



I Come to This New Place with Curiosity: Writing, Reflecting, and Engaging with Conversations about Practitioners' and Students' Relationship with Research in the Field of Creative Writing for Therapeutic Purposes

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Abstract

In this paper I explore and engage with eleven research conversations that I shared in and facilitated in 2022 in the UK. These conversations were created under the auspices of a narrative inquiry to explore creative writing for therapeutic purposes (CWTP) practitioners' and students' relationship with research. I was full of curiosity about the role of research in CWTP and how practitioners and students felt about research. This paper presents what I heard in the eleven conversations and where these led me. What emerged from the conversations about the weightiness and constriction of traditional, mainstream research. Then how people were finding their way to something more akin to play and 'writing from the heart' as their practice. And how I was transformed. This is not a traditional research paper. I have chosen to abandon my usual ways of writing research in order to present something that follows a line of thought, a curiosity. The paper shows how my knowledge developed through attending to the voices met with along the way and how I arrived at a place of new insight into research as potentially about (moving in) connection (with others). This paper contributes to emerging conversations in CWTP by proposing that, following Ingold, research in this field can be reimagined as a relational, dialogic, and process-led practice. Drawing on narrative inquiry and eleven research conversations, it

challenges dominant, product-driven models of research and highlights alternative ways of knowing grounded in connection, reflexivity, and 'writing from the heart'.

Keywords: research, creative writing for therapeutic purposes, Lapidus, curiosity, exploring, innovation

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A Recent Arrival

I am a recent arrival in a new land, the field of creative writing for therapeutic purposes (CWTP), spending part of my time here as a practitioner and researcher and part of my time back where I have come from, the academic discipline of education. I come into this new place with curiosity and many questions that I seek to answer as I try and make sense of and learn about my new place.

One of my areas of curiosity in this new place is, 'What is the role of research in CWTP?' What is its purpose? What *is* research here in this new land?

In what follows I will share something of how these questions came about and where I walked with them, who I spoke to, the research conversations and dialogues with others and myself that were had, and what I learned from writing, reflecting, and engaging with them. This is my story of following a line of thought, a curiosity—and of all the voices, ideas, and other stories met and threaded through with along the way. In this I am following Ingold (2011) and his view of research as relational, processual, and participatory—a view of research in which knowledge is continually formed through movement and engagement with the world and its inhabitants, rather than as something produced after the fact, extracted from data, reported as fixed findings (p. 143).

May there be space in the reading of this story for your own stories to be woven in.

The way I am writing this is not in the form of a traditional academic paper. It is in the form of *following a thread*. Here I want to share two ideas I found recently when reading Hanif Kureishi's (2019) 'The Politics of Feeling':

Suppose you put aside, or entirely give up, ideas of success and failure, and only proceed experimentally, following your interest and excitement? What if you retired what Rousseau calls 'the frenzy to achieve distinction'? (p. 260)

By forgetting your manners and being less impressed by the rules, you can allow surprising things to happen (p. 261)

I am attempting to follow my interest and excitement, forget my manners, and be less constricted by the rules of academic paper writing in order to allow surprising things to happen. You are not going to find an Introduction–Literature Review–Methodology–Findings–Conclusion text here. What these traditional sections of a paper usually contain are to be found threaded through the text where relevant. What I hope you will find here is the path that I followed, my attention to what I heard, my reflections and learning. As a result, this is a text that opens out (rather than closes down), that invites you in and offers a space for further thought and dialogue beyond the paper, that reveals how ways of knowing are continuously produced in dialogue and from moving with others.

I Live in Two Lands

I am both an academic and a new practitioner of CWTP. I work as an Associate Professor in Education at the Institute of Education, University College London. The main focus of my work over the past fourteen years has been on teaching practice-based research and supervising postgraduate and doctoral student research in education. In 2019, I began two years of part-time study and preparation for being a CWTP practitioner on the specialist CWTP programme offered by the Metanoia Institute and accredited by Middlesex University. I have been working as a CWTP practitioner since 2020 in addition to my university teaching and research.

My questions began in the last two terms of my Metanoia course as I sat with my understandings of research (qualitative and most definitely post-positivist) in and from my education world and encountered new descriptions of research and new language in the CWTP world. I became curious. Sometimes I

felt very lost. The main questions that arose were, 'What counts as research in this field of CWTP?' and 'What is the purpose of research in this field?' Was it very different from my known and familiar land, or were there similarities and crossovers?

