. I wanted desperately to run or to turn and beat on the metal door to be let out. But I knew it would not avail; it was, after all, my job.

For the past fifteen years I have walked through that same door, but I am increasingly convinced that I am not the same, nor are any of my colleagues the same as we were before this experience. Just as incarceration radically affects the children in our care, we are also changed, perhaps in ways we only dimly sense. Although I am aware of some of these changes, I wondered what other effects there might be. I proposed an action research project with my colleagues in order to explore our experience of teaching inside a juvenile institution. I wished to look closely, listen carefully, and speak openly with my colleagues in an effort to learn how this experience has changed us and our worlds. I wanted then to co-create with them changes that might make the workplace culture more supportive of us as we labor in this difficult environment.

I had no wish to become completely objective—to separate myself from my colleagues and my own involvement in the practice or to study the practice as if it existed

✓

outside myself. As Gergen rightly asks, “What is it for professionals to inform the world that we know most about each other when we care the least, when we are cool and distant? Is this a good model for our relations with each other?” (1999, p. 91). I sought rather a situated knowing that results in practical understanding, a means of going on (Wittgenstein, 1953/2001) together with my colleagues. Therefore, I chose to engage in action research with my colleagues rather than on them. My research followed Peters’ (2002, 2004) DATA-DATA format because its emphasis on cycles of action and reflection forced me as a researcher to examine my assumptions, my values, and my relational responsibilities (McNamee & Gergen, 1999) within my practice. **DATA-I** focuses the researcher on an exploration of her practice through a rich Description of the practice and an Analysis of underlying assumptions, proposed strategies, and rationale for the research. Based on information, issues, and reasons surfaced during these first two stages, the researcher formulates a practical Theory to shape and guide the research effort. In the last stage of DATA-I, the researcher Acts on her theory. **DATA-II** provides for not only what is usually considered to be the matter of research, the Design of the study and the Analysis of results, but also leads the researcher to re-examine her Theory in light of the research results and literature in the field, as well as to formulate new practical theories as a basis for (Action) going on in the practice.

Workplace cultures are constructed by the people who inhabit them through their joint meaning-making around common experiences. Most of these “moments of common reference” (Shotter, 1993) simply happen to people or are imposed upon them from the outside by management, the environment, or changes in the economy. This study explores the development of a common reference from within a group of teachers

working behind the fences of a juvenile correctional institution. Twelve of my colleagues volunteered to become co-researchers with me in this venture. Reflecting on our own experiences as they surfaced in phenomenological interviews and were made available to all participants in transcription, we then engaged in collaborative learning, “people laboring together to create new knowledge” (Peters and Armstrong, 1998; in press). Initial and follow-up interviews, as well as all group sessions, were audio-taped, transcribed, and subjected to thematic and language analysis. Participants verified that this analysis captured their experience.

Our jointly constructed meaning-making enabled us to see ourselves as competent, thoughtful professionals, experts in our fields, who were operating out of a practical mastery (Bourdieu, 1977/2002, 1990) which, though tacit, could be accessed by inquiry and reflection. Such a moment of common reference gave us a new starting place for our going on together, a “knowing where we are coming from” as several participants reflected. This study has implications for workplace culture change initiatives in other environments.

Chapter I: Description of the Practice

Following Peters' (2004) recommendations to generate a rich description of my practice from a phenomenological stance as a basis for further exploration, in this chapter I describe two aspects of my experiences of working at Mountain View: features of a hardware-secure environment and facets of teaching inside the institution. I also describe critical incidents in our shared history and current experience of the joint practice as well as of my individual practice as a supervisor of teachers inside a juvenile correctional facility.

The Facility

Mountain View Youth Development Center is a hardware-secure facility located inside the Dandridge city limits in Jefferson County, Tennessee. The complex of red brick buildings, dubbed the "Blue Roof Inn" by the locals, is surrounded by a 15-foot fence with razor wire in strategic locations. Anyone entering facility grounds, including the parking lot, is subject to search; these searches may extend to automobiles, briefcases or purses, or a pat search of one's person. Visitors, staff members, and students are routinely frisked. Students are strip searched after visitation with family members or on returning from home passes or court appearances. Visitors to the facility must surrender or return to their vehicles items such as purses, pocket knives, diaper bags, food items, and medications. They must also pass through a metal detector as soon as they enter the facility from the lobby. Three remotely controlled electronic doors separate areas of student access from the lobby and parking lot. Security cameras monitor numerous

locations within the facility. These are features that characterize the facility as hardware-secure.

Mountain View is one of three regional facilities; the catchment area is the east grand region, extending south from Mountain City to Chattanooga and east from the Cumberland Plateau to the North Carolina border. Male students aged 12 through 19 are placed at Mountain View according to institutional criteria: a minimum of three felonies, a capital crime such as murder or kidnapping, or for their own safety with Commissioner approval. Mountain View has the capacity to house 144 juveniles who have been adjudicated to DCS custody. The facility is a 24-hour live-in residential program and security is a top priority. Children's Services Officers (CSOs) are on duty at all times; these CSOs are unarmed but have extensive training in non-violent crisis intervention. No weapons, including mace and pepper spray, are allowed on the grounds. Counseling staff on the dorms provide alcohol and drug group counseling sessions, anger management, and rope course activities, as well as individual and family counseling. There are two specialized sex-offender units, and contract mental health professionals are available for referrals.

Mountain View School is part of a special school district approved by the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) and operated through the Department of Children's Services (DCS) to serve incarcerated juveniles. The school is made up of 16 classrooms, the majority of which, along with the school office and library, are located in the administrative building. Most of the classrooms include a small half bath; there are no common student restrooms. Two confinement rooms in this building are used when students become physically out of control. These concrete seven by nine rooms have a

built-in ledge that serves as a bench or bed and a combination stainless steel sink and toilet. The steel door of the confinement room has a small square of plexiglass for sight observations that are required at 15-minute intervals. This door can be opened only from the electronic panel in the control booth. Because of the nature of the population, safety and security concerns are a priority, and sight supervision of students is required at all times. Some learning experiences, particularly science labs, are extremely difficult to provide because of the safety concerns. There is, for example, no dissecting of frogs with scalpels at Mountain View.

Mountain View School offers the standard high school curriculum set by the Tennessee Department of Education, including all classes required for high school graduation on the technical path. Remedial classes are available in math and language arts. We have several students who have not yet completed middle school; therefore we must also offer seventh and eighth, and occasionally even sixth grade curriculum. Vocational courses include construction, food preparation, nursery/landscaping, and commercial art. A General Education Development (GED) program is available for students who are 17 or older and who will be unable to earn the number of credits necessary to achieve a high school diploma in one school year. Class sizes are small compared to community schools; the average student-teacher ratio is eight to one. Remedial and special education classes are usually even smaller.

The School employs 22 full-time teachers, 3 instructional assistants, 2 administrators, and a school secretary. Of the current school staff, 11 are males and 14 are female; we currently have 5 vacancies. Twenty percent (20%) are African American; the remaining eighty percent (80%) are White. Ten staff members hold Master's degrees;

approximately half of those have additional hours beyond the Master's. Three of the vocational teachers have not completed Bachelor's degrees; instead they hold Trade Shop licenses based on at least five years' experience in their vocational field and completion of an 18-hour block of education courses. The certified staff has a combined total of 308 years teaching experience, an average of 14 years; eight of the teachers, a little more than one-third of the teaching staff, have no teaching experience outside Mountain View.

My job title is Correctional Teacher Supervisor, but most people would be more familiar with the equivalent term of "Assistant Principal." I directly supervise 12 Correctional Teachers, 3 Teacher Assistants, and the school secretary, complete evaluations for both TDOE and DCS, oversee curriculum, plan and deliver training and professional development programs, schedule students and complete transcripts, provide instructional support for teachers, and deal with disciplinary issues with students. While the latter duties are by far the most important to me, the institutional demands on my practice require a great deal of my work time to be spent in mandatory paperwork.

From time to time and for extended periods, I have been the only administrator in this school, supervising a staff of 26 and a student body averaging 130. I answer to three state departments—TDOE, TDOP (personnel), and DCS-- and an accrediting agency, the American Correctional Association. In addition, approximately 40% of our students are served in special education; therefore federal mandates (IDEA) apply. As a result of settlement agreements resulting from prior lawsuits, my department (DCS) employs attorneys at the facility level for student consultation. We may indeed be in the unique position of paying people to sue us.

Aspects of Teaching Inside an Institution

Critical features differentiate the experience of being a teacher/supervisor at Mountain View Youth Development Center from that of our colleagues in community schools. First, our students are all adjudicated juvenile delinquents, many of whom have incurred very serious charges, including rape and murder, and most of whom have multiple charges. Almost all of our students have experienced considerable difficulty in their previous school history; admission testing reveals that the average IQ for our student body is 87, and students test two to three years below age norms in both language and mathematics achievement. Whether this disparity reflects real achievement gaps or their inability/unwillingness to do well on tests is a moot point, since academic achievement for all children in the state of Tennessee is measured by results on state-mandated tests. For some of our students, previous school records consist of page after page of disciplinary offenses. For others, there are multiple placements, as many as six, within a single school year, or entire school years without any record of school attendance. Many cannot return to public schools in their home counties. Public schools gave up on these children long ago. Unfortunately, we can neither suspend nor expel students; we are the ultimate alternative school.

Therefore, we work inside a security fence topped with razor wire within buildings where no windows open, every door is locked, and simply getting to one's classroom requires passage through three electronically controlled steel doors and a fourth heavy wooden door which can only be opened by one of three people. Because of the nature of our population, no student can ever be out of sight supervision. We have three formal "counts" during each school day, and each teacher counts her students two

or three times within a class period. Vocational teachers count, and account for, not only tools, but also screws and nails, tea bags, yeast, plastic bags, even pencils. A bathroom break requires the teacher to summon a security officer to watch over the classroom. Six of these classrooms have non-operational windows that admit daylight; other classrooms and offices, including my own, are arranged around an interior hallway and lack any view of the outside world. We know it is raining outside if the horticulture students are wet. At least once a month in the spring and summer, lightning strikes somewhere on the campus and shorts out the control board so that all electronic doors are rendered inoperable except by the shift supervisor's master key. Worse yet, the power surge may be sufficient to plunge the facility into darkness, requiring that we immediately move students to hallway areas dimly lit by the emergency generator. A rational explanation for the frequency of lightning strikes is the location of a radio tower near the facility. Folk wisdom holds with the story that the facility is located on an old Indian burial ground.

Teachers in the administrative building communicate with security officers or with the school office by yelling from their classroom doors; there is no intercom system and classrooms lack telephones or panic buttons. Teachers who hold classes outside this building carry two-way radios that usually work. These teachers line up their students and escort them to classrooms in the common areas of the living units. The horticulture teacher has a greenhouse behind the gymnasium and a garden area close by. Not only do his students frequently use tools such as shovels and pruners, but also his location is out of sight from the control booth and separated from the main campus by a fence. The music teacher, who is also the Special Education Coordinator, conducts two music classes in a common area of a living unit, as does the health/wellness teacher. In order to

enter or leave these buildings, they must radio the control booth to open the steel entry doors.

Since Mountain View is a year-round school without breaks except for state holidays, there are very limited opportunities for us to meet with other members of the teaching profession. Professional development opportunities are hard to come by, since most of these are scheduled around the 10-month calendars of public school teachers. Substitute teachers are difficult to find and impossible to keep. Whenever any teacher takes time off, her colleagues cover her classes. In a very real sense we function as security officers first and teachers second.

We work in an environment where our students may claim to our faces that we are not “real” teachers, and our colleagues across the institution frequently voice their resentment at the pay differential between teachers and all other job classes. The administrators of the facility are not educators, and there are numerous instances of local policies and/or decisions that negatively affect teachers and teaching. In general we lack community with either our teacher colleagues in local school districts or our institutional colleagues.

Further we lack the kind of connection that teachers in community schools maintain with their students. Our student population is characterized by a degree of mobility that community schools seldom face. The “beginning of the term” is a meaningless concept. It is a rare day when a teacher does not gain or lose a student; the semester begins when the child does. Students may have been in class for less than a month when state-mandated testing is administered. The average length of stay is approximately six months; in any calendar year we may have served three to four times

the number of students indicated by our average daily attendance (ADA). Since Mountain View is one of three regional juvenile youth development centers in the state, we have historically been at capacity, with students in the community on waiting lists.

We are forbidden by policy to have any contact with our students for six months after they leave the institution; any contact thereafter is frowned upon but not officially prohibited. Though some students call to let us know that they are enrolled in school or have gained employment, we seldom hear success stories. On the other hand we frequently see our students in the newspapers or in the evening news, sometimes as perpetrators of crimes, sometimes as victims. We work with children for months or years and see them change and grow, laugh and be the children their lives have never permitted them to be. Then we send them home to the heartbreaking reality of chaotic homes, or to homelessness, or to the streets. The really bad days are those on which we learn that a child we have struggled with and over, taught, and cared for, is dead. Newspaper pictures of bullet-ridden cars bear mute testimony to their violent ends.

Despite these real and critical differences, we are held to the same standards of accountability as other administrators, teachers, and students elsewhere in the state. We are an approved special school district, our teachers and administrators must meet and maintain licensure requirements, and our students must pass all state-mandated tests. We currently administer 18 state-mandated tests per year, along with the 4 scheduled GED tests. As do community schools, we struggle to find and retain qualified and committed teachers. I have been a part of this faculty for over 13 years, and a supervisor for 12 of those years.

Perhaps because of the necessary element of maintaining security, the management of Mountain View Youth Development Center is based on a military model. There is an organizational chart that sets out the “lines of supervision.” Security officers wear uniforms and progress through the “ranks” from CSO (Children’s Services Officer) to Lieutenant. For years my Job Performance Plan has included an objective to “observe the chain of command.” Decisions are made at the department level in Nashville or at the facility level in senior management meetings and passed down through middle managers and line supervisors. I am considered a middle manager, and I have observed first-hand the effects of this management strategy, which preserves the status of rank at the expense of empowerment for those who exercise direct supervision of delinquent youth.

I am primarily interested in the experience of teaching inside a juvenile institution, as we teachers seem to be particularly vulnerable to the stresses of working inside an institutional environment. Most people enter the teaching profession because we believe in the transformative power of learning and because we believe in children. Such assumptions create great tension in dealing with incarcerated juveniles who are both victims and perpetrators. These are children whose histories of abuse and neglect break our hearts and whose behavior in the present can imperil us and those around us. Dealing with evil embodied in a child requires of us that we regularly examine our own humanity. Further, the experience of teaching in any environment carries with it a degree of isolation; we spend our professional lives surrounded by children who are in our care and for whom we are responsible. We conduct our profession in classrooms in which we are both kings and prisoners. Teaching in an institution is physically and psychologically isolating because we are embedded in a culture foreign to most. And so I wonder how

teaching in this environment affects us and how we can become a “community of resources” (Katz & Shotter, 1999) for each other.

The special nature of our student population requires of us a constant vigilance. Unfortunately, our students are not the only source of tension. There are events in our shared history that have shaped our perceptions of the workplace.

History

Mountain View Youth Development Center is part of a grand experiment. In 1988 Corrections Corporation of America (CCA), a privately held company operating adult facilities throughout the southeast, entered into a contract with the Tennessee Department of Corrections to build two identical juvenile correctional facilities. Mountain View, which opened in April of 1990, was to be administered by CCA; Woodland Hills, the sister institution in Nashville, opened in November of 1990 under the administration of the Tennessee Department of Youth Development (DYD), newly created as a separate department. This venture was undertaken as a 5-year experiment to compare the cost-effectiveness of administering juvenile treatment facilities by private industry and by state government. However, in June of 1992, CCA served notice of intent to end the contract for administering Mountain View, having discovered that the costs of operating a juvenile correctional facility far exceeded their original calculations. At the stroke of midnight on New Year’s Eve, 1992, administration of the facility was transferred to DYD.

The Riot

I was originally hired in March of 1990, shortly before the facility opened, as a member of a small contingency of state employees on site for student classifications and contract monitoring. Given the competitive nature of this business undertaking and the potential costs and benefits both to CCA and to state employees, it was probably inevitable that we few state employees would be considered as the “enemy.” However, it soon became clear that there was little time or opportunity to engage in intra-facility skirmishes. The May Day riot of 1990, in which several staff members were injured and extensive property damage was incurred, required the intervention of local law enforcement to re-establish order. Even though I was not personally involved in the melee, as I was locked in a rear section of the administration building, I was unable to leave my office for several hours. I had no way of knowing what was actually going on, though I could see law enforcement vehicles arriving from surrounding counties, along with mobile units from several television stations. I later learned that 75 law enforcement officers from surrounding cities and counties, including Tennessee wildlife officers and Tennessee Highway Patrol officers, had responded. I could hear shouts, doors slamming, objects thrown or shoved against walls, and glass breaking. When I was finally able to leave my office, I saw dazed and bloodied staff members, their uniforms torn and stained. The school classrooms looked like a war zone; every book in the library was on the floor.

Such was my initiation into working inside an institution. My risk assessment of the workplace was radically transformed that day, and the lessons learned are a legacy for all of us in this environment even for staff members hired many years hence. The contract staff at Mountain View were quick to lay blame on DYD and particularly “those people

in Nashville,” bitterly complaining, “They sent us the worst kids in the state.” While there may have been some truth in that claim, it is also true that the CCA staff had not been prepared for the reality of twenty-year-olds who looked like NFL linebackers. In fact, some of the juveniles in custody were older than the security guards. The original plan had been to move the student population into the facility in small groups, allowing the staff time to become accustomed to their new job responsibilities, as had been done at Riverbend, the adult high-maximum security facility in Nashville. However, CCA, after laying out construction and personnel expenses, was being paid a per diem rate only for students on campus. Therefore, they requested an acceleration of students to full capacity. The facility went from 0 to 144 students in less than three weeks. Facility staff were never told of this request, so they naturally blamed DYD for dumping students on them en masse. Thus began the perception that Nashville was the source of all problems.

High staff turnover rates, especially in some job classes, continue; it is not uncommon for new staff members to walk out after their first day on the job. On the other hand, visitors often express surprise at quiet and orderly school classrooms and evidence of student achievement. It is hard to know what expectations have been formed before actual contact with this environment.

The Search

One event in our fairly recent history had effects that continue to reverberate into the present. In late February of 2001, members of the Internal Affairs division descended on the institution in paramilitary fashion, dressed in black fatigues with high-topped leather boots. The facility superintendent and most of the senior management were away

from the facility. No staff member was allowed to leave until his or her vehicle was searched. Employees were questioned and advised to declare any items that might be considered weapons, drugs, or firearms. If the search revealed any items that might remotely fall into these categories, these items were confiscated. Our newly hired school secretary had in her car an antique pistol that had belonged to her recently deceased father. Not only was this weapon unloaded, inoperable, and secured inside a locked vehicle, ammunition for it could no longer be obtained. She was subjected to harassment and ridicule and coerced to resign rather than face criminal prosecution. A social studies teacher suffered a similar fate when a search of her vehicle revealed that, unbeknownst to her, her husband had left his handgun in her car. Both staff members were photographed and escorted from the building.

These employees were not alone. My own vehicle was also searched, but luckily I had nothing that was questioned. Others were not so fortunate. Among the items confiscated were a pair of tweezers from the glove compartment of the school principal's car, a broken fireplace poker one staff member was taking for repair, a bottle of prescription pain medication, various hand garden tools, and emergency road flares. We were in the middle of a special education due process hearing, and a pocketknife was confiscated from the Administrative Law Judge presiding over the hearing. This was a family heirloom that had belonged to his grandfather; not only was it confiscated, he was informed it would not be returned. Needless to say, we lost that case.

This was an event that had never occurred before; nor has it since. All in all five staff members were terminated and a number of others received disciplinary sanctions up to two weeks off without pay. Shortly following our own experience, other searches,

including one conducted on a public street which involved the vehicle of a district attorney, initiated a firestorm of protest. Eventually the instigator of the search himself was terminated, other searchers were disciplined, and all employees affected had their discipline overturned. Those who were terminated were offered their jobs back, and they returned to work. Their personnel records do not reflect this break in service. However, it is not as if this never happened. “The Search” has become a metaphor in our shared experience for arbitrary, abusive policies coming out of Nashville—an illustration of a “gotcha” policy toward employees.

Current Events

Three additional aspects of the current situation must be taken into account when considering our experience of teaching inside the institution. On August 9, 2004, a newly hired part-time teacher assistant was assaulted by a student in the classroom, choked almost to the point of unconsciousness. Had another student not intervened, it is likely that serious injury or even death might have occurred. The student assailant had been previously committed for a premeditated attack with a hammer on a sleeping camper and had subsequently assaulted another person. Both victims had serious injuries requiring hospitalization. The assault was shocking in and of itself, but what followed was even more distressing to the school staff. The student was removed and taken to a confinement room but was returned to the classroom before the teacher assistant returned from the clinic. Moreover, when the staff member attempted to press charges in the local juvenile court, he received no assistance from either DCS or the local District Attorney’s office. This occurrence triggered an avalanche of angry faculty reactions. Not only did it bring

home to us the real and ever-present dangers of working with this population, it also demonstrated for us that we were pretty much on our own in dealing with our situation.

In early October of 2004, during the course of my research project, an announcement was made in a faculty meeting that the superintendent of the facility had been directed to cut \$1.4 million (approximately 15% of the total budget) from the current year's operating budget. Such a reduction would involve the loss of a number of school faculty, possibly as many as nine positions. Throughout the course of my research, the possibility of job loss has been hanging over our heads like Damocles' sword. Also because of the fiscal uncertainty, we have been unable to fill five vacant teacher positions; as a result, we must juggle staff members and/or students daily to cover classes. My workday begins with deciding how to accommodate more classes than teachers. Along with the principal, I spent two days sequestered with the Tennessee Minimum Rules and Regulations for the Governance of Public Schools and the Tennessee Code Annotated, justifying teaching positions by citing chapter and verse. Recently I rescheduled the entire student body to combine some classes and make the best use possible of the staff we have available. This situation is still unresolved. It is unclear to me whether this lack of resolution is a good or a bad thing.

Further, there have been a number of instances where students have made allegations of abuse against staff members. For the most part complaints have been launched against security officers, alleging excessive force in physically restraining students. These complaints have previously been investigated and determined internally. However, it is now the policy for all such allegations to be investigated by Child Protective Services (CPS), an arm of DCS that has broad powers and can *indicate* a staff

member for abuse according to a standard of proof that falls short of evidence required for criminal proceedings. Staff members who are accused of abuse must be immediately removed from any contact with students. If the investigation results in “clear and convincing” evidence of abuse, the staff member is automatically terminated. Shortly after the first group session, one of the research participants was accused of abuse, removed from the school, and assigned to other workstations within the institution pending outcome of the investigation. After nine weeks of stress and uncertainty, she resigned her position. Two days after her resignation, the investigation returned a finding that the allegations were “unfounded.” Several staff members have indicated to me that they fear such unfounded allegations from students will be leveled at them if they discipline students. I cannot reassure them that their fears are unreasonable.

It is not uncommon for visitors, program monitors of various affiliations, and other facility staff members to observe a teacher’s classroom from the interior hallway window and render judgments about the quality of teaching from that unabashedly objective view. Two years ago positive comments could be counted on if students were sitting quietly with their desks in straight rows. This year student desks arranged in straight rows is considered far too regimented. Last year quiet and orderly student movement between classes was a sign of appropriate discipline. This year it smacks of repression and lack of student engagement with adult authority figures. It may come then as no surprise that as teachers in this environment we sometimes vacillate between apathy, amusement, and outrage.

In our everyday workplace experience we must exercise hyper vigilance in accounting for common everyday items that might be rendered into weapons. We

monitor volatile and sometimes violent young men, whom we must protect from each other and from themselves. We model responsible adult behavior toward others, even when we do not receive it ourselves. We strive to engage our students in the magic and power of learning, even though what we do is devalued and misunderstood. And we remain always on our guard because we know that not every threat comes from inside the classroom.

My Practice

I share all these aspects of our joint practice; sometimes, because of my supervisory duties, I am also called upon to be an instrument of disciplinary actions with which I do not agree. I must also resolve grievances filed by students against teachers and occasionally referee intra-staff disputes. I counsel students, teachers, and other staff members who are angry, exhausted, worried, or exasperated. Sometimes I just listen. I also handle inquiries from home county case managers and provide school records to community schools receiving our students, frequently translating our twelve-month school year into terms of more traditional school timeframes. One of my research participants mentioned in his follow-up interview that we are “sandwiched between adversaries”—students and administration. My sandwich has more layers. And yes, on occasion, I do feel as if I have fallen down the rabbit hole.

Currently teaching across the country is an increasingly hazardous and arduous occupation. Students bring weapons and/or drugs to class; they lack respect for and appropriate behavior toward authority figures, including teachers; and they bring in problems from the streets, occasionally engaging in violence in the classroom. Moreover,

politicians determine teacher effectiveness through the results of standardized tests, results of which are identified by teacher name and published in local newspapers. As teachers inside a juvenile institution, we have these conditions of practice in common with teachers in community schools. Our students are the ones who are expelled from those community schools, often because of zero tolerance policies. They have committed offenses which would have earned them many years in prison had they been a few years older when they incurred the charges. In addition we are situated within an institution where what we do is often misunderstood and devalued and we ourselves are subject to resentment from other staff members because of differences in pay scales with other job classes. Small wonder then that we experience ourselves as isolated and embattled.

I truly believe that my colleagues are extraordinary people, dedicated professionals who possess wisdom, resilience, and practical mastery. This is a belief that I have tried to convey through our everyday interactions and through instances of consciously positioning them as such. Three years ago in one of those periods where I was the only administrator and, at that point, acting as secretary as well, we found ourselves with the task of completing a School Improvement Plan that should have been done over a period of many months. Among the steps of completing this plan were identifying program needs, developing strategies to meet the needs, and constructing methods to measure our success at the end of the plan period. Moreover, this plan required consensus of the school faculty. As I struggled to devise a way for us to accomplish this task, I thought of all the “experts” who had been brought in at various times to advise us. I then determined a strategy: I would begin the work-day by introducing each of my colleagues in turn as a visiting consultant, an expert in the field of

juvenile justice, and by asking each of them to brief us on aspects of the education, work experience, and personal background that qualified them as an expert in this field. This experience was profoundly moving, as we spoke to and acknowledged in others our own expertise. Having positioned ourselves as experts, we completed all components of the three-year plan by the end of the work day.

As a follow-up, I asked each of my colleagues to prepare an in-service workshop on some area of their expertise and to develop a short announcement of what they planned to do. During the next several months, I scheduled these workshops and posted descriptions and sign-up sheets. I also participated in as many workshops as I could. Topics included changes in special education laws, drawing techniques, creative writing, and cake decorating, among others.

These activities seemed to make a difference in our perceptions of ourselves and our colleagues, at least for a time. Staff members completed evaluations of workshops and commented on the knowledge and skills their colleagues had demonstrated in the workshop sessions. However, since I was juggling even more job responsibilities than usual, I did not follow through other than in informal ways—in occasional conversations or in requesting that individual staff members chair or attend meetings in my place.

Chapter II: Analysis—Perspectives on the Practice

In the preceding chapter I described aspects of our practices as educators inside a secure juvenile facility, as well as critical incidents in our shared history. In this chapter, as Peters (2004) suggests, I reflect on my practice, seeking to examine my assumptions and to answer the question “Why am I experiencing my practice in this manner?” Action research in one’s own practice requires that the researcher account for her positioning relative to that practice.

Since I am engaging in research in my own practice, I occupy dual roles of participant and researcher. As a research participant, I have access to ways of knowing unavailable to an outside researcher, including the potential to contribute to meaningful change in the practice. As a researcher, I must negotiate relationships within and without the practice and answer questions about the validity of my research.

No single perspective can encompass the complexities of this experience; therefore, I have attended to five different ways of looking: subjective experience of practice, objective vs. reflective perspectives, frames of reference, and my personal stakes in the matter. The theories that shape my practice will be treated separately in Chapter III. Rather than constituting merely a point of view, each of these originates in a perceptual world and reveals some aspects of the practice while obscuring others.

These reflections on my practice are informed by the ordinary language philosophy of Wittgenstein (1953/2001, 1980), the existential phenomenology of Merleau Ponty (1962/2000), the critical theories of Bourdieu (1977/2002, 1983/91, 2000), Shotter’s (1993, 1999, 2002) work on knowledge and social construction, and

Goffman's (1986) framing. I begin with Peters' (1999) concept of *levelising*, which requires that as a practitioner I step back in a series of removes to see myself engaging in action. Peters suggests four phases or levels of reflective practice. In *Pre-Reflective Being in the World*, Level I, I am sensitive to or in tune with my surroundings, including my companions. My awareness is directed outward to others, rather than inward. In Level II, *Reflective Being*, as a result of an unexpected or surprising occurrence, or in response to a prompt from others, I begin to consider my actions. This awareness usually develops first in retrospect; I become aware of already completed actions. Later on, I may reflect on my actions in the moment of acting. In Level III, *Framing the Experience*, I begin to become aware of reflecting on my own actions and perhaps to see that I am operating from within a conceptual framework. As I become more comfortable in this level, I may try out different frames. In *Theorizing*, Level IV, I begin to think about frames and to realize that language itself is a frame for our experience of the world. I can then think about thinking, critically examine what others think, consider how theories shape our experience of the world, and perhaps construct my own theories. In addition to these four levels, I engaged a fifth perspective addressing what is at stake for me in this research. Peters's concept of levelising focuses on the participants themselves and what may be seen at each level. My own concern has been to look also at what is necessary to engage as a participant at each level.

A critical aspect of Peters's work is that the stages of levelising have as their general principle that the knowing which comes with each level is only accessible from the next remove, that stepping back which allows the researcher to see herself acting at the previous level. What I can see depends on where I stand and how I view the

landscape; therefore, a number of positions are necessary for a robust accounting of the experience. The first of these positions arises from my situation as a practitioner/researcher within my own practice.

Subjective Experience of the Practice

In our everyday world practitioners embody a personal relationship to practice, “a *pre-objective* view which is what we call being in the world” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/2000, p. 79). We are, according to Shotter (2002), “embedded and embodied” in a self-evident world, one in which “the reality of everyday life is organized around the ‘here’ of my body and the ‘now’ of my present” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 22). Personal being in the world is the ground against what we notice is figure. Unfortunately, as Polanyi points out, “we can know more than we tell” (1967, p. 4); therefore, tacit knowledge, the knowledge of the subject, may not be fully accessible even in our attempts to foreground it. Bourdieu notes that practical mastery is “a mode of practical knowledge not comprising knowledge of its own principles” (1972/ 1977, p. 19).

The experience of a practice gives the practitioner a kind of knowing that is not available from outside the practice. Shotter (1993) refers to this situated and unarticulated knowing as a “knowing from within” or a “rhetorical-responsive” engagement that is possible only in “once-occurrent” (1999, following Bakhtin) occasions. Shotter tends to focus on verbal and gestural interactions in a dyad but neglects the wider context of the practice. Wittgenstein’s (1953/2001) knowing “how to go on” shares the features of

engagement and responsivity to others but implies a greater acknowledgement of the importance of context and of the actions called for by this knowledge.

In my practice as a supervisor of teachers working inside a juvenile institution, I am often confronted with situations into which I must act based on understanding from within my situation. My assessments of the potential for immediate physical harm to staff members or students are in the moment, as is my course of action to avert serious consequences. These assessments and actions are not the result of deliberation and conscious decision-making, for in such critical situations there is no time for deliberation. Nor can I act “according to rule” (Wittgenstein, 1953/2001), despite myriad institutional and departmental policies and procedures. No two children are alike and the same student may react differently at a later time or with another staff member. New staff members frequently ask how they should deal with volatile juveniles in an institutional setting. While I can and usually do intervene effectively, I find that I am unable to provide a satisfactory explanation of how I do this. Even if I could articulate my knowing how to do so, I am not sure that it would suffice for another person as a guide for their actions. As Cook and Brown (1999) point out, telling someone how to ride a bicycle seldom enables them to do so. My knowing in the moment is based in large measure on my relationships with others involved, as well as on how I approach them. In this environment my colleagues and I have developed our own practical mastery by getting on the bicycle.

As a way of accounting for such mastery, Bourdieu (2000) proposes the concept of *habitus*, “a particular but constant way of entering into a relationship with the world which contains a knowledge enabling it to anticipate the course of the world, is

immediately present, without any objectifying distance, in the world and the ‘forthcoming’ that it contains” (p. 142). Habitus generates practices that are suited to the circumstances and are immediately perceived as the right thing to do. Though similar to Wittgenstein’s (1953/2001) *grammar* as the underlying structure enabling one to know how to go on in a particular situation, habitus is also a generative principle and can itself undergo change as a result of historical events or personal experience. Based on our prior experiences, especially those of our youth, habitus allows us to predict what actions of ours will be appropriate for the current circumstances, even if those circumstances present themselves in novel dress. Unfortunately for our students, their prior life experiences have given rise to habitus that serves them well on the streets but ill equips them for success in other areas. My own habitus, arising out of my experiences of place, time, and social situation, has changed because of my practice within an institution. Just as surely, this changed habitus has affected my relationships outside the practice.

In many ways I am as much a prisoner inside these walls as are the students, and when I leave, I carry this world with me as well. I am always aware of my surroundings, assessing parking garages, elevators, and public buildings for potential threats. In restaurants I prefer to sit with my back to the wall and facing the door. I am uncomfortable in crowds; I seldom attend concerts or movies, and when I do, I always locate the exits immediately. I am acutely aware of people and their location relative to me, especially if they are walking behind me. I actively scrutinize groups of teenagers at the mall, looking for once and future students. While I do not think of myself as afraid, I do have a heightened sense of awareness.

More troubling and more pervasive than this sense of potential danger in my surroundings is an underlying sea-change in my assumptions about the motivations and behaviors of other people. Working in this environment has challenged deeply felt convictions about the nature of children and the power of education. After 15 years of reading social histories and working daily with incarcerated juveniles, I no longer believe that all children can be saved. It is not only the children here at Mountain View about whom I have developed this jaundiced view. They are different not in kind but in degree from the students in high schools across the state and across the country. The evening news is full of stories of terrible acts of teenagers. My own children are now adults, but I wonder what effect working in this environment has on my colleagues who have children still at home.

And if I entertain suspicion about children, I find that my attitude toward adults is often downright cynical. I question the motives of others, from government leaders to friends and neighbors, to members of my own family. I am amazed and exasperated by what seems the naiveté of people who leave their doors unlocked and always expect the best of others. I used to be one of those people. I wanted to know the extent to which my colleagues share these perceptions.

Further, I have become desensitized to certain forms of language referred to in East Tennessee as “cussin.” Working in an environment where the various forms of the word “fuck” are continuously used, not only as interjections or expletives, but as common adjectives (“Where’s my mother-fucking pencil?”) has numbed me to such language. More distressing still, I find that such expressions have crept into my own speech to the point that I must monitor my conversation. The embarrassment of this

realization is minor compared to the sense of loss I experience, for the power and beauty of language have always been an important part of my life.

This is knowing I have, not from within the practice, but by reflection on it. Situated in the context of my own practice, I act into and out of practical mastery, a tacit understanding of what is called for in each situation I confront. This mastery is not a result of conscious decision-making; rather it is what goes without saying, in Bourdieu's (2000) terms, *doxa*, "a set of fundamental beliefs which does not even need to be asserted in the form of an explicit, self-conscious dogma" (p. 15). Doxa may be compared to the fish's view of water, encompassing and unquestioned. How is it that one comes to know what goes without saying? For the unlucky fish, it may begin with an attractive worm on a hook—a rather dramatic shift in point of view. Some dissonance, rupture, or nasty surprise calls our attention to the ordinary everydayness of our lives. And in that moment, we have moved to reflection. This separation or removal from the primary experience to a second-order knowing is eloquently described by Merleau-Ponty: "Reflection... steps back to watch the forms of transcendence fly up like sparks from a fire; it slackens the intentional threads which attach us to the world and thus brings them to our notice" (1962/2000, p. xiii). How then is it possible for the practitioner to slacken those threads, to access and articulate the practical wisdom that informs her own actions within her practice, and to occupy a position as both researcher and researched? The most commonly applied remedy is that of taking an objective viewpoint. As will shortly be argued, this is a necessary but not sufficient remedy. For the practitioner-researcher and her colleagues, an objective view is neither desirable nor even possible.

Objective vs. Reflective Perspectives

A point of view is just that—a view from a point. In conventional research the objective point of view is privileged over reflection, which is seen as personal and suspect. The conventional understanding of an objective view fails to consider that each point of view encompasses a world, or more accurately an *Umwelt* (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/2000). What is not usually noted is that the objective, disinterested viewer also has a stake in the matter. The objective viewpoint requires a separation, a taking up of a position outside of and distanced from the naïve being in the world of the person. This perspective drives positivist research with its control groups and rigorous exclusion of the researcher. In the conventional objectivist paradigm, the world becomes an object or a spectacle, about which observations may be made and theories constructed. Doxa, what goes without saying, can now be said. Judgments may be entered about the right way to do things; orthodoxy comes into being. Correct language and legitimate forms of language are established, access to which is part of what Bourdieu (2000) calls *symbolic violence*: “Abstract universalism generally serves to justify the established order, the prevailing distribution of powers and privileges” (p. 71). Conversely, lack of access to forms of legitimate language effectively silences many elements of the population. In my practice I have noted for many years the preponderance of incarcerated juveniles who lack basic competencies in the use of standard language forms, and I have wondered if they would have entered the juvenile justice system had they possessed such competencies.

The objective point of view is characterized by separation and inequalities in power relations (Bourdieu, 2000, Gergen, 1999). There are complex issues of power at

play within the institution. While it is common in this environment to hear staff members claim that “The kids have all the rights,” such statements belie the fact that these students are in truth incarcerated. It is true that students have due process rights in the disciplinary process and a grievance procedure, as well as guaranteed access to policies that govern their treatment. The politically and departmentally correct title for our security guards is Children’s Service Officers or CSOs. They are unarmed and restricted by numerous explicit policies and procedures in methods they may use in subduing physically out of control juveniles. A recently revised DCS policy states unequivocally that “The use of physical restraint should be seen as a treatment failure” (DCS 27.3. G.1). However, as recently as January 10, 2005, 43 of 118 students at Mountain View (36% of the population) are listed as *Violent Offenders*, a designation that indicates a crime against a person with the use of force. A number of our students have gang affiliations or lay claim to gang membership; others ally themselves with extremists groups like the Aryan Nation. Clearly there is risk in this population; what is surprising is how seldom the potential for violence is realized either against staff members or other students. Perhaps this may be due to Bourdieu’s (2000) notion of symbolic violence, the granting of legitimacy by both the empowered and the disempowered. Students in our facilities are disempowered in at least two ways: they are minors and they have been adjudicated. Our CSOs wear uniforms and occupy ranks that evoke a paramilitary presence. Teachers, on the other hand, position themselves relative to students as both authority figures and helpers. Of course, there are no guarantees; the threat of violence is ever-present. But our students, like most of their contemporaries, seem to crave structure, or at least predictability, to feel safe in the world.

✓ Another issue of power has to do with my relationship to my coworkers in this institution. I see myself in this situation as occupying two roles: I am both supervisor and colleague. I share the highly structured working environment, the tensions of an ever-present need to be aware of one's surroundings, and the frustrations of working with an extremely needy, volatile, and occasionally explosive population. While I have been a classroom teacher in this environment and I make conscientious efforts to position (Davies and Harre, 1990) myself and others as colleagues, there are inescapable ramifications of my institutional role. I want most of all to function, and to be seen by others, as an instructional leader, a master teacher, and a resource for other teachers. Yet I must also evaluate job performances, recommend for licensure advancement and civil service probationary completion, and, on occasion, discipline staff. In formal occasions, such as job performance issues, it is fairly easy to see how positioning comes into play; but in the everyday working environment, this element is much less clear. At any given time I am as likely to engage in employee counseling for problems outside the institution or to respond to a security back-up call in a classroom fight as to observe and give feedback on teaching strategies.

While the objective point of view allows me to examine and articulate some features of practical mastery, especially the practical mastery of other people, it is not without inherent difficulties. This is the domain of school, particularly higher education, and of scientific detachment. As Bourdieu points out in *Pascalian Meditations*, "This perspective presupposes a point of view on which no point of view can be taken... through which one sees (*per-spicere*) but which is not seen" (2000, p. 22). Such a perspective, separated from the primary experience, can, and often does, as Bourdieu

states, “set up a magic boundary between the elect and the excluded while contriving to repress the differences of condition that are the condition of the difference that they produce and consecrate” (2000, p. 25). The objectivist relation to the world, exemplified by the university and the work of scholars, thus attempts to be outside of time and considerations of power and privilege, at least by its own reckoning. This is also the point of view of experts and outside consultants frequently employed by our department to tell us how we should do our jobs. The aims of the researcher (or the consultant) and the researched cannot be the same when they are viewed through the objective lens. The objective researcher does research on people and not with them (Reason, 2001); the conditions, the terms, and the accounts of this research are of her choosing. This is, however, the kind of research that generates data, especially numbers, generally accepted as evidence of solid, meaningful research.

The separation inherent in the objective view also informs what counts as knowledge. The knowledge privileged in the objectivist relation is “knowing that” (Shotter, 2002, following Ryle, 1949), a theoretical, impersonal and rule-driven knowledge. Lacking practical mastery of a highly valued competence, the researcher/observer must provide herself with an explicit and at least semi-formalized substitute for it in the form of a *repertoire of rules* (Bourdieu, 1972/1977, p. 2). The objective viewer sees others as acting according to rule and herself as acting according to reason. For the objectivist, the particular language game (Wittgenstein, 1953/2001) under consideration is a matter of following the rules; rather than being a player, she functions as a referee. Further, the objective viewer may be led by the distancing strategem of her observations into a fundamental error in which she mistakes the regularity of actions for

rules that govern them. For example, my son tells me of an acquaintance of his who, upon seeing DEER CROSSING signs on a country road, asked, "How do the deer know to cross there?" We shared a good laugh at the expense of this unnamed objective viewer, but similar and far more serious errors of thinking can result from what Marx (as cited in Bourdieu, 1992) calls mistaking the things of logic for the logic of things. For example, the average IQ of my students is almost a full standard deviation below the norm. Does this mean that only the slower kids get locked up? Or is it an indication that, in addition to failing to abide by the rules and laws of society in general, these students routinely fail to put forth effort in intelligence and achievement testing? And if they choose to be non-participants in these various measures of what we regard as pro-social engagement with the world, how do we account for that? Are they anti-social or are they profoundly disaffected? Or are there other possibilities? In any case, how did they get to be so? And how do we as teachers engage them in learning?

Rather than a purely objective stance, Peters (1999) proposes *Reflective Being*, an awareness of one's own actions brought about by dissonance, distance, or "arresting moments" (Katz & Shotter, 1999). While incorporating the distancing necessary for examination and articulation of one's own actions, this perspective does not extend to the degree of separation inherent in a conventional objective view. Rather than split herself into subject and observer, the action researcher simultaneously occupies both points of view. This is not so difficult as it seems, as few of us are capable of regarding ourselves as objects. Marshall (2001) reflects on this "sense of separated selves; as if I could be not-personal, a relic perhaps of objectivity" (p. 438). And in fact we do this sort of thing continuously, acting in the present with a sense of our own past; we do not recreate

ourselves anew each morning. Merleau-Ponty (1962/2000) asks, “If *per impossible* I had once succeeded in *making myself into* a thing, how should I subsequently reconvert myself to consciousness?” (p. 435, italics in original). While standing with a foot in each perceptual world may be a difficult task, it pales in comparison to taking a disinterested view of one’s own doings. This perspective was necessary in order for me to evaluate my own involvement and participation in the research.

Engaging in reflection on one’s own practice may occur spontaneously in response to something that engages our attention, or a practitioner may purposefully explore her practice. Recently a teacher summoned me to her class to consult about a student who had proven himself quite a discipline problem, engaging in almost daily fights and even threatening me in the hallway during a fire drill when I put a hand on his chest to prevent him from joining another group of students. When I arrived in the classroom, I came with my assumption that he *was* the problem. It was only when she asked him to show me his neck, that I realized he *had* a problem. At the base of his neck there was a raw crater the diameter of a nickel and deeper, revealing hair follicles—an open, third-degree burn that rubbed against his collar every time he moved. I brought him to my office, where he told me he had attempted to burn off a tattoo—a swastika. I asked if he had been to the clinic, and he showed me the individual pack of Neosporin he had been given. I cleaned the wound with baby wipes as best I could, applied the Neosporin, and covered the area with a large band aide to protect the wound from his shirt collar. I apologized to him for what I knew must be painful attentions. He was quiet, humble. He thanked me and returned to class. I then called the clinic and insisted that he be scheduled to see the doctor. Later the same day I checked on him, and told him that he had an

appointment for the next day. The burn has healed. I do not believe it was self-inflicted, but I do believe the tattoo it covered was a major factor in his frequent fights. I wish I could say that his behavior problems were eradicated. This is not the case, though his name appears less frequently in discipline reports. What I can say is that his relationship with me is greatly different: he is now quiet, well-mannered, and friendly toward me. Something happened in that laying on of hands—something beyond attending to the wounds of the flesh. That experience evoked a whole new relationship for both of us—one in which I was caring and he was cared for. And I must wonder how much of his behavior, especially toward me, I had unwittingly invoked through the ways that I had approached him.

Stumbling into awareness is one path, but purposeful actions can foster reflection as well. The concept of reflection requires an otherness which can reveal for us the boundaries of our experiences and the configurations of our habitus, just as a mirror reflects our physical appearance. The richness of our subjective experience may be brought to our own cognition by an Other who engages with us for the purpose of that discovery, sharing with us questions which, as Elie Weisel says, have as their gift something that does not lie in the answer. Pollio et. al. (1997) observe that “Dialogue not only allows the speaker to describe the experience; it also requires him or her to clarify its meaning to an involved other and, perhaps, even to realize it for the first time during the conversation itself” (p. 29). Language both evokes our narratives and invokes the reactions of others.