A Keynote Speech

During this time, I attended an online research conference for counsellors and psychotherapists to learn more about what counts as research in this new land of mine:

Yesterday I sat in a keynote presentation about the purpose of research in counselling and therapy. It was titled 'What's the purpose of research?' Four purposes were put forward in the form of a framework:

1. Theory building (empirical research; scientific explanation of how the world works; improving theory)
2. Fact gathering (what scientists do when there isn't a theory; the hypothesis is the investigators' hunch)
3. Product testing (e.g., clinical trials/randomised control trials; finding out the effectiveness of treatment/does the treatment work?)
4. Enriching (qualitative research; grounded theory; assumes there are multiple truths; the product is enriched people)

As I sat there listening, I thought, 'In what way is this framework helpful to me in thinking about the purpose of research in CWTP?' I was struck by the fact that my immediate answer was, 'Not at all'.

Journal: 20/2/2021

I found myself writing a creative piece about my experience:

The Purposes of Research: A Keynote

I had high hopes.
Your mellifluous voice
that called me in.
Deep, serious, knowing.
Flowing.

In the beginning:
'I am in the presence of authority and wisdom'.
I sat back and exhaled.
Here is a voice I can relax to
and listen
and feel fed.
Ideas flowing.
Something for my mind.
A chance to stretch and play.
A coming home to
being able to use my mind.

Later:
A man's voice.
A Zoom full of women.

What were the reasons for my 'Not at all' answer when considering how helpful I found this keynote speaker's framework for answering the question 'What is the purpose of research in CWTP?'

The answer that came to me was that the explication and the framework felt much too *top down*.

The framework and the purposes of research explicated were couched in abstract language, the concepts were highly refined (people's curiosities, explorations, experimentations, uncoverings boiled down over and over to some supposedly pure abstract conceptualisation) expressed in the language of high academe, a basis only in positivist 'science' with a little window for the post-positivist, interpretative way of knowing the world, here named as *enhancement*:

I had an image of all the women in the room (and the audience was nearly all women), all the women researching in the world in the social sciences, crouched in this tiny corner of the room given over to 'enhancement'.
Doing their duty. Enhancing the polished pure science generated by proper researchers, by authority.

Journal: 20/2/2021

In education, I live in a *bottom-up* world where research starts with people's professional practice. Authority is (re)searched for in practitioners in this bottom-up approach rather than as something existing 'out there' in an elite,

authoritative other. In a bottom-up approach, connection is made with the knowledge that practitioners make use of in their daily work, which arises through that daily work, and this is put into play alongside the scholarship of others, research and critical reflection and as part of a research endeavour. This is the basis for professional practitioner research in my education world.

In practice-based enquiry, we offer and explain research approaches and tools to practicing teachers and support them in using those tools to explore and examine challenges they face in their daily practice. I was curious about the extent to which this might be the case in CWTP. The CWTP research modules (which focused on hermeneutics, phenomenology, and the self) led me to sense there was something else central to research in CWTP that I hadn't quite grasped. I was curious what this might be.

The keynote speech and what was shared felt very alienating. I found the language hard and cold. Unwelcoming.

At the end of the keynote, one of the participants stated that she felt it was important to acknowledge that the nature of knowledge in counselling and psychotherapy was very often the practitioner in her professional role sitting with *unknowing*, and this had deep implications for research and what it means to know in counselling and psychotherapy. This struck me as important and profound. And that it came from a woman in an audience of nearly all women and that there was something important here about unknowing, knowing, and knowledge that I couldn't quite grasp yet.

In the same period as attending the conference I was listening to my peers on the Metanoia programme. Also, all women. I wrote in my journal,

I'm noticing how 'research' feels very excluding for many of my peers on the programme, and how there is resistance..... It is something 'other', belonging to others who are powerful and, in some cases, threatening. 'Research' as something carrying great affect, a potential 'trauma'.

Journal, 11/5/2021

A series of questions poured out of me that I wanted to explore. These included:

What is CWTP practitioners' and students' relationship with research?

How do CWTP practitioners and students view research?

What makes for good research—useful research, valuable research—in this new land of mine?