In my own case, through engaging in a dialogue with others, I have been able to surface some features of my everyday practical mastery. I try to listen with an openness

to what is said, rather than what I want to hear or what I expect, without taking those comments personally, becoming defensive, or offering unsolicited advice. I strive to be a person who can be trusted not to betray a confidence, hold a grudge, or judge others on the basis of actions committed in a heated moment. I try to be present to troubled others. I am not always successful, and, even when I am, the other person does not always respond in ways that support communication. This knowing from within my practice is not anything I can describe well, much less teach. These realizations are a knowing that I have arrived at through reflection on my practice and with the help of others.

Frames of Reference

Common sense tells us that we have experiences in the world and then we make sense of them. Perhaps it is rather the case that the sense comes first; “It is not so much our judgments as it is our prejudices that constitute our being” (Gadamer, 1962/1976, p. 9). Gadamer’s “horizon of understanding” constitutes a set of frames which in themselves do not preclude the researcher’s attending to the specifics of the circumstances and individuals at hand. But as Ihde (1986) points out, when a Cartesian and a druid are commissioned to find and describe a tree that represents for each of them the essence of “tree,” each seer sees what he already believes to be “out there”(p. 18). The Cartesian’s tree is brightly lit with symmetrical branches; the druid’s tree is dimly lit with gnarled trunk and twisted branches.

Frames establish what counts as data and the narrative structures we interpret as “reality.” As Merleau-Ponty (1962/2000) says, “All my knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge, is gained from my own particular point of view”(p. vii). That point

of view is framed by windows on the world that have been socially constructed and that serve to focus one's gaze in a particular direction while eliminating other vistas entirely from view. Goffman (1986) is clear on the necessity for taking one's frame into account:

Since frame incorporates both the participant's response and the world he is responding to, a reflexive element must necessarily be present in any participant's clear-headed view of events; a correct view of a scene must include the viewing of it as part of it" (p. 86).

In my practice within the field of juvenile justice there are two competing and diametrically opposed frames: correctional and educational. The correctional frame focuses on the similarities between adult and juvenile offenders and uses a vocabulary of *crime and punishment, felon and victim, doing time, repaying society, guards, the yard,* and, sometimes, *rehabilitation*. The educational frame focuses on similarities between juvenile offenders and other youth in community schools and uses a vocabulary of *student and teacher, child, educational remediation, pro-social behavior, children's services officers, and student potential*. Until 1989 my department was a subdivision of the Department of Corrections; our history and culture have been informed by this legacy. We have uniformed officers who occupy paramilitary ranks. Our students live in dorms, but the facility is surrounded by an escape-proof fence, parts of which are topped by razor wire. One result of this correctional cultural legacy is the privileging of masculine models of strength. This is true of both students and staff, who equate strength with physicality and sheer bulk. Women working in this environment navigate a torturous path to establish norms of female strength. They tend to take one of several paths: acting as "one of the guys," adopting a motherly role, staking out new territory as a feminist role

model, or allowing themselves to be protected or “taken care of” by male staff members. At different points in my experience of this environment, I have tried out all but the last strategy.

It is in our perspectives on our students that the issue of framing is critical. When I reflect on relating to the students in my care, it is as if I must hold two opposing realities always before me. One is that each student is a child, much like my own children, and capable of learning, growing, changing, doing good in the world. These are also children who have been neglected, abused and abandoned. They do not trust adults for good reasons. Some have horrific backgrounds. Because of the necessity of researching school histories and prior psychological testing to ensure proper placement in school, I know more than I ever wanted to know about those histories. I know that one child was infected with a sexually transmitted disease at the age of six months. I know that another was doused with gasoline, set on fire, and left to burn. I learned that several of my students have witnessed the murder of one parent by the other. Many students have no idea where either parent might be, except, of course, for the ones who are in adult prisons. Some of these students have supported their mothers and siblings by selling drugs. At least a third of them already have children of their own. They have told me about joining a gang to have somewhere to belong. My mother’s heart tells me that if there had been someone who cared, who encouraged, who was there, these children would not be in an institution. All these things are true.

But it is also true that every child here has committed a crime, perhaps many crimes, some of which are truly reprehensible. Students with sexual offenses against young children present special challenges. The circumstances of their charges are

particularly disturbing, not only to staff members, but to other students. Almost all of them see building relationships with others as a route to victimize those others; they lack empathy, not just for others, but also for themselves. Further they take every opportunity to transgress the personal boundaries of others, requiring an “arm’s-length” policy at all times. Still others steal for amusement or to construct elaborate homemade tattoo guns from printer cartridges and empty ballpoint pens. Lead from pencils inserted into wall outlets creates enough sparks to ignite smuggled cigarettes or anything else one cares to burn. Toothbrushes can be sharpened on concrete blocks and fashioned into potentially lethal weapons. No student can be trusted at any time, anywhere, with anything. The moment I forget that, I become a danger to myself and those around me. All these things are also true.

Most of my colleagues in the school and I struggle with the competing frames of correction and education. For one of my colleagues there appears to be much less struggle than for others, as he consistently views his students through a correctional frame in which they are felons who need to be punished. Most of us, however, tend to utilize another frame, in which our students are youth who lack appropriate guidance and structure. We are therefore more likely to act as shepherds rather than wardens. But, even as we teach, support, and encourage our students, we also acknowledge the real risk of harm from volatile and impulse-driven youth, many of whom also have mental health issues.

The competing frames with which we in education have long wrestled have come into sharp relief for the entire department. In addition to the correctional and educational frames, staff members in other departments operate from counseling or treatment frames.

Our new commissioner comes from a background in human services and believes strongly that “Any child in the custody of our agency, regardless of how they came to us, is in a public child welfare system” (Commissioner’s Weekly Wrap-Up, July 30, 2004). Although this frame is particularly apt for considering dependent and neglected children at risk in the community, it results in some jarring disconnects when applied to eighteen year olds adjudicated for rape, murder, and arson. Staff members viewing a serious incident from a correctional frame see justification for the use of strenuous sanctions; the commissioner sees the same incident through a social welfare frame and finds justification for her position that the youth involved have not been adequately served. So long as we focus on incidents themselves and not on the frames through which we view them, our communication is at an impasse. If, on the other hand, we begin to examine our frames of reference, productive dialogue may lead to change in practice. The researcher-participant must be able to recognize and navigate through competing frames of reference.

Personal Stakes

Every researcher must examine her own motives for undertaking research, asking herself: What is at stake for me? What do I hope to gain? Why do I consider undertaking this research?

In my own case, this perspective was the most difficult to access, as well as the most painfully honest. I followed the suggestion of Pollio (personal communication, May 6, 2004) to engage in a bracketing interview, a technique designed to surface the assumptions of researchers prior to their data collection and analysis. Having already

engaged in examining my practice from the perspectives noted above, I assumed that little would come from this experience beyond what I had already considered. A colleague graciously agreed to engage in the interview process with me, and as a result I came to acknowledge two powerfully moving motivations for the contemplated research.

First, as a supervisor of teachers inside a juvenile institution for over twelve years, I have made a conscious decision to be truly present for both students and staff members. I came to this work with a deep sense of human potential for good and a faith in children and in the transformative power of caring for and educating them. Some of these children are so damaged that it is hard to hold out hope. Certainly six months of the best possible treatment and education is insufficient to remediate sixteen years of asocial or actively anti-social orientation. I struggle to find a balance between feeling unwarranted hope and seeing each child as possessing a heart of darkness. A rational assessment of the difficulties as well as of the possibilities of what we do sometimes eludes me. Some students are especially difficult for me to relate to, as I recoil from the heinous nature of their offenses. Some staff members can be especially trying or deeply troubled in their private lives. Year-round teaching in this environment is challenging, exhausting, frustrating, and sometimes frightening. Whatever my feelings and whatever struggles I undergo, I have believed that it was necessary for me to be emotionally available to both groups, offering at minimum attentive listening. I have done so at tremendous personal cost, a reality I am just now acknowledging. Pouring out humanity in an inhumane place has left me with little to share outside this environment; my contributions to community, friends, and family have been diminished thereby.

Second, as I attempted to answer the questions my colleague posed about my experience of the practice, I realized that this research project is a preparation for my leave-taking. I have been a guiding force behind this school since its inception under state auspices. I developed the master schedule and participated in hiring original and subsequent personnel. My door is always open. During the past 12 years, we have had three different principals and been without a principal for extended periods, but I have always been here.

Perhaps I have been too much here, as some staff members refer to me, not altogether in jest, as “our security blanket.” It is a rare occasion when I can get from the parking lot to my office without problem-solving, consoling, or encouraging on the way. School staff frequently line up outside my door at the end of the day for advice, complaints, or reassurance. Whenever I take time off work for any reason, staff members indicate their lack of ease; one recently stated, “I just panic when you are not here.” My functioning in this way has seemed to be beneficial, perhaps even necessary, for teachers dealing with an extremely stressful environment, particularly as they receive little support from other sources in the institution. However, as I near retirement, it becomes increasingly clear that this reliance on me also has significant drawbacks, both for me and for my colleagues. Not only am I usually exhausted by the end of the work day, but I also worry that my complicity in co-constructing these relationships has in fact impeded my colleagues’ perceptions of their own efficacy. Several years ago I made a conscientious effort to practice not-knowing, to stop automatically providing answers, and to support my colleagues’ perceptions of efficacy—their own and that of their colleagues. My hope is that together we can create a self-sustaining culture of mutual support, a culture that is

not dependent on any one person. Then I can lay this burden down and go on with the rest of my life.

The experience of coming to grips with the personal significance of my research into my own practice was a surprisingly emotional one. I believe that this experience, accompanied as it was by a profound sense of sadness and loss, was possible only through a very special kind of dialogue within a relationship built over time and characterized by mutual trust, respect, and openness. Having articulated the personal significance of my research, I can now answer the questions I pose for any practitioner considering research into her practice: What is at stake for me? What do I hope to gain? Why do I consider undertaking this research?

Reflection on the Process

As I reflect on my own process of positioning myself relative to research in my practice, this is what stands out for me:

1. I have learned more about my being-in-the world than about my doing in the world.
2. I could not have come to this knowing without the aid of others and otherness, both those present in the moment and those present in print.
3. Whatever research initiative, as it is commonly understood, that I might undertake after this reflective process will be deeply affected by this process.

What I have previously tried to do in my practice is to make a difference in the workplace through my own actions. It seems clear to me now that no single person, no matter how that person is situated, can positively impact a workplace culture, except as

she engages others at the level of the practice. (Unfortunately, it appears that one person can often negatively impact the workplace culture.) I cannot mandate positive changes in the workplace culture through supervisory directives, by rewriting job performance plans, or by directing actions of others. My practical question is How can I facilitate an opportunity for my colleagues to become partners with me in reshaping our work culture to support individual and group efficacy?

Chapter III: Matters of Theory

As any other researcher must do, I have developed an approach driven by my practical theory and such formal theory as illumines it. In this chapter I attempt to parse out my practical theory and to credit those formal theories that have informed my approach. I did not want to explore teaching inside a juvenile institution as it “really is” in some abstract, generalizable way. As Gergen (1999) remarks, “For any state of affairs a potentially unlimited number of descriptions and explanations is possible” (p. 47).

Berger and Luckmann (1966) also hold that there are multiple realities, but among them, “There is one that presents itself as the reality par excellence. This is the reality of everyday life” (p. 21). I wanted to understand our everyday experience as educators working inside a juvenile correctional facility. Nor is it my intent to understand our experience only for the sake of that understanding, but to understand it in order to foster positive change in our joint practice.

Fifteen years ago I walked into a juvenile institution for the first time. The great majority of staff members initially hired had no experience in working inside an institution; nor was there a community sense of what it meant to work in this field, as might exist in locations where the majority of jobs are in a single industry—mill towns, shrimp fishing, or corrections. We made it up as we went, jointly constructing our shared story. Just as Vico’s primitive tribe constructed a group understanding of the meaning of thunder (1948, as cited by Shotter, 1993, 2002), we had to make some meaning of the May Day riot in 1990. This event became a *sensus communis*—a “moment of common reference” (Shotter, 1993, p. 64, following Vico), even for many who were not actually

present. Just as in the case with Vico's natives, much of our meaning-making around that event was in the form of narratives with story lines and clearly identified roles. Those stories, casting some of us as heroes and others as villains, became the reality into which we acted. Because I was a state employee, I was cast as one of the "bad guys." It took a year of continuous effort and chocolate chip cookies for me to get a new role in the continuing story of Mountain View.

Social Constructionism

My colleagues and I have created a work culture, a way of being inside a juvenile institution. We have done this simply by showing up, by doing our best in a difficult environment, sometimes with the help of others, often despite them. If we have created our ways of going on together, then we might also create better ways to practice. Social constructionism, as discussed by Berger and Luckmann (1967) and Gergen (1999) among others, is concerned less about heroes and villains than about how the story functions. It does not seek to discover ultimate truth but to determine the consequences of constructing the world in particular ways. The ability to jointly "fashion our future," one of Gergen's (1999, p. 48) four assumptions of social constructionism, gives me hope that, even in this most difficult environment, by working together we can support our own human flourishing (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). I see my task as a researcher in this practice as one of fostering the creation of solutions that "reflect the reality of a particular place and particular people" (Bensimon *et al.*, 2004, p. 107). My purpose is "to produce practical knowledge that is useful to people in the everyday function of their lives" (Reason & Bradbury, 2000, pp. 1-2).

Workplace cultures are constructed by the people who inhabit them on the basis of “moments of common reference.” In the environment my colleagues and I share, such moments tend to be events that happen *to* us. As I noted in the previous chapter, these events usually have effects that are negative for our everyday work in the practice and for employee morale—budget shortfalls, employee investigations, and student assaults. I wondered how we might construct a *sensus communis* of ourselves as competent professionals acting out of practical mastery in a difficult and challenging environment. In Shotter’s (1993) discussion of Vico’s work, he refers to the “generative potentials” of relationships between people: “These first anchor points are to do not with ‘seeing’ in common, but with ‘feeling’ in common, with the ‘giving’ or ‘lending’ of a shared *significance* to shared *feelings* in an *already shared* circumstance” (pp. 65-66, italics in original). I needed a means of constructing such an “anchor point” and of fostering the relationships that would generate joint understandings. Further I wanted to foster what Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) call “connected knowing,” a knowledge that “comes from personal experience rather than the pronouncements of authorities” (pp. 112-113).

I theorized that I must begin with our perceptions of our shared situation. I was seeking, not analytic or scientific ways of knowing the world, but the knowing of the body-subject—a being in the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/2002)—as that body-subject relates to others. Bakhtin declares,

For one cannot really see one’s own exterior and comprehend it as a whole, and no mirrors or photographs can help; our real exterior can be seen and understood

only by other people, because they are located outside us in space and because they are *others* (1986, p. 7, italics in original).

It was clear to me that I would need a means to obtain those perspectives and to jointly consider them. Pollio et. al. state that “We learn and relearn who we are on the basis of our encounters with objects, ideas and people—in short, with every different kind of ‘otherness’” (1997, p. 8).

Language

If people can jointly create their social worlds—worlds that are conditional, contextual, and ever mutable--the tools of this construction are linguistic. Language, in addition to representational and interpretative functions, serves a heuristic one—that of moving, persuading, and creating “Everyday life is, above all, life with and by means of the language I share with my fellowmen” (Berger and Luckmann, 1966, p. 37). The creation of the social world through language is an on going, though often hidden, process in which we may be the creator or the created (Bourdieu, 2002; Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Gergen, 1999). Gergen notes, “If we wish to change patterns of action one significant means of doing so is through altering the forms of discourse—the way events are described, explained or interpreted” (1999, p. 115).

Wittgenstein (1953/2001) directs our attention to the various ways in which words “move” us: pointing out things, reminding us, and changing our perspectives. Such direction is necessary because “One is unable to notice something—because it is always before one’s eyes” (no. 129, p. 43). He further reminds us that

The results of philosophy are the uncovering of one or another piece of plain nonsense and bumps that the understanding has got by running its head up against the limits of language. These bumps make us see the value of the discovery (1953/2001, no. 119, p. 41).

Though language is the means of constructing our social worlds, it is by no means a tool easy to master. Wittgenstein is full of such cautions: “A *picture* held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably” (1953/2002, no. 115, p. 41, italics in original). During the course of my research, I came to learn this anew.

Changes in language reflect and point to changes in actions. “It is not experience that organizes expression, but the other way around—*expression organizes experience*. Expression is what first gives experience its form and specificity” (Voloshinov, 1973, p. 85, italics in original). Perhaps nowhere is this clearer than in the creation of metaphors, which Lakoff and Johnson (1980) contend are the basis for our conceptual systems. Political strategists, in their attempts to mold public opinion about candidates and issues, are a powerful case in point.

A particular feature of language as discussed by Bakhtin (1986) forms a critical aspect of my practical theory. While the word and the sentence are units of language, the utterance is a unit of communication, and, as such, possesses additional qualities. As Bakhtin notes in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, “There can be no such thing as an absolutely neutral utterance” (1986, p. 84). In addition to content, the utterance has an “emotionally evaluative attitude” and is situated in a context between the speaker and the addressee, who is an active participant in communication. Indeed, “The speaker expects a

response from [the others for whom the utterance is constructed], an active responsive understanding. The entire utterance is constructed, as it were, in anticipation of this response” (1986, p. 94). By addressing my colleagues as professionals who are operating out of practical theories developed through their experience and wisdom, I create the possibility of their seeing themselves in this way and of their acting into this shared relation. Here I am also indebted to Atwill (personal communication, spring 2001) for her casting this idea in terms of *invoking others*, a move which allowed me to see the possibilities for this approach.

Further, if we construct the social world partially through language, then changes in language may precede and effect changes in behavior and, therefore, in the socially constructed nature of the world. It is in our language that changes in practice are reflected; it is also in language, particularly in the creations of metaphors, that changes in practice may be indicated. For as Bakhtin remarks, “Sooner or later what is heard and actively understood will find its response in the subsequent speech or behavior of the listener (1986, p. 69). While measurable changes in practice may not occur during the timeframes of my research, changes in language can be documented.

Collaborative Learning

My experience and my reading tell me that the likeliest way for us to intentionally engage in changing our joint practice is through collaborative learning, a process that is founded in the social construction of shared reality and which emphasizes joint construction of knowledge (Peters & Armstrong, 1998, and in press). Collaborative learning is characterized by the presence of four identifying elements: a dialogical space,

a focus on construction, multiple ways of knowing, and cycles of action and reflection (Peters & Armstrong, in press). A dialogical space has both physical and social dimensions; it requires a quiet, private setting and uninterrupted time. Such a place contributes to an environment where participants can suspend their own assumptions, practice focused listening, and engage others in such a way as to promote understanding. A dialogical space is also a safe place where participants may speak what they deeply feel, secure in the knowledge that other members honor the special nature of their relationship. Dialogical space is part place and part relationship.

A focus on construction allows participants to build on understandings to create new, uniquely appropriate, and shared knowledge from within the group of participants. The joint construction is something “more than and other than” (Peters & Armstrong, 1998) what each might create alone. While we are accustomed to thinking of learning in terms of the individual, learning also occurs in and by groups. “Truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person; it is born *between people* collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 110, *italics in original*). The solution to perceived problems or the appropriate way to go on in a shared situation may not reside in any one person. Nor does it already exist somewhere else, simply awaiting discovery. Rather it may be constructed between two people or in the center of a group. By definition this knowing will be a new creation—something that has never existed before, since no two situations can be exactly alike in terms of time, place, social conditions, and participants.

What constitutes knowledge is a question that has far-reaching consequences and implications. If an absolute Truth exists, whether it be that of Plato’s ideal or

Augustine's divine Truth, then knowledge may be acquired through a process of discovery, explication, and application. The existence of such absolutes conveys the possibility of certainty, stability, and security, in matters philosophical, if not political. On the other hand, human creativity, both in its process and its products, is subsumed in the service of this Truth and becomes a tool for acquisition and implementation. If, however, there is no absolute Truth, and only situated, contextualized, socially created truths are possible, then, in addition to functions of discovery, explication, and application, knowledge may be generated. The process and products of human creativity can be given free rein. Whether truth exists in absolute or relative terms, or in some combination, is a fundamental, often tacit consideration in what counts for knowledge. There is, however, a strong tendency to see the creators of "new" knowledge as scientists, inventors, artists, geniuses like Einstein—in other words, extraordinary people unlike us. To see ourselves as creators of knowledge in our everyday lives and practices requires a re-imagining of ourselves acting in the world.

Cook and Brown (1999) differentiate between the "epistemology of possession" which deals with knowledge, either tacit or explicit, that individuals or groups may possess and the "epistemology of practice" which deals with knowing either individuals or groups use and develop in practice. My department currently has 531 policies—four 4-inch binders in printed format; this does not include the 3-inch binder for in-house policies and procedures. My colleagues and I are expected to have a working knowledge of all these and to remain in compliance with them at all times. Further, teachers are responsible not only for the "body of knowledge" which constitutes their areas of certification, but also for the curriculum frameworks that order this knowledge in terms

of delivery. Yet an individual might know all these policies and a great deal of the subject matter of his specialty and still be spectacularly unable to function in a classroom with a dozen juvenile delinquents. More than knowledge is required. To succeed, even to survive, in such as setting requires a knowing how to engage such students in positive, effective ways and a “knowing from within” (Shotter, 1993)—a sensing of what is called for in the moment. “Knowing is literally something which we do” (Cook and Brown, 1999, p. 7, quoting Dewey). Further, it is something that we do together.

Collaborative learning is characterized by cycles of action and reflection that occur over time. These cycles are not bounded entities; they may not be understood as formulaic (one act + reflection = one cycle). Actions engender reflections which then engender different actions that bring about additional and new reflections in ongoing iterations. While this description sounds like a complicated process, it is the most basic of human patterns. Embedded in our social and historical context, we act from and into our worlds. On the basis of the responses provided by others, our reflections on those responses and our own, and our predictions of future responses to other possible actions or utterances, we act again. This is reflective practice.

As a practitioner-researcher, I can foster elements necessary for collaborative learning, but I cannot create it. Nor can I guarantee its presence or its results. I would hope that, as a result of engaging with my colleagues as a co-learner, new ways of going on together might emerge. Perhaps, instead of focusing on problems, we can come to examine our expectations and our framing of these problems in order to get beyond them in creating a “community of resources” (Katz & Shotter, 1999) within the institution. I see my research effort as “productive inquiry”: *“that aspect of any activity where we are*

deliberately (though not always consciously) seeking what we need, in order to do what we want to do" (Cook and Brown, 1999, p. 8, italics in original. Note that the idea of "productive inquiry" is attributed to Dewey).

Based on my own experience and concepts in fields as widely separated as quantum physics (Heisenberg, 1927) and business (Schon, 1983), I believe that to examine one's practice is to change that practice. It follows then that a joint examination of the practice will result in changes to the joint practice. Fostering dialogue about participants' experiences of their individual and joint practices is an action I can undertake to facilitate understanding of the practice as it currently exists and as it may be. Merleau-Ponty states that

In the experience of dialogue, there is constituted between the other and myself a common ground; my thought and his are interwoven into a single fabric, my words and those of my interlocutor are called forth by the state of the discussion, and they are inserted into a shared operation of which neither of us is the creator.