I developed a research proposal while employed at the University College London Institute of Education that formed the foundation for this article. In 2022, I began a narrative inquiry to explore my research questions. First named by Connelly and Clandinin (1990), narrative inquiry is a qualitative methodology that understands people as living storied lives, shaping and interpreting experience through narrative. It prioritises human meaning over measurable data and gives voice to individual perspectives, often including those less represented. This made it particularly suited to exploring the lived experiences of CWTP students and practitioners.

I conducted eleven research conversations with UK-based CWTP participants. Three were students new to both CWTP and research, while the remaining eight were experienced practitioners, including three highly experienced researchers nearing the end of long careers in higher education.

I chose narrative inquiry for its openness to participants' stories and its capacity to position my own narrative alongside theirs. I drew on Jane Speedy's (2008) approach, which encourages listening for the 'talk that sings'—allowing alternative, non-official stories to emerge. Central to this approach are narrative conversations, adapted from narrative therapy, which attend closely to power and relationships. These conversations position participants and researcher alongside each other, making the research a collaborative, relational process in which no single voice holds authority over knowledge or experience.

Following this approach, I needed to come to the research as a collaborator and as part of a conversation committed to exploring and deeply listening rather than as a researcher who sat back and listened and then analysed the stories produced by participants. This would allow me to be fully focused on my own presence in the research and to not concur with 'the myth of silent authorship' or neutrality in conducting and presenting research (Speedy, 2008, p. 29; 64–65). Alongside Speedy's (2008) *Narrative Inquiry and Psychotherapy* I read and deeply engaged with Etherington's (2004) *Becoming a Reflexive Researcher* as this text touches on many of the deep underpinnings of research and researching when adopting a narrative inquiry approach. Speedy

and Etherington were close colleagues, and I found there was a sense of reciprocity and parallel thinking, exploring and engaging in and across their two texts which was extremely supportive in my stepping into this new approach.

In addition to conducting narrative conversations, I also kept a research journal in which I recorded my reflections, thoughts, and creative responses to the research process. These contributed to my thinking and engagement with the participants and to the development of my writing about the research process.

Participants were invited through the *Lapidus Newsletter* and the director of the Metanoia programme. Twelve people approached me to take part in the research. Of these, eleven took part in an online one-to-one research conversation with me. I met with the twelfth person but chose not to start the research conversation because the person had other needs that needed meeting and it would have been unethical to pursue the conversation.

There was always a focus during the conducting of the research on *not doing harm* and including *an ethic of respect* for the agency, privacy, and well-being of all research participants and myself. I was careful to gain the voluntary informed consent of all participants prior to meeting for our online research conversation, to revisit this before we began the conversation, and to be clear about the opportunity to withdraw from the research at any time or to not pursue particular lines of conversation if this was not wanted. I also shared with all the participants that any social characteristics that might identify them would be withheld as much as possible, names would be changed, and member checking would be employed. At the centre of my thinking about the ethical issues arising in this study was the relational aspect of research and how power may flow and be held differently amongst us. 'Ethics in narrative research ... is not a matter of abstractly correct behaviour but of responsibility in human relationships' (Josselson, 2007, p. 538). I understood this to mean that careful thought, reflexivity, and nuanced awareness of the other in relationship with me was required at all times.

The participants (all the names are pseudonyms) were:

Gillian	Experienced practitioner and researcher. Supervisor in higher education
Annabel	Experienced practitioner, researcher, and academic.
Lily	Therapist and experienced practitioner
Tim	Experienced researcher using creative approaches, working in higher ed
Linda	Metanoia student, practitioner
Alicia	Metanoia student, practitioner
Eleanor	Metanoia student, writer, practitioner
Hannah	Experienced practitioner
Kathleen	Experienced practitioner
Rebecca	Experienced practitioner
Sarah	Counsellor using creative approaches, writer

Each research conversation began with two pieces of timed writing completed by both of us. The first prompt for writing was, ‘What is research?’; the second was, ‘What is the purpose of research?’. These five-minute pieces of writing were a way into the research conversation. The research conversations were conducted between May and December 2022.

Research Is Like...