We have here a dual being, where the other is for me no longer a mere bit of behavior in my transcendental field, nor I in his; we are collaborators for each other in consummate reciprocity (p. 354).

Recognizing that we have similar experiences in and of our working environment should lessen feelings of isolation and contribute to the creation of a common ground from which we can create new ways of going on together.

Chapter IV: Plan of Action

Following Peters' (2004) approach, this is the stage at which the researcher explores plans of action which might enable her to put her practical theory into play. Previously in my practice, I have acted out of hard-won practical mastery and on the basis of working theories, both in my engagement with students and colleagues and in planning and delivering professional development activities. Both mastery and working theories have developed over time, called out by the circumstances of my day-to-day involvement, and both have functioned at a mostly unexamined, tacit level. I have judged the appropriateness of my actions by their apparent effects, informally and in relatively short-term timeframes.

Having deeply considered my own positioning relative to my practice and the practical theories that inform my actions in that practice, I determined to develop a plan of action. I wanted to bring about meaningful positive change in the workplace and to study the process and outcomes of this action. Therefore, as I developed a plan for acting in my practice, I was also mindful of how I might evaluate those actions. This dual strategy grows naturally from my role as a practitioner-researcher. It is almost as difficult in this case to separate the plans for action from the research design as it is to separate myself from the practice, but in the interests of clarity I attempt to treat the plans for action and the design of the research as focused on different aspects of action research. In this chapter I discuss the possible courses of action I considered; in the next chapter I discuss specifics of the design together with methods designed to evaluate the results.

As I mentioned in Chapter I, I previously attempted to bring about changes in the workplace culture through informal individual actions aimed at invoking efficacy. There were some positive outcomes to these attempts in terms of a few colleagues' recognizing the knowledge and skills of others; however, these attempts were limited in scope and of fairly short duration. I wondered what I might do differently to bring about changes in the workplace culture that were more broad-based and of longer duration.

Moreover, as I indicated in Chapter II, it seems clear that actions of any one person are insufficient to effect the kind of change I sought. Rather, changes in workplace cultures are brought about by groups of people acting in their own practices. Over time, my colleagues and I have constructed common understandings about what it means to work inside a juvenile institution. Unfortunately, many of those understandings are based on events outside our control and for the most part position us as being acted on by others instead of acting in our own best professional interests.

My practical theory suggests that, through fostering a collaborative learning experience with my colleagues as co-participants, I could facilitate an opportunity for us to become partners in reshaping our work culture to support individual and group efficacy. Meeting as a group to engage in collaborative learning would enable us to co-construct a common understanding of ourselves as operating from practical mastery. To construct such an understanding, we would need to re-imagine ourselves in the practice. This would, in turn, require a different starting point—a *sensus communis*, a moment of common reference in our practice. I further theorized that such a common reference might be constructed from our perceptions of shared practice.

One way to proceed would have been to begin with group sessions, encouraging participants to speak about their perceptions of their practice, hoping to surface common experiences of the practice through the group setting. This course of action presented several problems: First, a dialogical space that is safe, supportive, and comfortable comes into being over time and through the efforts of all concerned. It would be likely that, even though we work together, some participants might well be reluctant to voice aspects of their experience, as our workplace is not an environment that fosters self-disclosure. Second, in a group of any size, it would take considerable time for each member to talk at any length about their perceptions of their own practice. It also seemed quite likely that the group might be impatient to discuss topics of interest in the moment, and some participants might feel as if they had not been heard.

For these reasons I determined that a better plan would be to sit down individually with each participant who volunteered to elicit their perceptions of their practice. I could then bring these perspectives to the group for consideration. Each person would have had the opportunity, in a focused conversation, to articulate his or her own perspectives of practice and to be heard. I believed that participants were more likely to speak openly in a one-to-one conversation with me than in a group setting. I could also remove identifying information and confirm with participants that they were comfortable in sharing their perspectives with the group in that form. We could then begin as a group with shared perspectives. Through collaborative learning we could co-construct common understandings from our common experiences

For us to engage in collaborative learning around our perceptions of our practices, I invited my colleagues to participate in a series of group meetings. During the first group

meeting on December 9, 2004, I reviewed the purposes of our meeting as being those of understanding and improving our practice as well as of forming the basis for my dissertation. I reminded participants that their participation was strictly voluntary and that they could drop out at any time. I then stated my expectations for our engagement and asked for any other expectations or comfort agreements they might suggest. I wanted us to create a dialogical space that would be safe, confidential, and supportive and focused on the construction of a joint understanding. I emphasized my belief that there were no “experts” outside the group, but that we ourselves have access to multiple ways of knowing, among which were intellectual, emotional, and experiential methods. I expected us to engage in cycles of action and reflection--learning as we go. I further stated that I saw this as an opportunity for us to reflect deeply on our practices as they are and as they might be—not as a way of fixing each other, the school, the institution, or DCS.

Facilitating group sessions provided a number of challenges. First we had to find a time that all participants could meet, scheduling around team meetings, family obligations, and doctor’s appointments. Second I felt responsible for assuring that every member would be able to participate in each session. Sometimes I had to reign in three outspoken and boisterous participants—who seemed bent on airing their personal grievances—while at the same time encouraging other, more reticent, group members to participate. Some days we were more distracted than others because of events occurring outside the group sessions. Constructing a dialogical space initially proved difficult since most participants engaged in the group sessions as debates rather than as dialogues. On occasion I felt more like a referee than a facilitator. But as we continued to meet, we learned a way of being as a group.

Negotiating my multiple roles of colleague/supervisor/researcher, as well as attempting to overcome the inherent tensions of an institutional environment, provided other challenges. I made it a practice to schedule meetings in the school library or in a classroom other than my office, and I always brought snacks. Further, I recognized that as teachers we have limited time and energies to devote to such an activity, even when it offers us the possibility of co-creating a new understanding of our individual and joint practices. At each meeting, I expressed recognition and appreciation that my colleagues were devoting time and energy to this project.

I wondered if and when to talk about matters of theory that concerned me but might have been of little interest to other participants. I determined to do so only when something happened in the group that some aspect of formal theory might make clearer. For example, I introduced “asking back”—a technique that inquires into assumptions underlying statements or questions, when one participant had done just that. Throughout the group sessions, I also made every effort not to privilege formal theory over our own practical theories. I tried to model rather than mandate collaboration. I also attempted to inquire and support the inquiry of others rather than to lecture.

In these first four chapters, I have described aspects of my practice (D), analyzed the practice from several points of view (A), articulated my practical theory (T), and considered a plan of action (A). These are the steps of DATA-I, which in themselves constitute reflective practice. Because I believe this approach has potential for changing the workplace culture in my practice, as well as in other applications, I decided to go on in a systematic inquiry. The next chapter concerns the design of my study—the first step of DATA-II.

Chapter V: Design

My research question was this:

Will individual and joint examination of our experience in a supportive dialogical environment bring about changes in our perceptions of our practice and in the practice itself?

To answer this question, I selected procedures for collecting and analyzing data. As Peters (2004) notes, “The essential question is a How? question; i.e., ‘How will I study my research questions?’” (p. 10). As my intention was to seek an understanding of the experiences of a particular group of people within a particular context, rather than to speculate on the general nature of education within an institution, my research necessarily was grounded in my practice.

The Participants

The 12 colleagues who volunteered to participate in these interviews comprise roughly half of the certified school staff. Their total teaching experience ranges from 2 to 29 years, and their experience at Mountain View ranges from 1 to 12 years. Three have bachelor degrees; the remaining nine have masters and beyond. All are teaching in their areas of certification: two hold elementary certification, two hold vocational certificates, seven are certified in secondary subject areas (English, history, science, math, music, business education) and one is a certified librarian. Eight are female; four are male. Ages range from 30 to 60; the mean age is 45.

Methodology

Because my research involved the participation of DCS employees, I had to gain DCS Research and Development Division as well as University of Tennessee Institutional Review Board approval for the project. To effect these approvals, I developed a brief overview of the proposed research and an informed consent document. One issue of concern was that I directly supervise approximately half of the school staff.

Procedural safeguards, including a two-step review process at the facility level, were already in place to alleviate concerns that some of my colleagues might feel compelled to participate. Since participation in this research would require a substantial time commitment from my colleagues, and since the conduct and outcomes of the study offered the potential for professional development in our shared practice, I requested departmental approval for conducting these meetings during work hours. I applied to my principal, the facility superintendent, and the DCS Director of Education for advice and consent. Superintendent Morris was most helpful in acquiring departmental support and final approval; on May 18, 2004, after three months of languishing in administrative limbo, my proposal was finally granted departmental approval. UT IRB approval was granted on April 7, 2004.

Once approvals were granted, I discussed the project with my colleagues at Mountain View and invited them to join me. I had to devise a means for us to articulate, in as full and rich a manner as possible, our perspectives on our joint practice. Individual phenomenological interviews seemed to present the best means of eliciting perceptions of the practice. The phenomenological interview as discussed by Pollio, et. al. (1997) positions the interviewer as an investigator and the interviewee as the expert. Both are

joined in a dialogic exploration of the interviewee's *Lebenswelt*, seen from the perspective of the interviewee. Choosing the phenomenological interview as a technique afforded me the opportunity to obtain first-person accounts of my colleagues' experience of teaching inside Mountain View Youth Development Center. As recommended by Pollio (personal communication, May 6, 2004), I participated in a bracketing interview designed to surface my own assumptions about the proposed research. Assisted by a colleague experienced in phenomenological interview techniques, I responded to the same interview questions I proposed to ask my colleagues. Results of this interview have been discussed in Chapter I and inform the Analysis made in Chapter II.

During October and November of 2004, I undertook individual interviews with teachers who volunteered to participate, beginning each interview with the question: "When you look back on your experience of teaching at Mountain View, what stands out for you?" and asked additional questions as their responses suggested. Eleven of these interviews were conducted face to face; they lasted from 45 to 90 minutes and were audiotaped. The twelfth participant resigned and moved to join her fiancé in London shortly before the interviews began. She graciously agreed to respond by email, and her comments have been included in the analysis of initial interviews.

I transcribed these interviews verbatim, gaining a new appreciation for court transcriptionists in the process, and confirmed with each participant that the transcription accurately reflected his or her interview. I also asked each participant to remove any personally identifying material or anything they did not wish to share with the group. The typed protocols were made available to participants on email and in printed copies.

Following the hermeneutic analytic approach outlined by Pollio et. al. (1997),

I first examined these transcriptions for particular things that stood out for me—an idiographic analysis. I then provided transcripts to the research participants, who functioned as the interpretive group. I provided background information on thematic analysis so that we could sit as an interpretative group; I also modeled the approach in the initial group session and coached participants thereafter, as we jointly worked through four interview protocols during the first three sessions. These group sessions began by identifying words or phrases that stood out to participants and progressed to identify themes surfaced in the individual interviews and across interviews. We read four of these protocols, seeking to determine what features of the experience of teaching inside the institution were figural for each of the interviewees. We also attended to features they shared in common. Heeding the admonition that each part must be understood in terms of its relation to the whole, I then reviewed the first interview protocols and completed an analysis of experiential patterns across all the interviews—a nomothetic description. I returned to the group on January 11, 2005, with the results of this analysis and, with their insights and feedback, modified and simplified the thematic structure presented in the next chapter.

We met eight times as a group, discussing the protocols primarily in the first three sessions and moving on to other topics afterwards. Group sessions occurred weekly from December 9, 2004, to February 8, 2005, for eight sessions of approximately 90 minutes each. These sessions were also audiotaped and transcribed. I analyzed these transcripts in terms of common themes, participant roles, evidence of group knowing, and language use. I then engaged participants in final interviews, which I also audiotaped and transcribed. These interviews were more structured than the initial ones. Each began with

the question: As you look back over the experience of participating in this research, what stands out for you? I also asked participants about their experience of being in the group, using such prompts as, Were there any surprises? What do you wish we had done differently? What was the best part of the experience for you? What was it like for you to participate in the group?

Analysis of Data

Data for this study consists of three sets of transcriptions: the initial individual interviews, the eight group sessions, and the follow-up individual interviews at the end of group sessions. In terms of rhetorical analysis, I examined this data for invention (content--what people say) and style (form--the way they say it), or, in Aristotelian terms, for *logos* and *lexis*. The chief means of examining content was thematic analysis. I participated in the group thematic analysis of initial interviews and then conducted thematic analysis of group sessions and final interviews on my own, returning to the group for verification of my results. Further, I examined the form of the language used in each data set, with particular attention to the metaphors used by participants, as well as the circumstances (*kairos*) of their use.

I examined the results separately for each data set and then compared themes and language across sets. To come to some conclusions about what the data showed, I read transcriptions of the initial and final interviews side by side for each participant, noting particularly the usage of personal pronouns. I then reviewed both transcriptions and tapes of the group sessions. I compared results of the thematic analyses from initial interviews to final interviews, seeking to determine if participants' descriptions of their experiences

indicated a change in their perceptions of their individual and joint practices. I further examined the form of their language to determine if there was evidence to reflect such changes in the present and/or point to changes in the future.

I had conjectured that the themes surfacing in initial interviews would focus on participants' perceptions of isolation and of problems in the environment. My practical theory suggested that final interview themes would emphasize participants' perceptions of connectedness and potential in the environment. Further, I expected to see metaphors originating in the initial interviews or in early group sessions be picked up by others, added to, and changed during the group sessions and reflected in final individual interviews. Such evidence of change from initial to final interviews in terms of both what is said and the way in which it is said would point to changes in our individual and joint practices.

Validity

I considered the question of validity as it applies to this research in several ways, first by acknowledging that criteria such as replicability customarily applied to conventional research do not apply to action research situated in a particular practice. I have accounted for my own positioning relative to the research by means of a multi-layered understanding of my practice arrived at through critical reflection and my own involvement in this process, striving to answer for the reader what is at stake in this matter. I attempted to provide sufficient detail for the reader to make an informed judgment of the quality of the research. The thematic analysis of initial individual interviews was conducted with the participants as the interpretive group, recognizing that

their familiarity with the context of the practice makes them particularly well suited as interpreters of this data. Analysis of language offered another framework for interpretation. Congruence of content and style in the data ought to provide support for my practical theory; a lack of congruence should point to a need for further study. Finally, before submission to the committee, results of this study were discussed with participants for feedback, clarification and verification. Such verification by participants constitutes a particularly powerful statement of the significance of these procedures and what was discovered. Perhaps the most meaningful outcomes of this project will be seen in long-term changes in practice that may not occur within the timeframe of this study.

Chapter VI: Analysis of First Interviews

As there are three discrete sets of data, I have chosen to analyze them separately. Initial interviews will be analyzed in this chapter, Chapter VII addresses the analysis of group sessions, and the final interviews are analyzed in Chapter VIII. Participants' comments will be in italics unless otherwise noted. In accord with confidentiality agreements entered into before conducting interviews, I have not identified participants or assigned pseudonyms.

Themes from the First Interviews

Analysis of the first interviews revealed a pattern of common concerns that were grouped into three themes: the environment, relationships with others, and personal experiences in this role. Each of these themes is characterized by tension, often described by the metaphors of *battle* or *struggle*. See figure 1 next page. Further, the element of time (the "*life span of the job*" as one participant termed it) occurs across these themes and may be considered as meta-theme, or alternatively as the ground against which these themes are figural.

Perceptions of the Environment—Awareness/Wariness

Awareness of the environment is a critical component of work inside an institution: "*I observe things more intently.... It's more intense, aware of surroundings*

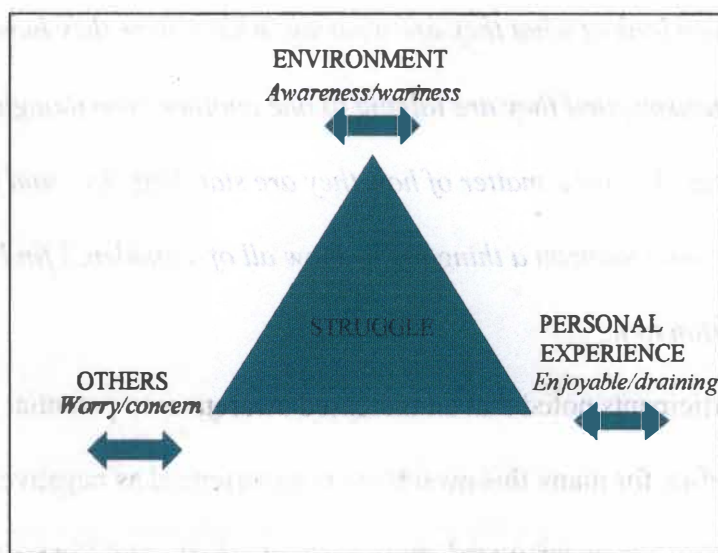


Figure 1 Themes From Initial Interviews

because of the students I'm working around," as one participant reflected. There can be amusing moments, as another participant notes:

It's ironic—I go into a public school and I can't believe that there are pencils and staplers on the desk. We're so focused on safety—what they can and can't have—what they can do with it. I have to remember that I'm outside the gates, not inside—it's almost funny.

But most of the time, such awareness is a serious matter:

You're not as free to do things you might want to do. You always have to watch what they are doing. Think ahead. Be cautious—notice who's doing what. I'm more watchful here. With groups you have to think ahead who needs to work together or not.

This awareness carries over into our lives outside the institution—*"you take it right on out the door with you."* One participant described his observing groups of teenagers:

But you look at what they are wearing, what colors they have on, watch their mannerisms, and they are talking to one another even though their lips are not moving. It's just a matter of how they are standing. As I said before, stuff like that never used to mean a thing to me. Now all of a sudden, I find myself paying attention to it.

Although participants noted that an increased awareness to potential dangers has some positive benefits, for many this awareness is experienced as negative: *"I notice things—cues—in public. I'm on my guard, more wary of others. And I'm vastly more suspicious of my fellow man. It's harder to trust others."*

Another participant declared,

I am now leery of teenagers whether or not that's good. I'd rather live next door to drug-dealing Hell's Angels than a family with teenagers. I think I have less to fear for my life. Whether that's true or not, but I am a lot more leery of teenagers because I've seen what they are capable of.

Yet another described the sadness he feels:

I think it has to do with looking for the negative so much. Knowing that there is a part of the world that focuses on crime and destruction—I need to watch out that it doesn't happen to me or my family. I think it's a sad way to have to live a life.

Relationships with Others—Concern/Worry

The relationships that surfaced in the initial interviews were those with students, with other staff members, and with family members.

Students

Perhaps the clearest statement of our relational responsibility as teachers came from a participant's reflection after a first interview: *"Teaching is about remembering that students learn so much from what they see us do and so little from what they hear us say."* Several participants mentioned their initial expectations about students incarcerated at Mountain View. One staff member found that her initial expectations were unfounded:

I expected more bitterness, more anger, more overall feeling of thugginess emanating from them more hours out of the day than it actually does. I realized that--Well, it kind of confirmed my thought that they are still very childlike; they are young people not much different than the other young people their ages that I know.

For most, initial apprehensions about working with incarcerated juveniles quickly gave way:

I was afraid I couldn't get past what brought them here I hoped that I could. Most of the time it doesn't even factor into the equation when they are in the classroom. They are just students who need to learn, and I want to help bring that about in any way that I can.

Over time some participants come to view their charges in more personal terms: *A lot of these students become my children (more so than I'd really like them to). In that I'm concerned about them and concerned about their future, and I know that's something I don't have a lot of control over. In a 24-hour day I'm only with them 1 hour or 2 hours. When you see them struggling and working hard, you*

want them to be successful. You do become emotionally attached to some; most you want to strangle. (laughs)

As one participant admitted,

It breaks my heart to think they don't have anybody that cares for them. I see-- and the parents—I guess I see so many that don't even get visitation. And just thinking how anybody could let their child go that long without seeing them. They are children, even though they want to be treated like an adult.

Several participants addressed helping students build self-esteem:

I try to get them to recognize how they can guide themselves by asking the same questions that I do. I also try to get them to write things down so that they can see what's going on and focus on the little steps. Then in the end they can look back and see how far that they have come."

And another remarks, *"It seems like there's a certain time frame and it's usually a pretty long one when they kind of click into becoming self-confident and able to be more creative without being as inhibited and actually being proud of themselves."*

As participants develop empathy with their students, their perceptions change.

Even the ones you're relieved are gone you wonder about. Some I get a little more attached to, but I try not to show favoritism. I'm with a particular kid during the week more than you are with your own children. I think about the kids when I'm not around them."

Even the most negative aspects of student life can be viewed from a different perspective: *The gang stuff gets to me, but I've kind of got over that too. It's kind of hard to tell some kid not to be in a gang when that's all the family they got. The lack of*

information about students once they leave us was also a concern. But it is also true that sometimes *"They come back and thank me for helping them see the right path and helping them learn."*

Other Staff Members

For most participants other staff members are viewed in a positive light. For some, colleagues are seen as resources: *"If I have a problem, then I feel comfortable going and talking to other staff members, 'How do you deal with this student?'"* In answer to the question: What's the best thing about being here? one participant answered:

The people I work with. For all our complaints about consistency, unity-- when the chips come down, we do generally pull together. We are the tightest department in the institution. We pull together, take up for one another, better than the other departments.

This shared responsibility can become problematic:

One thing that's very hard is to take time off, knowing that your peers or one of your fellow teachers is going to be overburdened by taking your class. One of the biggest problems with the overall situations--none of us are rested at the same time. When one person is gone the other person is double-teamed with students. So I think that one reason I don't take time off is that I feel guilty when I do. It's almost easier not to.

It is important to note that one participant did complain bitterly of having become the target of gossip among colleagues, but this is the only study participant to do so. On the other hand, another participant did note a concern about his colleagues: *"We have*

camaraderie, and then you realize that fellow teachers and staff members are doing things they shouldn't be. That's a big let-down; you want to help but you can't."

This feeling of collegiality does not, however, necessarily extend to other areas of the institution. While some participants have generally favorable opinions of security and treatment staff, others point to situations of tension and opposition. One participant remarked that

They're [security staff] like peers with the kids. They wink at this behavior—seem to identify with inappropriate and acting out or misconduct modes. They seem to be defending the kids from us. Educators are seen as authority figures they also feel rebellious towards.

Another complained of *"people looking over our shoulders."* Several participants noted tensions with or a sense of distance from institutional administrators.

Family

Family members sometimes get the brunt of job stresses; one participant confesses to "fussing" with his wife and children. One admitted, *"I'm finding myself being grumpy with my wife when I have to repeat what I say—something that she did just like what happens here."* Others remark on comments by spouses that point up the effects of working inside an institution. A staff member recalls that *"My husband would make comments like 'You're not at Mountain View. You're talking to your son.'"* It appeared that relationships with one's children were most affected by the experience of teaching inside an institution. Several participants recalled being reminded by their own children that *"I'm not one of your students!"* or, after expressing their concerns, being told, *"Dad, don't worry about that."* Staff members with children related that working in

this environment, while increasing their concern for their own children, had also made them realize how proud they are as parents of their children's accomplishments.