As I began the research conversations, I started to hear what research felt like to students and practitioners. These are some of their words:

Research is like –

A weight; (Lilly)

A straitjacket; (Gillian)

Like working in a biscuit factory. (Gillian)

It is horrendous, it's irritating, (Eleanor)
It's playing a game. (Alicia)
Performing. (Tim)
Getting my ticket. (Alicia)
Keeping my job. (Gillian)
I'm very cynical. (Gillian)

It's a dogma, an institution, (Alicia)
An endless quest, (Annabel)
A fight against the tide. (Annabel)
It's like standing in the headlights. (Annabel)
It's making money for universities. (Gillian)
It's big business par excellence. (Gillian)
I can't bear it. (Gillian)

It's
Gendered. (Hannah)
Exclusive. (Kathleen and Sarah)
Elitist. (Eleanor and Linda)
Cold and clinical. (Linda)
Silencing. (Lilly)
It's squeezing yourself into a box. (Hannah)
It's being forced into a predictable format. (Tim)
It's losing your centre. (Tim)

The force of the words brings me to a stop.

I don't want to move glibly into an academic discussion about what I found
and what it means.

I want to pause to allow the words to sink in and find their place in me and
you.

A pause.

What do you notice?

I noticed how heavy and restrictive mainstream empirical research felt to nine
of the eleven participants as experienced researchers and research
supervisors, students, and consumers of research (Lilly, Rebecca, Alicia,
Annabel, Hannah, Kathleen, Tim, Gillian, Linda).

Here are more of their words:

I feel as if there is something very heavy about that word 'research'.
(Eleanor)

I'm interested in research, but it can feel a bit weighty. 'Pull yourself together now'. 'Get ready to bear some weight'. (Lilly)

I've called research ... a straitjacket. (Annabel)

I have to work in these straitjackets. (Gillian)

The supervisory tutor was saying to me, 'You have to write in this voice'.
(Hannah)

I always feel like I am fighting against the tide. (Annabel)

I wanted to make something that was more of an artistic piece, but I was just getting too much pushback. My thesis has had to be forced into a predictable format. (Tim)

I didn't want to box up my words into what was needed to fit a PhD chapter.... I didn't want to put it into those words, but I had to. I had to tighten that box, eliminate the heart stories to get my PhD. (Annabel)

I couldn't squeeze myself into that box in order to do a PhD. (Hannah)

There is a dark side of research where research becomes purely performative – where we are operating to the designs of some controlling exterior thing. We become so consumed with working to those ideas, or those pressures, we lose our centre and because of that research really loses its value. (Tim)

I noticed that the doing of research was called 'playing a game' and 'performing' (Alicia, Gillian, Tim), something done in order to 'get my ticket' and/or keep a job (Alicia, Gillian):

I've worked in places where students had to do research in order to get their ticket in order to keep their jobs. They didn't want to do it. (Gillian)

I noticed research experienced as a fight:

For me there has been a personal battle with the very notion of research. I actually use the word *fight* and I've drawn this very scary looking stick figure ... to give research this persona. It's been a fight. (Annabel)

I noticed the view that research was primarily conducted to generate income for universities:

Research is done to make money for universities and other big businesses. This is really how I feel about it at the end of a long time working in different universities. (Gillian)

I noticed the negative feelings and experiences associated with research—how research language was experienced as cold and clinical or silencing:

I get bogged down with the academic way some research is presented. It doesn't speak to me. It's very cold and clinical. And the language has a massive impact. There have been some papers ... that have felt quite clinical. It's like they're from the outside looking in. A little bit of me does switch off then (Linda)

I can feel silenced (by research papers). I haven't necessarily found a way to enter into a conversation. (Lilly)

Alongside this, and wrapped around and through this, I noticed research experienced as elitist, gendered, 'white', and excluding. A site of *unbelonging*, for some of shame:

You are either in or out. The flavour of the month. Or you are not, and you've been disgraced. (Alicia)

The academy is a bit of a bastion. You have to have certain qualifications to get in. There will be certain things about class. I think it can be a bit elitist. It's bound to be dominated by white people, the usual suspects, which I think is off-putting. (Eleanor)

The research world has created a 'You're included' 'You're excluded'. (Sarah)

I notice very much, more and more, how research can be very gendered. And that many of these voices that are the authoritarian voices, they are telling us or explaining to us – you must be like this to be able to join our male voices. It's not always men in these positions, but it nearly always is. I still experience it as a very male authoritarian voice. (Hannah)

It's a very exclusive club which I don't think I'm good enough for and nobody would want me in it. (Kathleen)

All of the above left me holding a sense of the ways in which research, as an institution, excludes. How it is experienced as elitist, cold, weighty—

with no heart,

with no heart.