Personal Experiences of the Job—Enjoyable/Draining

Surprisingly enough, every participant reported enjoying, liking, or loving his job, even though one was quick to note that *“never have I loved and loathed a job so completely.”* A veteran teacher reported, *“I still find teaching fun. That look in there [a student's reaction] someplace. Or a kid says something that makes your day. That's the reason you come back the next day. It's amazing.”* For others there is a sense of a *“mission”*:

Here we have a nearly insurmountable task—an opportunity to fight the good fight. We're out of the starting gates into the fray. Whether or not we are victorious has come to mean less and less. We're trying, and we get an occasional victory.

Another participant echoes a feeling of *“knowing this is where I'm supposed to be—I don't have any doubts about that.”*

Ten of the participants have prior public school experience, and, while they acknowledge some benefits of teaching in the community schools, which for one was having summers off to catch up on her spring cleaning, and for others was better-behaved and more academically inclined students, most teachers with public school experience indicated that they preferred to teach in the institutional environment. Interestingly, three participants noted that they feel they have more freedom: *“One good thing is that we have the freedom to try new things. It's ironic that we have freedom here. We know a lot*

about what doesn't work." Smaller class size was noted as the biggest benefit to working in the institution. Other perceptions were that the staff at Mountain View works together more than in a public school, there are more possible behavioral controls, there is more flexibility in changing student schedules to alleviate disciplinary problems in the classroom, and there are fewer extra-curricular demands such as bus duty and fund-raising. One participant laughingly reported,

I'd tell people right now the difference in working here and working in public school—it sounds facetious but, I always tell them that number One, I know that every kid on the other side of my desk is a criminal. In public school I know that it's 10-15%, but I don't know who they are. Here I know everyone of them is guilty of something!

And yet there is a real sense that this is a difficult environment: *"When you get here, it's a shock to the system—how it really is. It's not for everybody.... I love my job."*

Another participant reports that *"I expect to be very tired at the end of the day and especially at the end of the week because it's such a challenge to stay up, encourage and....And I expect to be emotionally tired by hearing some of their stories. It's an emotional and physical drain."* For another the experience is similar: *"It drains you. See my grey hairs; you can tell I guess it depresses me sometimes. I think you have to use all that energy all day long --mental energy I guess basically is what we do here."* One participant found it to be *"nerve-wracking for the first year.... I think we come in every day with 'Oh My God! What's this day going to be like?' At the end of the day I'm physically very tired. It's stressful—physically. I have to work hard at relaxing."* At some point the stress takes a toll: *"The feeling of not being appreciated—it weakens you. I*

have a melt-down... It wears on you—to keep them respecting each other....Mental and physical exhaustion.”

Participants noted areas of personal and professional growth: *“I think probably for myself, I like to think professionally I’ve grown in a sense that I’m much more patient than I used to be.”* Other participants noted a feeling of making a contribution: *“Some students I felt I really can see progress. I can actually see progress. I felt like I had some impact. Such feelings of accomplishment led to what one participant termed “self-satisfaction”: “You can feel kinda good about having them change from being negative towards school to at least trying and doing better and things like that.”*

Struggle/Battle—An Engagement on Many Fronts

In the early stages of working with the data from the initial interviews, I thought that struggle/battle might be a fourth theme. However, as I re-read the protocols, it became clear that rather than constituting one aspect of experience, the perception of struggle/battle permeates each of the other areas—the environment, others, personal experience of the practice. The first battlefield is the classroom: *“The behavioral element—you have to battle that first....We end in situations in the classroom where we have to put up with misconduct. You have to be careful about picking your battles.”* For another,

Going into Mountain View, I was intimidated beyond belief. Not only was I unsure of my safety, I was not sure I could reign those guys in and create an environment in the classroom that would be conducive to learning. More to my amazement than anyone's [else's], I was able to do both over time.

Student misbehavior comes in many forms:

Here it was resistance from day one. You have to figure out what makes them tick.

Convince them that they need to do work. They're resistant because nobody

expects them to work. And their body language—that defiant stance—toward

peers, not toward me. I've not had any get in my face.

And not all misbehavior merits attention: “*I pick and choose my battles—you let some go.*” Beyond the obvious misconduct, “*they all have such underlying anger and discontent. A lack of accountability—a fear of—accountability—and hopelessness that they... It's going to take them a long time if ever to develop accountability and move beyond it.*” Teachers noted that, in addition to individual behavior problems, “*It's not that the kids are different, but the classroom itself behaves differently.*” And the solution seems to be “*I guess tough love—don't come down too hard but let them know what acceptable behavior was.*”

Student interactions provide frequent challenges: “*Sometimes it's stressful. If I know that somebody is trying to snooze somebody, then I have to keep my mind on that plus trying to teach the point I'm trying to get over that day.*” Another participant personalized the struggle even more clearly: “*I want the ones that are really trying to get what I'm trying to teach them to get the right message and at the same time trying to protect the one I'm usually standing by.*”

The second battle is with others. Interactions with staff members outside education were often noted as stressful and provocative:

It feels like everyday I'm going onto a battlefield. Actually it's more like going into a really bad neighborhood where somebody's going to pick a fight. I don't know who's going to pick a fight, and I know the police are going to pick on me.

Institutional administrators were described as non-communicative and distant. One participant expressed the wish that

you could change the attitude of the administration, where they would listen. If they would listen to staff and understand where we are coming from. Cause a lot of times it seems like you are up against a brick wall and they way they see things or maybe higher up than them, I'm not sure. But it seems like when you want to do different things that even if you explain it to them it's like "Well, we can't do that" and a lot of times they don't explain to you why, just tell you "No."

Another participant complained, "*The two-facing—we must follow policy—this one, not that one. That part is real frustrating.... Some of the management—some decisions are irrational in my viewpoint—not really following the philosophy.*"

Sometimes the focus is on wider society:

I've become more tolerant--not tolerant--more sympathetic toward people who have broken the law. Still don't have any—you know basically knew what they were doing and there's consequences. But sometimes there's lots of other reasons. I have developed more anger in the way our children are raised or not raised and so many of them are missed and lost.

And the final battlefield is within ourselves: "*The hard part is just coming in the door; I just anticipate conflict. While I'm teaching it's never as bad (almost never as bad) as I expect it.*" Another participant reports, "*Sometimes when I'm leaving Friday, I*

think, *"I can't go back on Monday. I can't do this 5 days a week. It's turbulent. Every 4 to 6 months I have a melt-down. I just can't take it."* In describing his struggle to confront his negative feelings, another participant states, *"I turn around and I tell myself, 'No, this is not right. You're not being fair to yourself or the situation.' And then I try to see what's really goin' on—what's really happening. I think that I have gotten wiser."* Even after a number of years, one participant reported, *"I still fight with myself—to find a happy place for me and for the kids where I could be more effective."* Another describes her struggle to keep her perspective in spite of continual student negativity:

I have to work not to let their crimes or their charges influence how I relate to them. And lots of ways not to let their personalities drag you down. And not to fall into believing what they say about you or how they beat you down by their comments—their cursing, their name-calling, their accusing "You're a racist. You never help me." I know it's not true, and I know where it's coming from and you deal with it. Every day for 5 days and every week and every month.... I'm so tired of being nice, fair, patient, what I think is treating them with respect, treating them better than most people, and still be beat down. The feeling of not being appreciated—even though I know it's there, but after a while of just hearing it so much, it just sort of weakens you.

Another participant related, *"You want so much to make a difference and then you get to realize that only a few.... That's the hardest part—you only have a few [succeed]. People say, 'One Kid. That's nothing.' But sometimes that's all there is."* Notes of caution appeared in the interviews: *Feeling sorry for these kids will eat you alive. And they can smell fear. They will extort and use you. You got to keep both in mind. You can't*

forget that they are human and they are convicts. And further, "You have to be careful about touching...private space. It's hard knowing if they had a chance what they would do. If you start thinking about that, it comes rushing back at you."

Finally, looking back on her experience, our former colleague and now ex-patriate reflects, *"At the end of the day, I usually thought I had never had it so good - or bad. What? Exactly. Yin and Yang. Completely irreconcilable. Conflicted."*

Time—The "life span of the job"

During the process of re-reading all initial interview texts, I noted that participants' perception of the practice tended to differ according to the length of time in the practice. A reexamination of the interview transcriptions with attention to number of years experience at MVYDC reveals a clear pattern. When grouped according to this factor, three distinct groups of teachers emerged: those with 1-3 years of service, those with 4-7 years of service, and those with 12+ years of service. Most participants' early reactions to the job were of apprehension: *"I guess I worried about it a lot. You just have this picture in your mind that these are criminals that are locked up and they don't care what they do and who they do it to."* Somewhere in the first year there is a coming to terms with what is required in the environment:

I'll never forget the first time they locked that door behind me. "What have I done?" And then the day I left for Tullahoma, I promised myself that it wouldn't be the same when I came back or if I was I was quitting. I was taking a lot of the stress home. I didn't feel like I was being successful or accomplishing anything. That was the turn around for me—Tullahoma. I came back and we had several

weeks' worth of butting heads and fighting for control. Then I started loving my job; I guess I learned what it took down there.

Another participant echoed this sentiment: *"I frequently say anytime during the first six months it was debatable whether I'd come back the next day. I'm not spoofing you—that's the truth."* During this initial period teachers developed an awareness of the necessity to remain *"on guard"* and watch for *"cues"* so as to maintain order in the classroom. Each teacher learned what it took for him or her to be *"in control"* of the learners and the learning. During this period the teachers focused on relationships with other staff members, who were primarily seen as resources, and on students, who became *"kids"* instead of *"prisoners"*.

Participants in the middle group (4-7 years) continued to express positive feelings for their jobs, but they also emphasize physical and psychological *"drains"* that sometimes *"empty out"* their emotional reserves. While most people in this experience range declare that they are comfortable in their classrooms, they occasionally have an experience that reinforces potential danger in the workplace: *"I know he would just as soon knock my head off as look at me....I guess I got complacent. That brought me back to reality. Some of these kids are dangerous and they have no conscience."* This wariness extends to the world outside the institution and is expressed as an awareness of potential threats in the environment:

I know I've gone to the airport a couple of times since working here. You're kind of watchful of what people are doing—watching your luggage and more careful of where your purse is or if you have a purse or whatever, having your ID or whatever in your pocket or on your person instead of just kind of in your bag.

Relationship issues addressed include the effect of this increased awareness to dangers that may affect our family members. One person noted, *"It worries me that my daughter might meet a young man who is like some of these young men who has moved on but still has underlying...."* Their battles now shift from classroom to institution, and administrators become the adversaries: *"It just kind of seems like—it's the people up front making these decisions. It's real easy to make decisions that don't affect you."*

The final group of participants, those with over 12 years of experience, displays a deeper understanding of the equivocal nature of their reactions to the job:

You know I look at the same thought two different ways. There's times I think of it and it's depressing. I sometimes think I'd better bail out and just quit trying to teach and just hang on until I can start a different career. I think that way sometimes. But more and more um I've been um making an effort to apply uh I guess to apply spiritual principles to it and uh just put it in God's hands.

This spiritual element leads some to a contemplation of the presence of evil in the world.

As one participant remarks,

In religion you have the idea of original sin and I've always not liked that idea. I'd like to think the best about mankind. I was raised that man was born and from the moment of birth was deserving of hell. But the problem with that is the more I see, the more I experience, or am exposed to—now I feel that there's a whole lot more cruelty and incivility in the world. I don't have nearly as much faith in mankind as I used to.

The struggle becomes a personal one in which the participant battles his own despair and negativity. One participant spoke of being with his own children, *"But when they are*

around me, I still—it's not a big focus but I still catch myself—you know, "What can I do to make this a safe situation?' Maybe that's part of the sadness too, when I should be focusing on enjoying our time together." The relationships with students, colleagues and family members continue to be a focus, but there seems to have been a sea-change, as these teachers seek to reframe their worlds from the perspective of one who has "*fought the good fight.*"

Another striking feature that emerged when considering responses grouped by time in service is that the focus of attention appears to begin with individuals in their immediate surroundings, spirals outward, and then returns to an individual examination. Teachers with one to three years' experience seem to have an early, fairly narrow focus on the classroom and the students, with occasional consultations from colleagues. Teachers in the middle range of experience widen their focus to their environments outside the institution, as they begin to look at potential dangers in those environments. They also widen their focus inside the institution to the actions of the administration. Teachers with the most experience focus on their interior struggles to come to terms with a changed moral universe. See Figure 2 next page. This figure came to represent our understandings about the shape of our experiences as educators working inside a correctional institution.

Metaphors from the First Interviews

While thematic analysis reveals patterns of common experience, it does not suffice to convey a sense of the *Lebenswelt*. As two participants noted, it is impossible to know the dimensions of their work without "*walking a mile in their shoes.*" Perhaps the

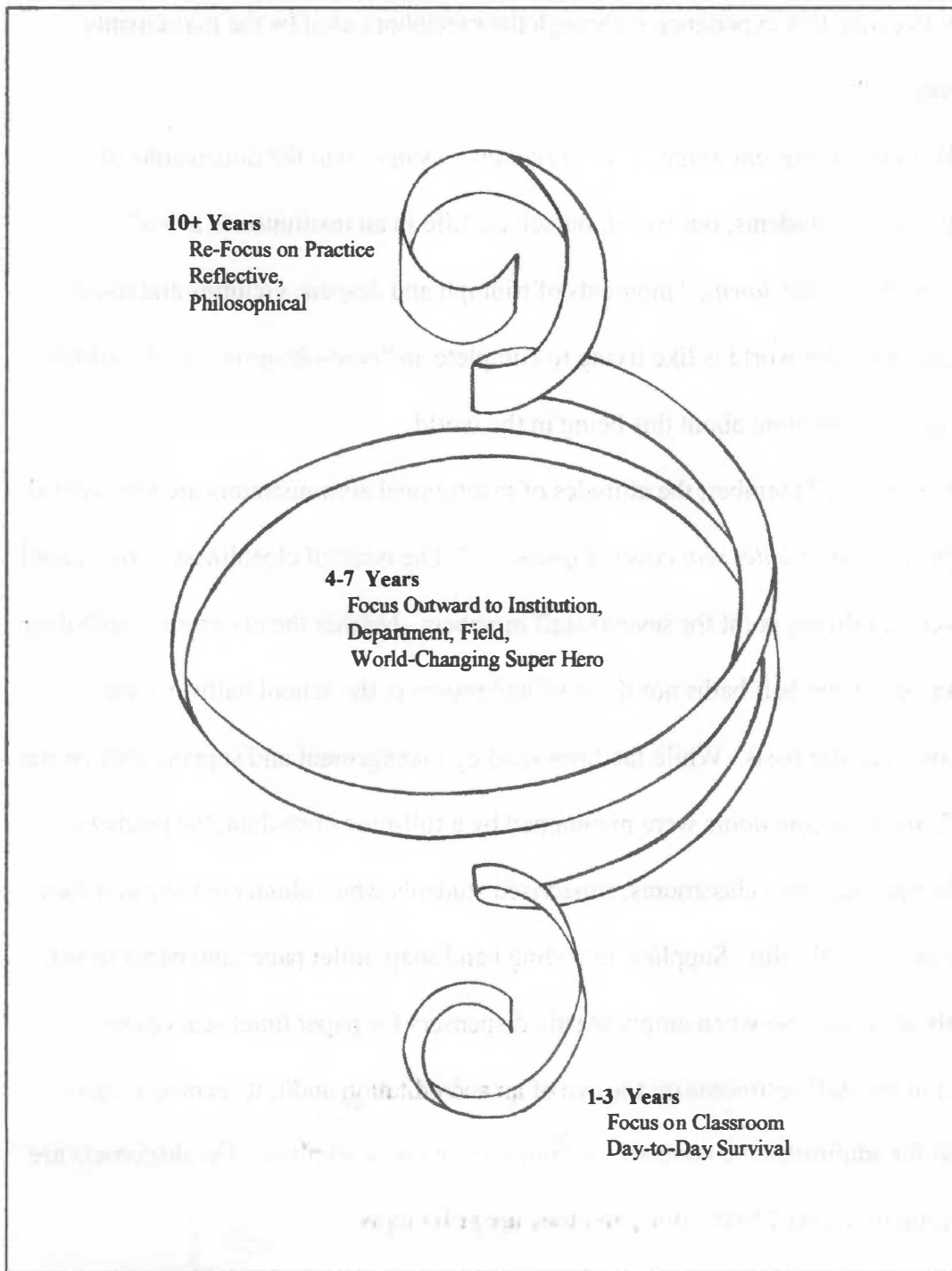


Figure 2. The Spiral

best way to evoke this experience is through the metaphors used by the participants themselves.

Working in this environment is “*a real eye-opener*” into the dimensions of humanity—of our students, our world, ourselves. Life in an institution is a “*roller coaster... with ups and downs,*” moments of triumph and despair, victories and losses. Making sense of this world is like trying to complete an “*ever-changing puzzle*” which evolves as we learn more about this being in the world.

For one staff member, the attitudes of institutional administrators are symbolized by the “*Rest Assured toilet seat cover dispensers.*” The issue of cleanliness in the school had become a rallying point for several staff members. Neither the classrooms with their incorporated student half baths nor the staff bathrooms in the school hallway were cleaned on a regular basis. While facilities used by management and support staff on the other side of the secure doors were maintained by a full-time custodian, the teachers either cleaned their own classrooms, supervised students who volunteered to clean those areas, or put up with filth. Supplies, including hand soap, toilet paper and paper towels, frequently gave out. So when empty plastic dispensers for paper toilet seat covers appeared in the staff restrooms on the eve of an accreditation audit, it seemed a fitting metaphor for administrative concern for sanitation in our workplace. The dispensers are still hanging in the staff bathrooms, and they are still empty.

The most striking metaphors in the initial interviews are those which characterize the experience as that of a *battle*. Participants talked about *picking their battles* in the classroom and deciding which ones were worth fighting. Most participants indicated that initially they felt intimidated by the surroundings of the institution in general and by the

students in particular. For some the struggle is not to allow students to affect their own self-worth or their ability to function in a high-stress environment. Others spoke of their awareness of the ever-present risk of violence. One participant dreaded coming to work because for him the experience was one of “*going into a battlefield.*” On a more positive note, one person spoke in general terms of “*fight[ing] the good fight.*” These are battles in which participants engage students, and sometimes other institutional staff members, as lone warriors.

On the other hand, there are metaphors of joint actions. Our students exhibit behavior that “*snowballs*” from trivial incidents, gathering momentum and other participants and taking on a life of its own, though seldom resulting in anything so recognizable as a snowman. The behavior of one child can provoke a chain reaction:

When you have one that starts [misbehaving] and they pull others into it with them—it’s almost like water going down the drain in the tub. They swirl around and drag others in; then the whole class goes down the drain with it. Most of the time, though, you have one or two that keep on working and that helps. Then one by one they start climbing back out of the drain and start working again. That’s the way I picture it in my mind.

After much experience we can tell from behavioral “cues” that “*something is brewing.*” Despite such behaviors, we “*refuse to bail them out—like water from a leaky boat.*” Though it depresses us and sometimes “*drains*” us, and though it sometimes feels as if we are “*swimming upstream,*” we keep on swimming. Reflecting on her experience, our colleague who has recently moved to London muses, “*There was something hopeful and hopeless about each day. Each small step of progress was*

surrounded, and sometimes overwhelmed, by the chaos around it.”

While analysis of the initial interviews surfaced common themes, participant language, as illustrated by the preceding metaphors, is very much that of individuals.

Chapter VII: Analysis of Group Sessions

Since my intent was to engage my colleagues in an examination of our joint practice, as it is and as it may be, I did not develop an agenda for each session. Beyond forming an interpretive group to thematize protocols from the initial interviews and some notions about fostering the creation of joint understandings, I had no roadmap for the journey we undertook together. Although I arraigned for and facilitated sessions, where we went was not determined by a single navigator. Rather than choosing destinations, I saw my role as making sure, to the extent possible, we all got wherever we were going as a group.

On reflection it appears that the eight sessions divided themselves fairly easily into four groups. The first group, defined by meetings one through three, was primarily devoted to thematizing four individual protocols. In session one, naturally more time was needed for coming to understandings about functioning as a group and for introducing the hermeneutic circle approach. In this session we also entered into a virtual line by line explication of Protocol A, and I talked through my reactions to early parts of this portocol, asking other participants what stood out for them and what connections they were seeing. In the second session we reviewed what had stood out for us in the previous meeting and turned our attentions to Protocol B. Toward the end of this session we began to note common concerns in the two protocols. In session three we reviewed the previous two sessions, especially as far as similarities and differences in the two protocols are concerned, and turned our attentions to Protocols C and E. By the end of this session we were able to see some broad themes emerging from the data, as well as some individual

differences in relation to those themes. At this point I made a decision to send out the remainder of the protocols on email and to continue developing themes to present my analysis to the group when we reconvened after the first of the year.

The second group of sessions, meetings four and five, centered around our discussion of the themes and figures presented in the previous chapter. Most participants had read all the protocols and were able to offer helpful insights and clarifications, particularly in the matter of how to address our personal experience of the job. They particularly resonated with the idea of a battle or struggle permeating all areas of their experience and with the notion of the *“life span of the job.”* Both of these ideas will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter.

The third group of sessions, meetings six and seven, attended to how we invoke and are invoked by others and to how our practical theories shape our attitudes and behaviors toward students. In the fourth and final session, group meeting eight, we concerned ourselves with two questions: So What? and Now What?

Themes as Developed in Group Sessions

As might be expected, since we began group sessions by interpreting initial interviews, many of the themes surfaced in the first three group meetings--the environment, relationships with others, and personal experiences of the practice--were similar to those set out in the previous chapter.

The Environment

The environment was figural for some participants, “*a dangerous, contaminated environment*”:

There's no ventilation. I'm breathing natural gas all day. And chill and freeze. And the people who put this carpet down did such a cheap-ass job (laughter)—cheap job—the glue is radiating out. I have six lights out and I have to clean my bathroom. But I think the air's polluted.

While one participant found this to be “*an environment you can't describe to someone who has never been in it,*” for another it was an unpleasant reminder of something else:

Well, it's not just physical health but emotional health. I can't remember the CSO's name, but I remember leaving—everybody was pretty much on alert that day. They had parked two vehicles down there on the road where you pretty much had to stop and crawl through and that's exactly what we did in Saudi Arabia and Iraq—slow the vehicle down to get through the barricades. And why? Not because of the kid, but because of a CSO coming back with a gun.

It is an environment where “*Certainty—being able to describe something exactly as it is or knowing exactly what is doing to happen is probably not going to be a feature of this environment.*”

Relationships with Others

The theme of relationships with others, also noted in the initial interviews, was further amplified in the early group sessions. Participants disagreed over whether “*mutual respect*” between teachers and students was possible in this environment. They shared a

laugh over one person's comment that *"It would be a great job if it wasn't for the students!"* Yet most participants seemed to resonate with comments in the protocols about *"helping kids"* and *"not forming opinions about students."*

Relationships with students are reciprocal; as one person noted, *"Have you ever noticed how kids influence our behavior?"* Beginning in session five, participants began to explore their assumptions about student behavior and how their own approach to students affects that behavior. One participant gave an example of observing a student's *"goading"* a teacher and or her *"falling into the trap"* and *"escalating right along with him."* Another person remarked, *"It's that relationship. I know you; I know your idiosyncrasies. I know how far I can push you."* Participants talked about dealing with students who are annoying or difficult to like or disruptive to other students. We explored factors that come into play in such cases: the particular behaviors of the student, the effect of that behavior on other students, the potential for further escalation, the context in which the behavior occurs, our assumptions about the causes of the behavior, and the history we have with that student, not to mention the mood we might be in at the moment and other events occurring at the same time. The complex nature of our relationships with these students influences our responses.