Only two of the participants (Alicia, Rebecca) expressed any positive experience of research.

Alicia shared that while she experienced research as a game, within that game there was a structure that allowed her to play safely and to be creative:

I got to play the game. But within that game, I was still able to be creative ... Something which felt very constraining and very structured ... can create the conditions for something expansive, more playful. (Alicia)

Rebecca shared about how the heuristic methodology she adopted for her research for the final year of her Metanoia masters course provided a good balance and framework for her research:

Although it was quite a rambling exploration, there was some framework. That sort of qualitative heuristic inquiry ... gave me permission to play and to explore and make a mess. But there was this [positive] regulatory sense that it was there as a structure to what I was doing. (Rebecca)

One other participant, Sarah, shared that writing a research paper allowed for an opportunity to positively engage with like-minded others and their knowledge through her reading for the paper.

These were the only three positive experiences of research that appeared for me in my initial engagement with the eleven conversations. Gillian later

shared that there was joy for her in supervising research students and witnessing the transformative power of research for them, making this four.

What did you notice?

I notice that my *noticing* became my way of interpreting and analysing the research conversations.

I probably noticed all the things noted above more than others because they touched something important in me. They resonated with my experience of myself as a researcher and writer of research books and papers that I kept hidden from sight. I created the research project comfortably located in my university role as a leader, teacher, writer, and supervisor of research. I set up the research conversations with the intention of hearing about other practitioners' experiences and relationships with research (and these informing me about what existed in this new land of CWTP that I found myself in). What was unexpected was the way the research conversations gifted me an opportunity for my own research experiences as a researcher, rather than as a teacher and supervisor, to come to the fore, to come into the light.

I recognised the experiences shared of research as a straitjacket, as weighty and as allowing no space, as restrictive and performative.

I suddenly had a space and an opportunity to admit that for the past few years I had felt so tightly restricted by the expectations and structures of research that I had stopped writing.

What emerged for me in the conversations was a sense of recognition. I found my own experiences reflected or articulated in the conversations.

Here is an example. Annabel is speaking to me (Sue) about her experiences of research in her university and the Research Excellence Framework (REF), a system for assessing the quality of research in UK universities.

Annabel: When at work we talk about research, and the Research Excellence Framework, it's all about output. It's all about the product. I'm doing the kind of writing we do in therapeutic writing ... because it is about process, not about products.

I feel like I am fighting against the tide.

I had a small pot of money to run a writing day for staff. The idea was to write it up and to follow it up with interviews but as soon as I started putting together the required paperwork I just shut down. I just wanted it to sit as a process. I wanted these people to come and have the experience of this writing. No need to write it up. Wrap it up. Put it outside.

Just let it sit.

I think that that was quite a moment for me. That's where I am with it. I'm just going to go with that. Just let it sit.

Sue: I too have done quite a lot of research where I've got little bits of money. I've done the research. And then I haven't done anything with the data. Because something closes down.

I just think, 'I can't'. 'I can't turn this into that'. 'I can't turn it into something else'.

Or maybe it was doing that interview was enough. Not having to make some kind of product which I'm walking around out there trying to sell. That's not what it is about.

Annabel touched something in me when she spoke about how she shut down when she had to write up anything. I had had this experience, too, but had never spoken about it. It was very reassuring to learn that someone else was experiencing this.

In Annabel, and with the other participants, I found conversations that reflected back or made a space for me. I found similar experiences of research.

Sue: If I was to ask you, 'What counts as proper research in your institution,' would you find that easy to explain or define?

Annabel: I think from an institutional perspective it would be the research that has the high enough star rating to have the kind of impact that the REF looks for.

Sue: And there is nothing in the REF that I can think of that's about personal impact, creative impact or transformation. It's all

about international impact. The number of citations, not the work that the text might do with the reader or for ourselves.

Annabel: I think when push comes to shove universities have still got to fit themselves into those categories and go for four and five stars.