The group meetings occurred during a period of considerable turmoil, as noted in Chapter III. Relationships with others inside the institution were frequently cited as sources of tension. Relationships with others outside the institution were also noted. One person mentioned that she says *"'Put your chair down'" to people who are not even in here—like at home in my kitchen.*" Another found it *"disturbing to think that this person [the interviewee in the Protocol A] takes this home to the extent they do."*

Personal Experiences of the Practice

These themes, however, were soon overshadowed by participants' focus on their personal experiences. Several people recognized some aspect of their experience. For one participant, hearing her protocol read triggered a realization of the extent of her experience of depression; she remarked, *"Dang, I said that [it's depressing] all kinds of times!"* For another, the experience of reading his protocol was *"a big shock... it was like finally putting it in some kind of order... It made more sense than just going around thinking it... This tells the story."* As early as the first group session, group members verbalized their concerns about issues such as self-esteem: *"people looking over our shoulders"* or *"you only hear the negative"* or *"Anybody thinks they can teach."* One participant finds herself reacting to the demands of the students, *"getting totally broken down from the kids... And I feel like a pile of poop. And I know I can't take it personally... I realize that it's a fellow pile of poop that's making me feel that way."*

The theme of change appears early in the group sessions. Some changes have come about as a result of working in this environment: *"I'm definitely not who I was when I started. And I feel like I'll never be again."* Another person recalled, *"Back under [a previous superintendent] we kept hearing 'We're changing lives.' Well, yeah, but guess what? Our lives are changing too."* Still another participant remarked that *"You're a little bit innocent before you get here."* Other changes occur as a result of participating in the research group:

What I've learned from looking at the protocols is sort of like given me another— at first I was disgusted when I'd read about people talking about, "Oh well, you know, I think about these poor kids. What will happen to them?" And I'm like,

gimme a break... but I have to admit that I'm reminded that—I think maybe I'm one extreme and there is the other extreme, but somewhere---It's the good cop/bad cop thing, and I'm just the bad cop [laughter]...I thought there was no value to the good cops, but reading the protocols has made me realize that there's value to the bleeding hearts because they are the good cops.

In response, another participant (doubtless one of the good cops) stated, *“This has made me realize—I now see people in a different light. I probably look at [the bad cop] totally differently now. Now that I can see where he is coming from, I think he is a softer person. I even tell the boys that they need to look at it from his point of view.”*

Emerging as early as the end of the first group meeting and echoing throughout all group sessions was the idea that learning about the perceptions of others is “*comforting*” because it means *“There are people who, you know, feel exactly the way I do about a lot of these things and I'm not the only one.”* Or alternatively, *“I'm just glad somebody is more paranoid than I am!”* This realization of common experience was met with mixed emotions by one person:

I got a sense of maybe I'm not crazy or I'm not alone in the mental/physical exhaustion part of it and emotional stress. I thought maybe I'm not cut out for it...I sort of hoped that maybe when I got the hang of it, some of these feelings would go away, but evidently it's part of it.

Metaphors from the Group Sessions

Participants' use of metaphors in the group sessions indicated a kind of coordination of language, but more importantly, of thinking. On several occasions, a

participant borrowed an example or a phrase and created from it a metaphor that reflected both the original use and their own meaning.

Stepping on the Turtle

In session two, one participant took note that, in the protocol we were examining, the interviewee had given an example of his increased awareness of the environment,

I think I observe things with a little more intensity....Like right out in the yard—I'm out in the woods, walking on the path, all of a sudden here's a little turtle laying there. It's just one of those things where I just happened to see that it was there. Prior to working here, I don't know if I would have observed it before; I might have just stepped on it and then observed it.

In discussion after we had read the entire protocol, this participant returned to the example of stepping on turtle, utilizing it as a metaphor for relating her perception of changes in herself:

I'd like to—I would always see the turtle and never step on it. I would always step over it. I'm always very observant and I wouldn't even dream of stepping on a turtle. But that is my over-all personality; I catch spiders in my house and let them go. I just about slapped BA in the face today. I mean I—it was like the first time I got so mad at my child and I put them in the baby bed and said "Just cry—I don't care." He was just doing his BA thing. He said the F-word, and he didn't even say it to me, but I looked at him and his little shiny white cheek was just right here and it just went up my body and to my arm and I think my fairy godmother or somebody stopped me and I would—that's not my nature. I was just ready to plant

my hand right on his face. I didn't do it, but I told him, "I almost just slapped the sh.. out of you; I am so tired of your language and your attitude." And I was just like this...I think another day and time it would have really frightened me, made me feel really bad for even having those thoughts. But today I didn't have those thoughts that I am a bad, horrible person. I thought "Damn, I'm lucky I didn't do that." Because I really could have. I don't know what stopped. In fact Cpl. James was in my room today and I asked what would have happened. I know I would go under evaluation. Would I lose my job? You know, I stepped on the turtle today.

This excerpt clearly echoes the theme of change mentioned earlier, as well as illustrating the perceptions of stress surfaced in first interviews. It also illustrates another dimension of the notion of "catching yourself." What is also interesting is that, in the space of just a few minutes, one participant borrowed an example created by another to illustrate awareness and re-cast it to serve as a metaphor for her own awareness of what she sees as a radical change in behavior:

But I hit my cat on the head one time before we ever had kids, and I told (my husband) that I didn't think we should have kids because I'd abuse them. It just came out of me. But this time when I just about slapped a child, it didn't bother me at all....It was a change in my personality.

"Stepping on the turtle" powerfully evoked the struggles that we all face in the limits of our humanity while dealing with particularly difficult students.

A Crystallizing Event

Another example of metaphor occurred in session three, when a participant stated, *“Well, I think that the thing with TC was a real crystallizing event.”* This was a reference to the student who choked the teacher assistant in August; this incident was mentioned specifically in the protocol under discussion: *“It just kind of—it made me---and most of these kids. I guess I got complacent. That brought me back to reality.”* Raising this issue for the group was in itself a “real crystallizing event” as participants engaged for several minutes in voicing their perceptions of the event and its meaning in our joint practice:

You know it’s an uncomfortable feeling when you’ve got a kid like TC who choked somebody down and we don’t have too many people on our staff to stop him from doing it again.

He bragged about it.

It was treated like nothing happened. I mean he got three or four piddly majors and charges that didn’t get pushed and evidently not too much support from up front.

That’s the first time since I’ve worked here that a teacher has been assaulted, except verbally, and that’s everyday.

I mean the thing is that there was a real potential for injury in that particular situation and I don’t think that too many people outwardly viewed it as seriously as

Maybe it’s just a personal feeling, but I was quite frankly disappointed that the powers that be didn’t want to press charges. For whatever reason, it just seemed that, in my interpretation, it was swept under the carpet. These things happen.

The powers that be don't care about—it'd look bad in Nashville.

Save face for the facility. This is actually bitter-sounding, but I wonder if some of our incident reports actually make it to Nashville.

The incident, which for the interviewee had reminded her of the inherent dangers of working in an institution, once pointed to by a participant in terms of “a crystallizing event,” functioned to do just that—focus the entire group’s attentions on one situation and their attempts to make meaning out of it. Among the “crystals” that appear to have been distilled from such meaning-making are notions such as these: students can erupt in violence at any given moment, nobody but us takes this situation seriously, it can happen again, Nashville doesn’t care or doesn’t know, saving face is more important than defending staff members, things like this are hidden—swept under the carpet. The discussion continued, as one participant stated, “*I just wish the people up front would care more about our personal safety back here than how they look in Nashville.*” Her comment was greeted by unanimous laughter.

Cycles and the Life Span of the Job

During the third group session discussion of Protocol D, two metaphors surfaced: the *life span of the job* and *cycles*. One participant noted,

I like her phrase “the life span of the job.” And I always wonder... This is the longest I’ve stayed at a job... It doesn’t seem like it’s been five years, but I think, can I do this another week? Can I do this another five years?”

There seemed to be a consensus that the life span of the job varied from one person to another. As one person noted, the employees who get ten, fifteen, or twenty-year service

awards at the Employee Appreciation Days are not usually staff members who deal with students on a daily basis. The job life span seemed to be also a function of how one deals with stress in the workplace.

The discussion about an assault on education staff prompted another participant to remark:

One of the things that struck me is the cycle—you know students coming and going and coming back and then that brought back to mind—the same thing happens with the whole population. Because those of us who have been here before—a teacher getting assaulted is not something new. We've dealt with it before.... And... watching the new staff coming in... I've talked to people about this and they go through a cycle. And I noticed after about six months, they hit bottom and then they start climbing back up. And if they make it back up to the top, then they do well.

The cyclical nature of life in an institution—students coming and going (and sometimes coming back), staff coming and going (and sometimes coming back), and events recurring—had an additional dimension for me. For most of the current staff members August of 2004 was the first time a student had directly attacked a school faculty member. The excerpt above refers to an incident that occurred in June of 1996, when a student assault on a teacher resulted in several stitches. I remember another assault in 1991 when a teacher attempted to intervene in a student fight and was knocked to the floor and broke her hip.

The Spiral

When I continued to thematize the protocols that remained after the first three group sessions, I was mindful of the resonance that both cycles and the life span of the job had for my colleagues. I incorporated those ideas into the figure which represented the element of time as it applied in the first interviews (see page 85). When I introduced this figure to the group in session four, they immediately acknowledged that a spiral represents their experience of teaching in this environment. We determined that the first stage of the spiral lasts anywhere from six months to two years and is focused almost exclusively on survival. The middle stage “spirals out” because *“We’re looking for opportunities to make a difference with our students.”* This is the super hero-world changing stage which occurs somewhere between four and nine years, depending on the individual staff member. Almost inevitably though, the enormity of the problem of dealing with juvenile delinquency and the massive inertia of institutions, administrations, and government agencies bring the realization that it’s just too much for one person to take on. There is then a re-focusing that occurs somewhere around year 12, and the teacher turns inward, back to the classroom and the students before him or her, and within to ponder the problem of humanity. The question What happens next? cannot yet be answered. In our environment, I have been there for the longest time—just approaching 15 years. My guess is that we spiral back out, but with a different focus.

Unlike the metaphors of stepping on the turtle and a crystallizing event, both of which had short but powerful effects on the group, the metaphors of the life span of the job and of cycles continued to recur throughout the remainder of the group sessions. It is with the metaphor of the spiral, however, that the clearest evidence of engaging joint

construction occurs. Over half of session four focused on some aspect of the spiral.

Participants agreed that the spiral represents the nature of their experience, and there was general acknowledgment that the initial cycle is narrowly focused on getting through the day. When they considered the broadening of the second cycle, there was spirited discussion of what we as a group could or should do to make a difference in education within (or outside of) the institution. "*Marching on Nashville*" was one suggestion.

Participants also felt that anything we might attempt was hopeless since our expertise is not valued in the institution or the department; rather it is ignored, and the department contracts with outside experts who, for the most part, have no experience with our population in particular and juvenile delinquents in general. One participant wondered if staff members in other areas of the institution experienced a similar spiral in their work experience.

In session five we considered the spiral in terms of implications for new staff members in the initial adjustment period "*that hitting rock bottom.*" Later in this session, one participant reassured another, "*Now don't give up—we've got another spiral.*" In session six a participant noted, "*We're all at different places on the spiral.*" This comment led to a discussion of how some people seem to always know what is going on throughout the institution, while others are not "*in the know.*" In the last session, this same participant talked about the need for us to continue meeting as a group: "*It's the next spiral—we'll be going in our walkers!*"

Unlike the metaphors in the initial interviews, the metaphors that surfaced during the group sessions are characterized by coordination or connection with others. Analysis of follow-up interviews yields similar findings.

Chapter VIII: Analysis of Findings—Follow-Up Interviews

Of the original 12 participants, 10 completed the total process. One resigned to join her fiancé in England just as the first interviews began; the second was reassigned immediately following the first group session as a result of an investigation and did not participate further, subsequently resigning. A third participant attended only three of eight group sessions and participated in discussion in only one of those. I had originally planned to call these “final” interviews; however, my colleagues reacted negatively to the term. We then substituted the term “follow-up” interviews. These follow-up interviews were conducted with the nine remaining colleagues, each of whom had participated in at least five of the eight sessions. Four colleagues participated in all eight group sessions, three participated in seven sessions, one participated in six sessions, and one in five sessions. These nine colleagues estimated that they had spent an average of 27 hours in interviews, reading protocols, participating in group sessions and in thinking and/or talking with others about the issues we had surfaced. Individual estimates ranged from 10 to 50 hours. In this chapter I analyze the themes and the language of those interviews.

Themes Developed in Follow-Up Interviews

✓ Analysis of initial interviews in Chapter VII noted three themes: the environment, relationships with other people, and personal experience in the role. These same themes surfaced in the group sessions and in the follow-up interviews; however, the focus became narrower. While the theme of environment in the initial interviews extended from the classroom to the institution and the world beyond, in the follow-up

interviews participant talked mostly about their perceptions of the environment we constructed as a group. Similarly, relationships with others in the initial interviews included students, colleagues in the school and the institution, and family members. The focus of relationships in the follow-up interviews was primarily those concerning colleagues participating in the research group. The third theme, participant perceptions of themselves in the practice, focused less on physical and emotional drains experienced in their educational practice and more on their perceptions of efficacy in practice.

The Environment—The Group as a Safe Place

For one participant the group meetings were a place where *“We felt safe with each other.”* One person likened group meetings to a *“support group.”* Another remarked, *I feel like I’ve revealed a little bit more about myself, which is sometimes scary, ‘cause you never know how people will react to that. But it was a very safe, forgiving environment—nobody was abusive or anything like that.*

The same participant later added, *“I don’t believe any of my co-workers would be nearly as judgmental of me as I had thought they previously might be.”* As one participant put it, *“If you don’t feel a connection as a group, I don’t think that you talk as freely as we did in there. And we could laugh at ourselves and with each other over things that happened or things that we would say.”*

Several participants mentioned the laughter in group sessions as an indication that we were able to *“relax”* with each other, as one participant remarked, *“It is amazing how that little bit of humor can tend to put people at ease.”* Another noted that *“You kind of felt free to express yourself and tell others how you felt.”* Significantly, two participants

emphasized that they found the group to be a *“very comfortable, non-threatening environment.”* Other participants were described as *courteous, respectful, or tactful.* Four of the nine follow-up interviews characterized the group sessions as *therapeutic* or *good therapy.* One participant referred to his being able to talk about his experiences as a *catharsis.* Another noted a progression in the level of comfort for the group:

When we first started... everybody was kind of stressed about everything, but then as we talked more and more... it kind of calmed people down to seeing more into the individual people instead of looking at everybody from the outside.

For another person, the group experience *“was like a hug.”*

Such an environment engendered candor; as one participant remarked, *“It was neat to be able to speak candidly.”* For another, *“getting it out in the open”* was beneficial. Still another pointed out *“We were, I think, pretty much sharing our lives with each other.”* Another participant experienced the group as *“Just everybody talking about their true feelings and opening up and letting everybody see they are human... Everybody being honest.”*

This openness in the group was in turn engendered in part by having participated in the initial interviews and in having read each other's protocols. As one participant noted, *“When you put it [his experience] out there in the protocol, it brings it out in the open and you realize, ‘Hah! I’ve felt that same way!’”* For this participant, the protocols were critical in creating a safe and supportive group environment: *“It was the realization that we had that connection with each other. I don’t think it would have happened without those [protocols].”* Another stated, *“It was like, you know, that you had some things in common before you even started talking. And that makes a difference. I think it*

makes it easier to pick up a conversation or a discussion.” For another participant the effect was more dramatic: *“I guess when you see it in black and white, it kind of hits you in the face!”* Access to the protocols by group members also contributed to the group’s sense of safety and cohesion; as one participant laughingly noted, *“We had all the dirt on each other. We weren’t going to betray each other!”*

Relationships with Others—“I’m not the only one”

Eight of the nine follow-up interviewees reported recognizing that they were not the only ones to experience themselves or their practices in the particular ways that were figural for them. This recognition came about through their forging a connection with their colleagues participating in this research project. This connection, experienced as a *bond*, is characterized by common experiences and common perspectives. As one person notes, *“We have something the rest of the staff doesn’t have—a bond—the understanding that we have for each other.”* One participant confessed, *“Sometimes you feel like you are the only one, but you found out that many people had the same type of experiences and felt the same way.”* For at least one participant, this shared experience came as a revelation:

I was surprised that stress had more of an impact on some people...It seemed like they liked their job and it didn’t seem that stressful, but reading the protocols, ...I realized they do have as much stress as you [sic] do.

For another this recognition is affirming:

It [the group process] gave me insight into the way these people think—the way people I work with think about things. It made me consider things from their

viewpoint, and it's given me a different perspective on the students I work with.

At the same time [it] reaffirmed what I was experiencing and also let me know I was not the only person experiencing that.

And for a third participant, this recognition of shared experience was reassuring:

Whether you actually have to call on somebody or not, you know that you could and that they would understand and because of your shared experiences, they would know what you were talking about. Most likely they would not make fun of you.

Several participants noted this bond with colleagues as significant in their experience of the research project. One fairly new staff member explained, *"The big thing is when I realized that even people that have been here a long time still have problems and still, you know, still struggle sometimes. But they still love it."* Another's perception was that *"We do share a common, very stressful environment with each other. I've worked other places, but I feel closer to the people here that I ever felt to anybody that I've worked with."* Such bonds have practical benefits in the day-to-day reality of a difficult workplace; one person sees her colleagues as a resource: *"Understanding people ... just makes you feel closer. You are more apt to ask them for advice or, you know, maybe ask them how they deal with a situation. You just don't feel as silly asking questions."* Another person had a somewhat different perspective on her colleagues as a resource: *"We are lucky to have the people we do here that are willing to stick it out. And it amazes me how many of us really, seriously enjoy the job in this environment and are willing to do it."*

Personal Experiences of the Practice—“We know where we are coming from.”

Group members noted changes in their perceptions of themselves in their practices. One participant, who confesses that he likes to study human nature, theorized *“Getting to know those around me even better kind of helps you to know yourself in how you react to them.”* Another participant reflected that she had learned

That maybe I know how to do my job better than I realized and that I’m right.

That I have a good feel and a good take—the students we have here—how to direct their energies. That a lot of my skills and personality characteristics are common across the group.

She also indicated *“I think I realize that I need to take a little stronger stance on some issues and not be quite as lenient as I have in the past.”* Another participant reported his perception that *“All of us I thought seemed to think we are in the right place. This is what we want to be doing. Strangely enough!”* Still another participant characterized his assessment of himself in his practice:

And I also learned that some of the things—some of the relationships I have with students have more value—and the ways I am doing it are probably more competent that I had thought and are not that different from people I see as competent teachers. What I experience is not as different from everybody else as I had imagined. We have shared outlooks, shared approaches, shared attitudes and shared methods. There’s more value to it than I have given thought to.

Another person sees herself as *“more relaxed—not as worried about the whole world caving in if I don’t do something just right.”*

Two group members predicted outcomes of these changed perspectives. For one, the change will come about in individual terms:

Group members will feel more at ease in what they do and how they do it and congratulate themselves more and feel good about what they are doing. That they are OK in what they are doing and how they look at students and their job in particular.

He goes on to state, “*The biggest thing I take away is validation.*” Another participant sees change more in terms of the group:

We have the same feelings about...how things are conducted around here and now that we know that, maybe we can build on that to make it a stronger group for the teachers to be able to back each other up and feel good about it. Not feel like you are forced to do something I guess. You can honestly feel that way.

For most participants in the follow-up interviews, there is a sense of connection, a focus on the group, a shift from individual practice to our practice.

Metaphors from the Follow-Up Interviews

Three categories of metaphors arise in the follow-up interviews: metaphors of connection, metaphors of struggle, and metaphors of a journey. One participant referred to “*the common strings that run through us all.*” He identifies these strings as “*the hopes, fears, desires, and aspirations*” that he shares with his colleagues. Even though he saw us as having a “*sort of kinship bond that was ...there before,*” he goes on to state, “*We’re more tightly woven, closer knit, a whole lot more cohesive than we were before.*” Several other participants speak of a *common bond* without any further specifics.

Two metaphors of struggle occur in these interviews: two different participants mention a *battle*. One describes her experience in this way: “*Sometimes you do feel like there’s a battle—you’re trying to get things done a certain way—trying to keep them from misbehaving.*” For another the engagement seems more dangerous: “*Walking into the place is like going into a battle and I feel like a target from both sides—the kids and the administration both.*” This same participant also uses another metaphor of struggle:

I’d say we commonly experience an adversarial relationship to a great degree with the kids and their agenda and we experience an adversarial relationship with the administration on the other side, so we are kind of sandwiched by adversaries. You know, they may not deliberately mean to be that way, but that’s the way it’s ended up.

Echoes of the battle metaphor occur when other participants use the terms *camaraderie* or more clearly still *comrades in arms*.

The journey metaphor occurs in three forms. Two participants talk about being in the *same boat* as everyone else; another states, “*We are on the right track.*” It is not clear where either the boat or the track is heading, however. A second journey metaphor uses imagery from the Wild West:

Teaching is like a frontier....We don’t see a whole lot of what becomes of these kids and....we have no way of knowing very much about what effect we are having and how other people perceive what we are doing....It’s like a bunch of explorers—we run into each other and tell each other what’s going on in different areas of the territory.

However, at least one participant has realized that “*I’m not the lone ranger here!*”

The third journey metaphor refers to the spiral developed from the initial interviews (See page 84) as an expression of the various phases of experience over time. Four participants referred to this figure as a metaphor that clarifies the shape of their experience. For one participant,

It helped me understand—maybe this is part of the cycle that we go through and I can see where I've been in it and how I've progressed through my journey and then I can see coming back—it's real. It put into a visual perspective what I've been through.

The metaphors of struggle/battle indicate that for at least two participants this perception of the practice is on-going. Metaphors of connection and of shared journeys indicate that the form of participants' language is congruent with the content as discussed earlier in this chapter.

Chapter IX: Synthesis

In this chapter I discuss themes and metaphors across data sets, roles we played, ways that we positioned our colleagues, and evidences of group knowing.

Themes and Metaphors Across Data Sets

Themes Across Data Sets

The same three themes--the environment, other people, and personal experience of the practice—were present across data sets; however, there were differences in how participants expressed themselves in relation to those themes. In the first set of interviews participants talked about three aspects of their environments. The initial focus is the classroom which, after early struggles and somewhat infrequent later ones, becomes a *comfortable* place. The wider context of the institution remains across all data sets as one of tension and threat. During the group sessions, the institutional environment is described as one of uncertainty, risk and stress, which for one participant was like being on active duty in a war zone. Initial interviews were also concerned with environments outside the institution, in which participants report increased awareness or wariness. Some group discussion continues this theme of increased awareness of outside environments; however, the follow-up interviews are concerned with a different environment—the environment we created as a group, and which was described as *safe, comforting, and non-threatening*.

Relationships with others in the initial interviews included those with students, colleagues and other staff members, and family members. Relationships with students are

initially sources of concerns about dealing with incarcerated juveniles, but most teachers move fairly quickly to seeing them as *my students* or *these kids* or even *my boys*. Initial interviews report relationships with colleagues in generally favorable terms, though there are exceptions. Relationships with family members are affected as participants become more aware of potential risks for their loved ones or carry work stress home. During group sessions these concerns are also addressed, but participants begin to examine their relationships with students and attempt to account for how those relationships are constructed. Further they began to see their colleagues in the group in different terms, as people who share many of the same feelings and perceptions. In the follow-up interviews, the focus is on relationships with these colleagues, expressed as a *bond* and as *reassuring*.

The third theme, personal experience of the educational practice, is expressed in the initial interviews as an individual perception; although every participant reported *liking* or *loving* their job, they also found it *exhausting* or *draining*. During group sessions, several participants appeared to come to realizations about the extent of their perceptions of stress, exhaustion, or depression. They also began to realize that these perceptions were shared by others and began to see “*I’m not the only one.*” In follow-up interviews, participants report experiencing *validation*, feeling *camaraderie*, experiencing something *very reassuring*, and being “*not as worried about the whole world caving in if I don’t do something just right.*”

Metaphors Across Data Sets

Metaphors noted in the initial interviews are primarily those concerned with individual perception. One participant challenges individuals outside our environment to

“walk a mile in my shoes.” Another likens his experience in the institution to a *roller-coaster*—lots of ups and downs; for another it’s an *ever-changing puzzle*. There are two metaphors that feature connection to others; these are used in comparing student behavior to water *going down the drain* or to a *snowball* gathering momentum as it goes downhill. In the group sessions there are examples of participants making use of each other’s language to construct a personal metaphor; *stepping on the turtle*, an illustration of one participant’s awareness, becomes another’s metaphor for a disturbing change in her behavior. Several participants were struck by the notions of *cycles* of experience and the *life span of the job*. I combined these two elements to create the *spiral*, which became a meaningful articulation of experience for several participants. Four people mentioned the spiral in their follow-up interviews. In the follow-up interviews there are metaphors of individual perceptions, *battles* or being a *target*; there are also metaphors of connection, a *common string that runs through us all* and a *common bond*. Further, there are three images of travel, *the same boat*, *the right track*, and *frontier explorers*. Significantly, these images are of shared journeys; even the frontier explorers *“run into each other and tell each other what’s going on.”* In contrast the boat metaphor also exists in an initial interview; however, in that case it is a *leaky* boat which the interviewee is bailing out.

Struggles
connection
process

Roles and Positions

One of the most interesting aspects of our interaction is that we came to recognize ourselves as behaving in certain ways. This recognition was possible only through reflection; in my case it was brought about by the distancing from the group sessions

brought about by the necessity of transcribing the tapes. I was both present in the group session as a participant and present to it as I transcribed the audiotape.

While transcribing the group sessions, I was able to see how each of us as a participant was acting out our own role in the group. In speaking of roles, I am using the term in the sense of “actions appropriate to a particular ‘stage part’” (Bourdieu, 1977, 2002, p. 2). This awareness, while present to some degree during the sessions themselves, became far more apparent in transcription. In the last session, I shared with the group my perceptions of the roles in which we had cast ourselves. One participant typically entered the dialogue by telling stories or jokes; he was our comic relief. Another carried on a running commentary throughout each session—our own Greek chorus. A third acted as a co-facilitator, getting us back on topic, pointing out specifics in protocols, and engaging other participants in exploring their assumptions. Another tended toward philosophical concerns: “*How do we view our fellow man?*” For another participant, our meetings provided an occasion for holding forth on his firmly-held positions—his own bully pulpit. One participant’s comments were typically grounded in the here and now, giving specific examples of interaction in her daily practice. Yet another was a 60’s flower child, ever ready to march to Nashville or take on “the man.” Still others were moving from spectators to active participants who spoke out from their own experiences. I saw myself as a mother hen, frantically trying to gather in all her chicks, and as talking too much and inquiring too little. According to the other group members, my role was to provide focus and bring goodies. Participants indicated that they recognized themselves and others as acting in these roles. For the remainder of the last group session, we pointed to ourselves:

“He’s doing it again!” or *“You just did your thing again!”* Such comments were greeted by good-natured laughter.

Sorting through these various roles and noting the ways in which other participants and I positioned ourselves and each other forms a crucial step in analysis of the data. In this I follow Davies and Harre (1990) in their account of positioning: “the discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent positions in jointly produced story lines” (p. 4). I consciously positioned my colleagues as competent, thoughtful professionals, invoking them as experts in their fields, who were operating out of a practical mastery that, though tacit, could be accessed by inquiry and reflection. By inquiring into the assumptions underlying actions, I attempted to elicit an articulation of the practical theories informing those actions. In the following excerpt from the seventh group session, we worked toward understanding some aspects of the basis on which Participant 1 deals with behaviors that are annoying for her but do not seem to affect the rest of the students in the class. Note that in this and the following excerpts my comments are in italics and participants’ comments are numbered. I have also chosen to single-space these excerpts for ease in following the conversation.

Why do you have to do that? You two are saying that you believe that you, even though your reaction to this child is Yuccchh, that you need not to show that. Why do you believe that?

1: Because it was personal. It wasn’t really anything he was doing as a student, in the class. It was just silly stuff that irritated everybody in the class and it irritated me ‘cause it was like you tell a joke and you don’t know when to stop. And you wanted to not totally crush the spirit, but you had to get it controlled, you know. *OK, let’s go back ‘cause you are operating it sounds like—I want to try to sort some of these things out at a deeper level. You’re saying that this child just gives me the ickies. I really just—or he just annoys the crap out of me.*

1: I know he annoys everybody else and they're going to react and going to my class

2: That's what I'm talking about

3: A lot of times from past behavior you're thinking

2: annoy the room at large not just me

So you're predicting, say OK he's always been this way and he is going to do this and then I'm going to have the whole class...

1: You stop—and you stop—and ---

So this behavior of yours takes the form of IF , THEN: IF I allow TS or AD, or some other child—if I allow them, then I'm going to have this other problem. Ok, that's one maybe underlying practical theory.

1: The thing about my 5th period class and it's the type of personality that is majorly annoying, but all the six kids in there are—think it's great and it's fun and they just annoy and laugh and they are just happy being little weirdos. There's no one else in there that's going off on them.

2: But if it's the kind of annoyance that they can, you know what I'm saying

1: They're just being their little silly fun

2: Well, that's fine, but when you've got every kid in the room freaking out, you know, it's not fun

1: But if I had some of the more mature or different personalities in the classroom

2: It'd be a circus

1: But is they're all kind of mixed in, it's kind of fun. You never know when Chewbacca is going to start singing. (laughter)

So if you have—and this goes back to the context of the situation. So you've got all these things with this particular child, but you've also got the context of that particular class. So in this particular class, Chewbacca noises may be OK for everybody but you and that's another thing. But in another class, that's something that you might have to stop because the whole class would go bonkers. So you're saying—I think—that the demeanor and the behavior of the class, the reaction of the class, might be more important than your personal reaction.

1: Exactly.

2: Oh yeah

A subsequent interchange with Participant 3 lead to consideration of how we try to

balance encouraging student effort while controlling behavior:

You mentioned a minute ago that you catch yourself. How do you catch yourself?

3: Well, I just notice. Sometimes, after I've called somebody down two or three times, it's just like, "Oh, wait a minute."

What is that noticing like, when you catch yourself—when you notice yourself doing something? What is that like? How does that happen?

3: Oh, I just realize that I've done it—I've called the same person down—uh—maybe several times and somebody else is doing the same thing and I haven't said as much to him and it's just, you know...

2: Now, D....

1: I—in my situation when I do that—a lot of it is because the one that you are calling down so much—you know that from the point that they are at it will escalate if you don't say something. Whereas the other child that's doing the same behavior that you're not calling down—you assume that it's not going to go anywhere. It's like—I can't remember who the child was—I guess it was LP, who was just being yucky, and JR was saying bad words. And I said "JR, just straighten up." "Well he cussed. Why didn't you write him up?" And then I said well—"You yelled at him, why didn't you just yell at me?" Well, in a way that's true. But JR is saying it just being stupid and the other kid is saying it being ugly. And meaning it. Just trying to make me feel bad.

So sometimes you are in the class and you are fussing at a kid and you just catch yourself

1: Or they call you out
or they reflect to you... "I see it this way." When that happens, you mentioned you went "Oooh"

3: Well it just kind of bothers me to think that I'm not, if I can see myself doing it then they can probably see me doing it too.

It bothers you---what is that bothered about?

3: That I'm maybe treating—treat one unfairly you know—maybe I shouldn't—maybe I'm focusing on that child because I don't really like him so much, you know

That has the ring of honesty, doesn't it? [laughter—several voices, talking at once]

2: I think everybody does it, Ms.

3: Yes, there are some of them that I don't like as well...

2: But you don't really want to think that's why you're doing it. But, Yeah, D..., be honest...

3: But I don't want them to have the idea that I don't like them (several voices)
OK, now, you don't want them to think that you don't like them because....?

3: Because I don't-- I think it's hurtful

1: She doesn't want to make anybody unhappy; she's a very kind person.

And that's hurtful and you don't want to be a hurtful person, OK?

3: That's exactly right. Probably a lot of these guys have had teachers all along say, "You can't do this..."

2: You're dumb

3: yada yada yada all the bad things that teachers say when you are growing up. And, they don't need that. These guys need encouragement.

2: But you know, sometimes you can't take any more.

3: Oh, I know

2: You know it's just like, I don't care

1; That's just such a disappointment

So they need encouragement and you are acting into the situation with this child that you don't particularly like, and you are kind of monitoring your behavior to this child and realizing oooh, I really am calling him down a lot, even though I really don't like him and I'm afraid it's going to show, because he needs encouragement and I need to give him encouragement. That's a very deep level of why you are doing what you do.

1: I think that's very powerful and very ever-present when you work here. That you approach your students here that I'm assuming you would approach students elsewhere. You want to really get after them, but you also don't want to destroy them.

Because?

1: Well, you know, I don't want to unbounce Tigger completely. I want him to settle down, but I don't want to spit on the light, you know, but I want to him to learn to monitor it. And always I tell the comedians in my class, "You know, I love a comedian, but to be a good comedian you have to have a good sense of timing."

You don't want to unbounce Tigger completely.

1; Right

I like that—you don't want to unbounce Tigger completely. I like that. [laughter].

4: But that's true—you don't want to destroy--they may have just a little bitty small part that's good and you want to try to build on that.

What I had attempted in these two excerpts was to surface some aspects of the kind of practical mastery, a knowing from within a situation, which each of us demonstrates every day in our individual and joint practices. I asked questions in order to foster examination of this practical mastery. Participants had talked earlier about "*picking your battles*." I wanted to point out that the choices embedded in picking those battles were made according to practical theories that help to constitute and derive from practical mastery. By inquiring into assumptions underlying those action choices, we were able to recognize some aspects of individual knowledge. In Cook and Brown's (1999) terms, we were generating explicit knowledge about our tacit knowledge. Another kind of knowing also became apparent.

Group Knowing

If a group knows, how and what does it know? Is this different from individual knowing? And if the group knows, how does this knowing become apparent? I have struggled to describe or even talk about the notion of a group of people—not individuals, but the group—learning. On the one hand, it is like trying to talk about gravity before the Newtonian apple. Much of group learning has to do with re-understanding and re-imagining oneself and others in a particular context. It has to do with coordinating actions, with accommodating, with acting into and out of a common place. This is tacit knowing, rather than explicit, and as such, is expressed in doing rather than saying. It can only be described, explained, or even noticed as a result of reflection or in response to the questions of another.

What a group knows, among other things, is how to be that group. Such knowing is manifested, in part through individual acts, especially as those are coordinated with others, but also through particular ways of speaking, uses of language, symbol, or ritual, humor, and occasionally jointly developed products that do not exist outside the group. The group constructs a culture into and out of which it acts. As an example, many of our students belong to gangs. The gang develops language, codes of conduct, symbols, rituals, a history, and its own ethos, changing and evolving to sustain itself in the face of challenges from all comers. The cultural artifacts which identify the gang are not what the gang knows, even though they are referred to by associates as “gang knowledge”; they are only evidence of a way of being that exists within the gang.

On the other hand, talking about group knowing in terms of individuals is like blind men trying to describe an elephant. Or it is like, as Pascal notes, trying to

understand a body by dissecting it into constituent parts: “A man is a substance, but if we dissect him, will he be the head, the heart, the stomach, the veins, each vein, each portion of a vein, the blood, each humor in the blood?” (*Pensees*, 115, cited by Bourdieu, 2000, p. 133). This is, as Bourdieu continues, quite a different matter from the “inhabited and *forgotten* body, felt from inside as an opening, energy, tension or desire, and also as strength, connivance and familiarity” (2000, p. 133, italics in original). Though the living body is comprised of members, it is more than the sum of those parts. If the leg could speak, it would speak of leg-knowing—of long, powerful muscles and blood coursing through the veins, of strides and impact, of distances run or walked. This is a part, but only part, of body-knowing. The leg cannot speak the knowing of the body. Group knowing is more than and different from the knowing of the individual members of that group.

Perhaps group knowing is hard to put into words because it does not fit the dominant paradigm. The contemporary western frame of reference for looking at learning is in terms of the individual. Our language anthropomorphizes the universe in terms of individual human beings. Ships and cars are referred to as “she.” As Peters notes, “Our accustomed way of looking at language use is not given over to group speaking” (personal communication, February 17, 2005). Even our metaphors of groups, nations, and organizations are based on individuals. Russians speak of “Mother Russia”; Germans revere the “Fatherland.” The problem of how to speak or write about what occurs in the group that is different from what occurs for its individual members is a language problem. We need a new language for speaking what the group knows. As Wittgenstein notes, “The grammar of the word ‘knows’ is evidently closely related to that of ‘can’, ‘is

able to'. But also closely related to that of 'understands'. ('Mastery' of a technique)" (1953/2001, no. 150, p. 50). Shotter (1993) offers a clue for the problem of speaking about kinds of knowing that do not fit into the dominant paradigm: "Rather than as already having meanings, we must think of words as a *means*, as 'tools' for use in the making of meanings" (p. 51, italics in original).

One evidence of group knowing is an indication in the language of participants that they consider themselves to be a group—uses of plural first person pronouns (*we*, *us*, *our*, etc.) as opposed to singular first person pronouns (*I*, *me*, *my*, etc.). Table 1 below enumerates such usage in the group sessions. With the exception of session 7, there is a pattern of increased usage of plural personal pronouns by group participants.

Table 1. Usage of Plural First Person Pronouns in Group Sessions

Session number	Facilitator	Other Participants
1	93	23
2	58	20
3	50	26
4	43	41
5	76	52
6**	66	39
7	39	28
8	30	71

**Problems with tape 6. Responses extrapolated.

In the seventh session we explored assumptions underlying practical theories. Since this session focused on inquiry into practical mastery, we were positioning ourselves as individuals rather than as group members. It is understandable, therefore, that, since there was a different kind of engagement, the pattern of language would also differ.

In the last group session, participants speak in terms of “we”: *“It’s interesting that we accept each of these different ways—we welcome each other into the group and the conversation, with the exception of Debi [laughter].” “We know what works. We may not know why it works or understand why it works....” “So are you saying that what we do in here is the same thing that we do in the classroom?” “I think we’ve really seen that we all have a different approach—we have different means to reach the same end. We’re trying to have a positive impact on these kids.” “We are a unique group of individuals.” “I would like for us to go on as a group.” “If we could continue with a purpose...” “... We’ll be going on in our walkers!” “Well, this is a unique group. People have been willing and have pretty clear motives. We’ve done what we expected to do.”*

Especially in the last session there was more of a turning toward others. One participant, whom I have earlier characterized as preaching from his own bully pulpit, turned to another and said, *“Yeah, it’s unique about you, is what it is—you’re doing it[relating to students] in a loving way. You know you are talking about—I’m sorry, you were going to say something.”* This awareness of the other, of accepting and honoring differences, of the need for reflection are elements of what we learned as a group. While such “group knowing” may seem self-evident, it is anything but commonplace. As one participant says, *“A situation like this is not often found where you can say what’s*

important or on your mind and find out you are not the only one.” When participants spoke of their wish to go on meeting as a group, they articulated some characteristics that made us a group: having a *focus* or a *purpose*, being *willing* and having *pretty clear motives*, sharing a common experience—*“If other people—somebody who hasn’t done a protocol—they might not have the right attitude.”* Finally, the participant who had functioned almost as a co-facilitator summed up our experience:

Hopefully we can take what we have learned from each other and build on it.

Become more of what we want to be and be able to approach it with a better understanding of where we come from and the struggles we encounter.

When I examined initial and follow-up interviews side by side, I looked particularly for uses of language that indicated interviewees’ perceptions of being connected to others (*we, us, our*, etc). Results are displayed in the Table 2 next page. Considering the usage of plural first personal pronouns across all three data sets, as reflected in tables 1 and 2, it seems clear that, for all but one participant, there is a significant increase in the incidences of language which reflect a perception of connection to colleagues, rather than of isolation in the practice.

As an example of how such a connection might affect our joint practice, one participant talked about the idea of effecting system change through small changes that are within our power to make—*“How do we change the macro? By changing the micro... All you can do is do the best job in your area, and if everybody would do that, all of a sudden, instead of a micro change, you would have a macro change.”*

Table 2. Comparison of Plural First Person Pronouns in First and Follow-up Interviews

Participant	Pages in Initial Interview	Total Usage	Per Page	Pages in Follow-up Interview	Total Usage	Per Page	% Increase
I	8	31	3.87	3.0	25	8.33	215%
H	5	17	3.4	2.0	30	15	441%
G	4.75	15	3.15	3.0	54	18	571%
F	4.25	28	6.58	6.0	31	5.16	-22%
E	8	6	1.33	6.5	32	4.92	369%
D	2.5	3	1.2	2.5	18	7.2	600%
C	7.5	43	5.73	4.5	32	7.11	124%
B	6.5	24	3.69	3.5	18	5.14	139%
A	4	18	4.5	2.5	31	12.4	275%
Totals	50.5	185	3.66	33.5	271	6.47	176%

Chapter X: Revisiting Practical Theory

Undertaking action research in one's own practice is not for the faint of heart. In the course of this research, I experienced several humbling revelations. In the process of transcribing tapes, some of the ramifications of my dual role as practitioner/researcher, as well as my participation in the process at different levels, presented themselves. While my participation at all these levels allowed me access to ways of knowing otherwise unavailable, it does complicate the process of analysis.

Sins of the Facilitator

When I began analyzing the transcription of the first session, I found myself in a Shakespearean moment. Early in the first group session, one participant noted, "*We are all actors*"; I was observing myself acting in a play within a play. It became clear that I would need to sort out the various roles I was playing. During the first three group sessions, we were interpreting individual interviews. I was facilitating a group of colleagues who were sitting as an interpretive group, instructing them in the process of interpreting protocols and modeling the process. At this point our focus was on the content of the interviews. But I was also the interviewer in the protocols we were examining. While engaging in the group session, acting as both facilitator and instructor, I was also mindful of my role in the interviews we were examining. So I found myself in the group sessions noting my actions as an interviewer, especially questions which did not seem to have derived from the participant's comments, or which might have guided the participant in ways he or she might not have otherwise chosen. Participants also

questioned my assumptions, asking at one point how, as was evident by my follow-up question, I had concluded that the interviewee was referring to students rather than staff. They and I also wondered, where I had failed to explore further, exactly what a participant meant by comments like “*There are so many different levels.*” Acting as an interpreter of protocols, I was able to reflect on my sins of commission and omission as an interviewer.

Similarly, while transcribing tapes of group sessions, I looked at my actions as a group facilitator. I discovered instances where I did not follow up on comments or seemed to assume an understanding that, on reflection, I now question. Finally as I analyzed the transcriptions, I went back to the tapes and noted all the information available in the tape and missing from the transcriptions—laughter, murmurs of assent or disagreement, tone of voice, as well as information which the tape could not record, e.g. gestures and facial expressions—information that points to *kairos*, the emergence in that particular place and time of speech acts which engaged, challenged, or moved others to co-create understanding. I looked at the ways I had fostered or seemingly interfered with this process. I found that I frequently gave verbal, non-word attention signals (*Um hum*) that seemed to function as encouraging speakers to continue. I frequently talked too much; sometimes I allowed others to monopolize the conversation. Other times I was able to inquire deeply into a participant’s thinking. These realizations were made possible by stepping back from involvement in the process and reflecting on that involvement—an illustration in practice of Peters’s (1999) levelising (see Chapter II, p. 13).

Blinded by the Dominant Paradigm

Although I declared myself, both in Chapter IV and to my colleagues, to be a true believer that the chief function of language is to move others and to create reality, when it came to my actions I proved my own worst example of failure or inability to heed Wittgenstein's warnings: I found myself a captive of the picture (see Chapter IV, p. 50). After transcribing the initial phenomenological interviews, I removed all specific information (names, places, subjects taught, etc.) that I thought might identify interviewees to the other participants. I then emailed the expurgated versions to interviewees and asked them to verify the contents and to remove anything they thought might identify them or that they did not wish to share. Of course, as soon as we began to read the protocols, group members recognized the interviewee within the first page or two. While I believed and still believe that the least function of language is to describe reality and convey information, I acted as if that was what language was about. This was a humbling moment for me and the source of much hilarity for my colleagues, who pointed out that "the speech hesitations, pattern, and dialect was left intact." Despite all we have read and been lectured to about non-verbal aspects of communication conveying 95% of meaning, when it came to their colleagues, participants recognized them based on printed words on the page. As it turned out, guessing the identity of the interviewee became "*entertaining, like a puzzle.*"

Collaborative Learning

The four elements of collaborative learning were evident throughout the group sessions and echoed through the follow-up interviews.

Dialogical Space

In addition to my own enlightenment about the power of the dominant paradigm and the entertainment of participants as they sought to solve the puzzle of the interviewee, the protocols served another, more important function. My original theory posited the protocols resulting from these interviews as constituting a sort of baseline that I might use as a reference point to determine whether and to what degree changes occurred in perception and in behavior as my research progressed. I also theorized that enlisting research participants to interpret these protocols would provide initial topics for the group sessions I saw as the central focus of my project. As I discovered during the course of my research, these protocols served another, perhaps more important function, one very much in line with that of Vico's *sensus communis*.

The protocols themselves were crucial in creating the dialogical space required for collaborative learning. As one participant noted, "*You knew you had some things in common before you ever started talking.*" For another the protocols made possible "*the realization that we had that connection with each other... our secrets are out to the group members.*" A third participant noted that we were able to come together as a group, "*knowing that we had all been through basically the same interview.*"

Two other aspects important in creating the dialogical space were cookies and laughter. Other action research initiatives have noted the importance of food in creating a welcoming space (Naujock, 2002; Osborne, 2002; Fazio, 2003; Muth, 2004). Gathering in a circle around food evokes images of hearth and harvest, of sharing and providing for. Because we met at the end of the school day, I brought homemade cookies. We decided

that one chapter of the dissertation would be devoted to cookies; for the record, the favorite variety was snickerdoodles, followed closely by caramel brownies.