Sue: I must admit, it's those kinds of attitudes, and particularly working with editors and reviewers of journals, that stopped me dead. There was something about people telling me to get rid of that first page of my paper and then deleting it themselves. Emotionally I reached a point where I thought, 'I don't want to let that happen'. 'It's not okay'.

And it's still quite painful.

There is a lot of affective stuff here for me. I stopped writing. I gave myself permission. I had enough publications to see me through the last REF. I've only just started to step back into writing again.

Annabel: It's got to have a sense of purpose that speaks to the heart rather than to the REF.

This happened not just in my conversation with Annabel, it happened with others. Here's another example:

Gillian: I write and write and write and I sometimes think, 'Why have I stopped sending this anywhere?' I could send this to [a journal] and then I think, 'No. I'd have to reference it'.

I can't bear it. I really can't.

I don't know who I would be writing for and that's always been very important.

Sue: What you say about the referencing. I have exactly the same thing and I had no idea that there was anyone else out there feeling the same.

In the research conversations there were also moments where either I or the participants noted that we were saying things to each other that had not been articulated before. The conversations became a space where something, perhaps unthought as well as unarticulated, could come into tentative being.

Annabel, after eloquently articulating her current position in the academy and her recognition that,

‘My battle with research was always about having to be someone else to do it’

and that,

‘Writing from the heart [and] bringing therapeutic writing into how I want to write in the academy is bringing in more of myself,’

stated that,

‘I’ve never actually thought that before saying those words just now. I don’t think I’ve ever expressed it [in that way before].’

I felt a sense of seeing myself present in others, a stepping out of isolated experience, ‘just me’, into something collective and held by others.

Some months after conducting the conversations, I read the following from Laurel Richardson, writing about the importance of ‘the collective story:

the collective story overcomes some of the isolation and alienation of contemporary life. It provides a sociological community, the linking of separate individuals into a shared consciousness. Once linked, the possibility for social action on behalf of the collective is present, and, therewith, the possibility of social transformation. (Richardson, 1997, p. 33)

The research conversations provided me, and I think some others, with something more than a typical research interview. There was an aspect of self-recognition in many of the conversations, in the sharing of our words with each other and an opportunity to articulate and share something for the first time.

Richardson speaks of the possibility of linking separate individuals into a shared consciousness and that once linked there is a possibility for social

action on behalf of the collective, with the possibility of social transformation. This is something that I began to hear and notice in our research conversations, and which began to stir in me.

The research conversations had allowed for some sharing of private and often hidden away experiences and thoughts.

The experience of the conversations overcame my own sense of isolation and gave me an experience of community, of being connected and linked to these others that I was conversing with.

I found myself saying on more than one occasion that I was gaining so much from taking part in the research conversations for the research that I didn't feel the need to write up. It was enough to just take part in the conversation. They gave me so much.

Ways Through and Beyond: Finding New Meanings and Practices of 'Research'

Another deeply profound aspect of the research conversations and what they offered was being able to hear and pay attention to how people were finding their way through all that was restrictive, heavy, excluding, and cold in their experience of research.

I started to hear what I began to think of as people's ways of (re-)situating themselves, moving in their own way, finding their own place in their world of research. I started to notice the ways in which people were adjusting, shifting, creating, and finding their way to researcher-ly, satisfying spaces and practices.

People revealed that they weren't passive in their response to the research world that felt like it excluded them or in which they felt closed down or not allowed.

There was so much in the conversations that I started to hear. So much that gently budded and blossomed in all the conversations.

I heard people re-fashioning, re-interpreting, re-defining research on their own terms in the company of others or simply striking off in their own direction.

In my conversations with Hannah and Annabel, I started to hear about people giving themselves permission to follow their own path and not squeeze themselves into boxes.

I'm fortunate to have colleagues who are allies and that are writing from the heart and stepping out of the box. I'm giving myself permission to step out of the box. I fought long enough to try and fit in the boxes and that didn't work. (Annabel)

I've given myself permission to bring the therapeutic writing I do into my day job. I was moonlighting before. Trying to live parallel lives. (Annabel)

In my conversations with Hannah, Annabel, and Lilly, I started to hear about the importance of not seeking validation, of playfulness, and of 'writing from the heart':

I think it is a real personal step to not seek that approval [of the traditional research world and the academy], to not bend myself into shape, or seek that validation – and to choose instead to keep treading my own path and see if approval and validation find me.

I'm finally finding my way to thinking, 'I'm going to walk'. I'm going to step into my own path and let it come to me rather than try and fit myself into what feels too constricting, too narrow. (Hannah)

Writing from the heart is absolutely at the core of it. I think that's what I tried to do all those years ago as a PhD student, but it just didn't work then. Maybe I had to go through this journey – for it to get to this point where I can see how it fits. (Annabel)

Bringing the therapeutic writing into how I want to write in the academy is bringing [in] more of myself. Traditional research meant trying to be somebody else. (Annabel)

Playfulness is a way for me to access more. (Lilly)

In my conversations with Annabel and Gillian, I started to hear about what research can be and what it can bring:

Good 'research' would be stories rooted in emotion and rooted in myself and the real world. (Annabel)

Less theory, more story. (Annabel)

I think what's exciting to me now is probably life-writing. That's where I find myself going. (Gillian)

In many of these conversations, I heard about the importance of community and of belonging, and of the Lapidus community in particular.

[The Lapidus Living Research Community has] been really good for me. The LLRC is probably as good as its going to get. I think it is my tribe really. (Gillian)

Joining in through Lapidus, I can see that there's more ways in. In some of the Lapidus research workshops, even though the research has been done, we're still invited into it collaboratively and interactively. (Lilly)

I experience it as they are holding a space in a very different way. And they are not saying you must be like this to join. I'm hearing a message which is whatever you are doing is research a much more fluid, open, dynamic conception of research ... trying to open it up and create something different. (Hannah)

The box is expanding. There's multimedia. Different forms. Not just one voice. (Hannah)

Lilly likened what she saw as an emerging understanding and engagement with research at the heart of Lapidus to

A lovely new blanket that we're still unfolding and smoothing out the creases.

It feels like it is still quite young and open.

I see research as an adventure [now] a sharpening of curiosity and expansiveness.

Out of these eleven conversations, I started to build a picture of how CWTP practitioners and students experienced research and the role of research. At the same time, I began to hear about what research could be in this new land I had arrived in—how people were creating or finding their way with this, how important community (in the form of the Lapidus organisation), the collective and collaboration were.

The conversations gifted me an opportunity to see a different view of research.

Transformation

So, it's not about delivery, it's about wayfaring. We're moving through space with each other, dialoguing along the way. And it's not about arriving at points. And it's not about a journey either. It's about something more than a journey. It's about the process of being with others along the way. And having those conversations and then encountering places along the way together and then telling other people about the places you've been together.

There's not a holy site you are trying to get to. It's just – you're travelling along. It's not through a line, like the kind of delivery systems that we tend to have now: education to deliver an outcome or research to deliver outcomes. It helps me understand my research process better as well as explain how I got here [and] why the conversations are so important along the way. (Tim)

This is Tim speaking in one of the later research conversations that I conducted. He is explaining Tim Ingold's concept of *wayfaring* to me (see Ingold, 2011) but what is really happening here is a conversation that enacts the concept of wayfaring: dialogue, movement, collaboration, the 'more than a journey' quality that renders it as something that is more than producing an outcome.

I think the conversation with Tim occurred just at that moment when the other conversations had primed me and moved me ready for a sudden falling into a hearing of a new understanding of research.

Our conversation mirrored exactly what Tim was explaining to me about Ingold's theory of wayfaring.

Our conversation was a dialogue. I realised my other research conversations had been this.

There was a connection.

It was a being with another, encountering places along the way together as we conversed.

My other research conversations had been this too.

I felt myself start to move towards a new conception of research as something that can happen in and through dialogue and through being open to what is unique about us rather than always looking for what is the same:

One of the things that Bakhtin talks about is it's the difference which gives us ourselves. By talking with you I'm not only learning about you, but I am also learning a lot about myself, not because we're the same but because of the differences. (Tim)

This is a radically different conception of research to the one that dominates in my other land of education research. There the conception of research is that of looking for patterns and what is the same, rather than what is unique.

What arose in my conversation with Tim, and which took me back to the conversations I had had with others along the way—and which I took to the conversations I was about to have—was the turning towards the importance of the process rather than of outcome, of the experience and self-exploration rather than an output, of not to be required in advance to say what the research was about but to follow the trail, the thread, the curiosity.