That laughter exists at all inside the walls of a juvenile correctional institution is a testimony to the resilience of the human spirit. That it does so in abundance in our group meetings, as the tapes attest, is a tribute to my colleagues. At the beginning of the first group session, I stated my expectation that we would create a dialogical space that was safe, supportive, and confidential. Saying, of course, could not make it so; we made it so for each other. Sharing the protocols, in which participants talked candidly about their experiences, was an important factor in creating this space. We kept it so by laughter—with each other and at ourselves. Much of the laughter in the first three group sessions centered around the identity of the “unknown participants” whose protocols were being read, as the volunteers who were reading fell into the speech rhythms of the interviewees. When one reader got to the phrase, “*See my grey hairs,*” he stopped and patted his bald head, and the group dissolved in laughter. Another participant addressed the volunteer reading the interviewer’s questions as “*you old bat!*” This laughter seemed to signal a kind of good-natured teasing based in familiarity and in privileged knowing, as when one of my colleagues announced that, if I planned to leave Mountain View on completing my degree, “*We’ll make sure you don’t do well!*” One participant teased another (who is diabetic) about eating brownies just before going to the doctor’s office: “*Just be sure that if you are going into a coma, there’s somebody in your sight!*”

Sometimes laughter appeared to indicate agreement, as in response to a comment like “*If you could keep the kids out, we’d have it made!*” Some laughter occurred as a kind of recognition of shared response when someone commented about dealing with a

particularly difficult student. We laughed with colleagues who reported using humor to deflect annoying comments from students. One participant reported that a student had stated to her, *"I know you are on crack."* She responded, *"If I was on crack, wouldn't I be in a better mood?"* Another participant told us that when a student began talking about his personal appearance, *"I'll start talking about where I live up under the bridge, you know, in a little bitty trailer."* While there were a few jokes, most of the humor arose in the context of the group, and sometimes, it was jointly constructed. At the end of the seventh group session, one participant mentioned the No Child Left Behind program and others joined in to riff on this theme:

They [government officials] don't want to believe there are children that can't go no matter if they are given a ride.

Some kids don't know how to get on the bus,

They are going to jump off

Or try to drive the bus

Our kids have rioted and taken over the bus

It's one of the short buses

It's easier for them to take over

Our laughter was always at ourselves and with each other; it was the outward manifestation of "feeling in common" (Shotter, 1993, p.66).

Focus on Construction

In the first group meeting I surfaced my hope that we might construct joint understandings of our experience and go on to consider how that experience might be

different. It appears that we constructed meaning around three aspects of our experience: knowing where we are coming from, making sense of our experience, and recognizing the shape of our experience. Reading and discussing protocols allowed us an opportunity to see ourselves and each other from different perspectives. As one participant noted, *"I see people in a different light."* Although each of us is very much an individual, we do have a common ground—our dedication to educating the students in our care. Knowing where we are coming from does not require of us that we all act in the same way: *"Everybody's got their own way and don't assume they are doing something wrong. We need to be different because these students need to learn to deal with different kinds of people."* In this experience we constructed an understanding of ourselves as both similar in our experiences, our feelings, and our dedication, and different in our approaches. Whether this understanding extends to those of our colleagues who did not participate with us remains to be seen.

As we articulated the tension that exists across our experiences of the environment, relationships with other people, and within ourselves, we constructed joint understandings of a difficult environment. This understanding is both richer than and different from what we understood before. As one participant remarked, *"This would explain why this is such an exhausting job. The struggle is a constant thing—from one environment to the other."* Another participant talked about realizing that some feelings, which she had previously thought peculiar to her, were in fact *"part of it [the experience of the job]."* The realization that other people shared both feelings and perspectives on the experience of working inside the institution was for many an affirmation that *"I'm not the only one."* One participant expressed his sense of the experience: *"We are the focus*

of this paper because nobody else in the world understands this and nobody's ever wanted to understand this until now."

Similarly, recognizing the shape of our experience as articulated in the spiral and as shared by others was empowering. The realization that the common experience of "hitting rock bottom" occurred somewhere during the first six months led us to consider how we might help new staff members through that critical period. Some of the participants saw themselves as being engaged in the outward focused middle of the spiral and expressed their frustration with the inertia of institutional and governmental programs. Others who had turned back to the narrower focus of their own classrooms and their reflections found it reassuring to discover their colleagues had made similar choices. We were able to see these returns to more contemplative practice as a part of the pattern of our experience, rather than as personal failures. We talked about how we function as a group when we are at different places on the spiral. And we wondered if this pattern is how it is for us, or simply how it has been, and what comes next. In the last group session, one of my colleagues stated his hope that we could *"take what we've learned and build on it."*

Further, we learned to ask questions and to explore each other's thinking. We inquired into the practical theories that drive our actions in the practice, constructing understandings about the complex interplay of factors that inform our strategies in managing student behavior and learning in this environment, as well as in making sense of our involvement in the practice. In the fifth group session two participants engaged a third in an exploration of what it means to "do a good job." In session four one participant turned to me and asked, *"But I want to know what it looks like to you. Why are*

you doing this research?" I thanked him for asking and shared with the group my personal motivations (as noted in Chapter II). I was pleased that, during the follow-up interviews, three of my colleagues asked me questions about my perceptions of the experience; in fact, toward the end of her follow-up interview, one person turned the tables and interviewed me. These actions seem to indicate that my colleagues saw me, at least to some degree, as a co-participant and a co-learner, rather than merely a researcher or a facilitator. Moreover, in the eighth group session, as we discussed whether and in what form we might continue to meet as a group, one participant declared, *"Well, I don't think it would work if there were administrators involved."* This remark is significant in itself in that it positions me as a colleague rather than as a supervisor. What is also significant is that there was no laughter or any other indication in the group that I also occupy an administrative role.

Multiple Ways of Knowing

One significant way of knowing that clearly occurred in this project was recognition. We recognized each other's voices in the written words of the interview protocols, even though they had been stripped of sound and context. We recognized in our colleagues feelings and perceptions similar to our own. We recognized in our own words and in the words of others the meaning of our experience. We made sense of such recognitions. Recognition is a peculiar kind of knowing—re-cognition—becoming acquainted with again or re-knowing. It assumes we have already in some way apprehended whatever it is we recognize. Perhaps all those things we recognized were already known to us in some sort of tacit way, the doxa of our everyday lives. Perhaps

what we were able to do together is to create the possibility of knowing this more explicitly. As one participant put it, *"Knowing things but not being able to name them—we've actually put a few words to bring it to the surface."*

During the course of this research we recognized many things about ourselves and about each other. We recognized ourselves as playing different roles. I relearned the power of the dominant paradigm of language as a picture and a conveyor of information. One participant experienced his recognition of what he and others had said in the protocols as *"a big shock"*: *"It was like putting it [the experience of the workplace] in some kind of order."* Another participant recognized the shape of his experience: *"This spiral... is exactly the way I have seen myself."*

What we experienced was clearly both connected knowing (Belenky et al, 1986) and relational knowing. One participant noted that he interpreted protocols differently when he knew the interviewee: *"If I thought this person had said it, it meant a little different than if I thought someone else had said it."* Voloshinov could hardly have said it better:

In point of fact the word is a two-sided act. It is determined equally by whose word it is and for whom it is meant. As a word, it is precisely the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee (1973, p. 86).

In contrast, there was spirited discussion of the knowledge of outside "experts": *"We have all these experts that say it works and by golly it works because it looks good on paper."* Participants described their frustrations with the perceived lack of respect accorded to our hard-won practical mastery: *"We're the experts because we are the ones*

who are there. But they [administrators] don't care what we have to say; they want the higher experts.” In our organizational culture, and in fact in the educational field at large, individual explicit knowledge is privileged over all other forms of knowledge and knowing.

Cycles of Action and Reflection

We engaged in this research over a period of six months; I conducted the first individual interviews in October of 2004. The final group meeting for review of findings was March 15, 2005. Participants spoke of their perceptions of the experience of teaching inside a juvenile institution and then had an opportunity to review transcriptions of their own interviews and those of their colleagues. We then engaged in a series of eight group meetings to discuss those interviews and other topics that emerged. I reviewed the thematic analysis with the group in the fourth session. Approximately two weeks after the eighth group session, I conducted follow-up interviews. Two weeks later we met as a group to review findings. Our reflections following these meetings are discussed in Chapters VI through IX.

Each time we met, from individual interviews, through the group sessions, and the follow-up interviews, we acted into a safe space we made for ourselves. Each time we met we were different because of what we had said and done before. After reading protocols and listening to each other, we regarded each other and therefore ourselves in a different way. In the second group session I noticed that over half of the group members had made notebooks for their copies of protocols and their notes. They were positioning themselves as partners in this research.

As I talked about practical theories and inquired into the basis of assumptions and actions, they began to do likewise and to talk in terms of “*My practical theory is that....*.” We identified ways that we were relating to each other in the group and we caught ourselves and each other doing just that. We reflected on our perceptions of our practice and made sense of our shared experience. We looked at ways we can take our jointly constructed understandings and make a difference for ourselves.

Revising the Practical Theory

I theorized that creating a moment of common reference based on our own experiences of the practice would allow us to jointly construct an understanding of our workplace culture and enable us to bring about positive change in that culture. I further theorized that our language would both enable us to construct these understandings and reflect that we had done so.

It appears that undertaking phenomenological interviews with participants and having those participants function as the interpretive group for their own interviews did indeed create a *sensus communis*. My practical theory did not, however, take into account the role the protocols played in constructing a dialogical space. Participants indicated that both having done the interview and having read each others’ protocols enabled them to enter the group sessions feeling *safe* and *comfortable* because everything was “*already out there.*”

Participants indicated, both in what they said and in the manner of their saying, that they consider themselves to have common feelings and perceptions. By engaging in collaborative learning in eight group sessions over three months, we were able to

construct a joint understanding of our experience. These understandings were expressed in terms of *knowing where we are coming from, making sense of our experience, and recognizing the shape of our experience*. The tools of this joint construction project were those of language; by inquiring into each other's thinking and by invoking each other as colleagues who operate out of practical mastery, we have created a providential space (Shotter, 1993) open to possibilities for our own growth and support. Our language indicates these possibilities; it remains to be seen if, over time, our actions will fulfill them.

While I expected that the initial interviews would enable participants' feelings of isolation to surface, this did not in fact occur. What happened instead is that eight of nine participants mentioned in their follow-up interviews that after this process they felt as if they were "*not the only one*" who experienced the practice and its challenges in ways they identified. They further reflected that this realization was "*reassuring*" and "*comforting*." It is difficult to know whether isolation was not figural for these participants before this experience—whether these feelings were accepted as part of their tacit knowing in their practice. Or it may be that they did not feel comfortable in surfacing these feelings, as if to do so were to admit a weakness, as one participant suggested in another regard. Since all participants but one noted in the follow-up interviews that they no longer feel "*like the only one*," it may be argued that they previously did experience themselves as isolated in their practice and in their feelings toward it.

Chapter XII: Implications for Future Actions

In this chapter I discuss the possibility of similar initiatives within the institution, follow-up activities for this research project, possible changes in my actions brought about by this study, and implications for the field.

For the Practice

Similar Initiatives

In the final meeting to review findings, group participants indicated that they believed the entire school faculty and perhaps the wider institution could benefit from the actions we took as a research group. This raises several issues. First, the colleagues who participated in this research were volunteers responding to an invitation. The remainder of the school staff elected not to participate. Whether they might choose to participate in a similar venture at this point or later remains to be seen. It seems to me unlikely that compelling people to participate would have positive results. Such a course would likely be regarded in much the same light as other compulsory professional development activities. Further, it is unclear how the current situation, where approximately one-half of the school staff has participated in this project, will affect the faculty as a whole. These participants have shared a very meaningful experience and therefore consider they have a strong and unique bond with each other. In creating a sense of *us*, is it possible that we may have unwittingly created a sense among others of *not-us*? As Gergen (1999) notes,

every inclusion is also an exclusion. There does not appear to be evidence of this at the present time, but such a possibility must be considered.

Group size is another important factor. Our group meetings ranged in size from six to ten, if all participants were in attendance. Some participants noted the group size as contributing to their sense of comfort and safety. One reticent group member indicated that she would have been less likely to contribute if the group had been larger. Another participant reflected that, even though his comfort level would have been less in a larger group, he still felt that there was a greater potential for learning and growth in a larger group. Balancing potential for growth and comfort levels might vary with groups of people, but from my experience in working with groups of various sizes, 12 seems to be the maximum number to support dialogue and inquiry.

As far as extending an initiative such as this across the wider institution, other factors must be considered. Participants in the research group in this project have the same job duties and work the same hours in a fairly small area. If a more heterogeneous group were to engage in such a project, it is unclear how they might go about constructing a moment of common reference. Would working in the same institution with the same students, though in very different capacities with different duties and perhaps different schedules, be sufficient to create a common bond? Such questions pose additional opportunities for research.

Follow-Up

I am very interested in following this group of participants to see what, if any, changes in practice result from this experience. As a supervisor, I will be able to

monitor some changes in behavior in the practice. I expect to see some informal gatherings of staff members during shared planning periods or after school hours. Several participants have reflected that they now feel more comfortable in seeking advice from colleagues on matters of teaching strategies or dealing with student behavior. I also want to meet with this group in six months and again in a year to explore if and/or how our practices have been affected. Doubtless informal conversations will also occur.

Changes in My Actions

Having developed an understanding of the shape of our experience of teaching in a juvenile facility, I believe that changes are indicated in how I provide support for faculty members. As it is now clear that the first six months are even more critical for new staff members than I previously realized, I now believe that both arranging a mentor for new staff members and meeting weekly with them are called for. I have always provided support and encouragement for new staff members coming into this environment, but it is clear that additional resources are required to maximize chances for successful completion of the initial six months' period.

Similarly, I was mostly unaware of the frustrations that appear in the four to seven-year range of experience. I tend to think of staff members who have endured that long to be settled into their practices. It is clear from results of this study, however, that the frustrations of staff members in this period are more than passing moments and that such staff members may require more sustained support, both from colleagues experiencing similar feelings and from those of us who have more time in service. Moreover, the old guard—those of us who have been here 12 years or more—continue to

deal with educational and behavioral issues, but we also ponder philosophical and spiritual issues and occasionally we need to feel as if we are “*not the only one.*”

I have observed the results of consciously invoking others as dedicated professionals operating out of practical mastery and therefore of choosing strategies based on practical theories and personal wisdom. I am convinced of the power of this course of action in creating a providential space for human flourishing. I am also convinced that to empower teachers is to empower students. To model the invocation of efficacy is to create its possibility for others and for all whose lives they touch.

For the Field

Although Mountain View Youth Development Center is a unique environment, and teaching in that environment presents unique challenges, I believe that this research initiative, situated in a particular practice with a particular group of people, has application for other settings. Such research initiatives in other environments might reveal a pattern of participants’ engagement in their practice similar to the spiral that we discovered. Noting such a common shape of experience would enable participants to make sense of their experiences at critical points in their careers and to see those points as characteristic of the unique challenges of their fields and not as personal failures. Awareness of such patterns would also enable supervisors and administrators to develop strategies for additional support and professional development opportunities, or perhaps to address workplace conditions that contribute to creating critical periods.

Teachers in almost any setting are isolated from their colleagues, both physically and psychologically. Social workers, counselors, police officers, medical personnel, and

people in many other service occupations daily conduct their practices alone, making life-changing, and sometimes life-saving, decisions alone in the moment. Often, they too exist in situations with top-down management strategies and outside experts, and they inhabit workplaces constructed of common experiences based on events that happen to them. Constructing a workplace culture based on articulation of common experiences may provide a safe space for re-imagining themselves as experiencing common feelings and common perspectives, as colleagues who might be resources for each other, and as capable of jointly constructing their practices to support their own efficacy and human flourishing for themselves and for their clients. This study suggests the possibility of such an outcome for many different human services professions.

References

- 143

- Bakhtin, M.M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination*. (M. Holquist, ED. & C. Emerson & M. Holquist, Trans.). Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Bakhtin, M.M. (1984). *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics*. (C. Emerson, Ed. & Trans.) Minneapolis: University of Michigan Press.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1986). *Speech genres and other late essays*. (V. V. McGhee, Trans.). Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Belenky, M. F, Clinchy, B. M., Goldberger, N. R., Tarule, J. M. (1986). *Women's ways of knowing*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bensimon, E., Polkinghorne, D, Bauman, G. & Vallejo, E. (2004). Doing research that makes a difference. *The journal of higher education*, 75, 104-126.
- Berger, P., & Luckmann T. (1966). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. New York: Doubleday.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice*. (R. Nice, Trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Original work published 1972)
- Bourdieu, P. (1990) *The logic of practice*. (R. Nice, Trans.). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. (Original work published 1980)
- Bourdieu, P. (1990). *In other words: Essays towards a reflexive sociology*. (M. Adamson, Trans.). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. (Original work published 1982, 1987)
- Bourdieu, P. & Wacquant, L. (1992). *An invitation to reflexive sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (2000). *Pascalian meditations*. (R. Nice, Trans.). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. (Original work published 1997)
- Cook, S. D. N. and Brown, J. S. (1999). "Bridging epistemologies: The generative dance between organizational knowledge and organizational knowing" in *Organizational Science*, 10, 381-400. Retrieved March 2, 2005 from <http://is.lse.ac.uk/staff/sorensen/design/download/CookBrown1999.pdf>
- Davies, B., & Harré, R. (1990). Positioning: The discursive production of selves. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior*, 20, 43-63.
- Gadamer, H. (1976). *Philosophical hermeneutics*. (D.E. Linge, Ed. & Trans.). Berkley: University of California Press. (Original work published 1962)

- Gergen, K. (1999). *Invitation to social construction*. London: Sage.
- Goffman, E. (1986). *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.
- Heisenberg, W. Quantum mechanics: The uncertainty principle. Retrieved January 17, 2005 from www.aip.org/history/heisenberg/p08.htm.
- Ihde, D. (1986). *Experimental phenomenology: An introduction*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Katz, A. M., & Shotter, J. (1999). Social poetics as a relational practice: Creating resourceful communities. Workshop: Construction of Health and Illness, Social Construction and Relational Practices Conference. University of New Hampshire. September 19, 1999.
- Lakoff, G. & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- McNamee, S. & Gergen, K. (1999). *Relational responsibility: Resources for sustainable dialogue*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Marshall, J. (2001). Self-reflective inquiry practices. In *Handbook for action research: Participative inquiry & practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (2000). *Phenomenology of perception*. (C. Smith, Trans.). New York: Routledge. (Original work published 1962)
- Peters, J.M. (1991). Strategies for reflective practice. In Brockett, R. (Ed.) *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 44, pp. 89-96. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Peters, J.M. (2002, rev 2004). Combining reflective practice and formal inquiry: An action research model. Paper presented at the 10th Annual International Conference on Post-Secondary Education and Training, Brisbane, Australia, 2-4 December 2002.
- Peters, J. M. & Armstrong, J.L. (1998). "Collaborative learning: People learning together to construct knowledge," *New directions for adult and continuing education*, 79, 75-85.
- Polanyi, M. (1967). *The tacit dimension*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Pollio, H., Thompson, C. & Henley, T. (1997). *The phenomenology of everyday life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Reason, P., & Bradbury, H., (Eds.). (2001). *Handbook for action research: Participative inquiry & practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Reason, P. and Marshall, J. (2001) On working with graduate research students. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury, Eds.). *Handbook for action research: Participative inquiry & practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Reason, P. & Torbert, W. (2001). "The action turn towards a transformational social science" *Concepts & Transformations* 6:1, 1-37.
- Schon, D. (1983). *The reflective practitioner*. New York: Basic Books.
- Shotter, J. (1993). *Cultural politics of everyday life: Social constructionism, rhetoric, and knowing of the third kind*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Shotter, J. (1996). 'Now I can go on': Wittgenstein and our embodied embeddedness in the 'hurly-burly' of life. *Human Studies*, 19, 385-407.
- Shotter, J. (1999). Inside dialogic realities: from an abstract-systematic to a participatory-wholistic understanding of communication. Retrieved March 20, 2005 from http://pubpages.unh.edu/~jds?SCJ99_fin1_pap.htm
- Shotter, J. (2002). Approaches and meetings: dynamic understandings from within living, indivisible, complex wholes. Paper presented at the Conference On Action Research, Constructivism And Democracy, Stockholm, Sweden.
- Torbert, W. (2001). The practice of action inquiry. In P. Reason, & H. Bradbury, Eds.), *Handbook for action research: Participative inquiry & practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Voloshinov, V.N. (1973). *Marxism and the philosophy of language*. (L. Matejka & I. R. Titunik, Trans.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wittgenstein, L. (2001). *Philosophical investigations*. (G.E.M. Anscombe, Ed. & Trans.). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing. (Original work published 1953)
- Wittgenstein, L. (1980). *Culture and value*. (G.H. Von Wright, Ed. & P. Winch, Trans.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (Original work published 1977)

VITA

I completed my Ed.D. at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, in May of 2005, with a major in Education and a concentration in Collaborative Learning. My dissertation, "Razor Wire Cuts Both Ways: Teaching Inside a Juvenile Institution" reported an action research project undertaken in my practice and with my colleagues. In my dissertation I developed the following argument:

Workplace cultures are constructed by the people who inhabit them through their joint meaning-making around common experiences. In this study I explore with my colleagues our perceptions of working inside a juvenile institution. From this common reference we jointly construct understandings about the meaning and shape of our experience in this unusual and difficult environment. This is an action research initiative situated in a particular place and time; it has applications for other workplace culture change initiatives.

Previously I had completed a M.A. at East Tennessee State University in May of 1974 with a major in English. My thesis topic, "Women Warriors: Female Heroes in Italian Renaissance Poetry," explored fictional characters in light of emerging feminist theory. My B.A. in English was conferred in May of 1968 from Milligan College, magna cum laude.

I have extensive experience in four areas: Administrative, Consulting, Educational, and Business. Having completed this journey, I look forward to new challenges. I plan to continue writing in a reflective, personal accounting of my experiences.

I completed my M.A. at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in May of 1974 with a major in English. My thesis topic, "Women Writers: French Literature in the United States," explored national characters in light of emerging feminist theory. My B.A. in English was completed in May of 1972 from Milligan College, Milligan, Tennessee. I have extensive experience in four areas: Administrative, Consulting, Educational, and Research. Having completed this research, I am forward to new challenges. I plan to continue writing in a reflective, personal accounting of my experiences.

Previously I had completed a M.A. in East Tennessee State University in May of 1974 with a major in English. My thesis topic, "Women Writers: French Literature in the United States," explored national characters in light of emerging feminist theory. My B.A. in English was completed in May of 1972 from Milligan College, Milligan, Tennessee.

I have extensive experience in four areas: Administrative, Consulting, Educational, and Research. Having completed this research, I am forward to new challenges. I plan to continue writing in a reflective, personal accounting of my experiences.