To stepping into a place of *unknowing*:

St John of the Cross in this wonderful poem
writes about entering the unknown
and this idea of being set free.
That is the place where all knowledge is transcended,
and you cannot plan for that.
And you cannot control that. (Tim)

And later,

Tim: Unknowing. What's being unknown?
 There's the knowledge part
 and there's the unknowing.

Sue: For me, it's something to do with being fixed or in process
 Being able to sense how this is created in the moment
 Continuing to roll, unfold, shape shift.
 A sense of the dynamic and the ability to say 'I know not'

We are all of us working with glimpses
Knowledges that are fluid.

Tim: I think that there is something about the requirement to
explain
which is dissolved in that space.
It becomes the act or emotion or experience.
You don't have to have 'What's your reference for that?'

What I took and learned from the conversations equals a radical change in me.

If I take myself back to one of the questions I began with, 'What is research in
this new land of CWTP?' I find myself opened to the possibility of:

research as dialogue, taking the form of moving in connection with
others

research as collective, as exploring what is different and unique,
not what is the same,

research as not needing to say what it is about in advance,
or pin it down or put it in a box,

research being what you are passionate about: writing from the heart,

research as a space of willing unknowing,

research as a site of deep self-exploration,

research as a space for curiosity and from which we are telling people
about the places we have been together.

The conversations led me to a place where I could see how a space was being
opened, offered, and held by experienced practitioners and researchers, and
by Lapidus, to allow for curiosity, and the feminine and for *collectivity*. For
growth, for change, for discovery, for movement together, and for research as
uplifting and inspiring. A space for research to not require anyone to be
'someone else to do it' (Annabel). In which writing from the heart was
possible. In which writing for the self and about process can be as important as
writing about or for others.

The conversations I engaged with led me to see this as what research in the land of CWTP was/could be in the process of becoming. What I might step into.

I saw my struggles with research given a voice through the conversations and dialogue and what was shared and suggested as ways forward. I heard myself as part of what Richardson referred to as the collective rather than as a singular voice.

This paper has been an attempt to tell about the places I have been together with my fellow conversationalists and what has emerged from our being together along the way. There is no final destination, no arrival point with a tied up, nicely boxed 'findings and conclusions' gift for you the reader.

This is a story of where curiosity led me and where I am at this moment in time, this moment in movement. It has not followed the conventions of a traditional paper; it has been an attempt to present what I heard, the dialogues that I have been involved in, what has been formed in and between us through these, where I am currently situated, and how I see the world and research from here.

My new land offers so much that is new, exciting, challenging. I hope that what is offered here offers you, the reader, an opportunity for conversation, for dialogue, with some of the voices in the paper, with general ideas or claims about research and what it could be for us.

My greatest learning in this story of curiosity about this new land of CWTP research is noticing how I started out with the usual, for me (for empirical research in general), intention of finding out about others, finding out about how other CWTP practitioners and students experienced research and what the purpose and role of research was for them. And noticing how, in the process of the writing of this paper, I have moved imperceptibly from exploring and writing about others to exploring myself. This has been research as an ethic of self-care, of research as following the thread of curiosity, to unearth the many selves carried within me, and to offer me a space in which to *expand, change shape, grow* in collaboration and dialogue with others.

In keeping with the above, this paper should not end with a key point made, a closing down, a goodbye; this is the end of the trail, the finishing of something.

The ideas, the thoughts, that which continues the movement, the conversation, the dialogue should have their space here.

Here is a thread, a continuing, a further opening out of the research that I hope for...

One learning from the research was the potential of conversations to be transformative. In order to support people in finding their way and writing from the heart, making opportunities for conversation, for moving together, was indicated. I found myself playing with the words offered by the research participants and creating, and then filming, a script of four talking heads, made up of the words spoken. This felt like a way of opening up and continuing the research to allow other voices to join through engaging with the film and then having the opportunity to talk in small groups, allowing connection, creating new, evolving knowledge, and building community. An opening out of the research.

Here is another thread, another continuing, another further opening out ...

After my conversation with Tim, I moved to reading Ingold (2011; 2022). And that engagement led me to reading Bunn (2022) and her thoughts about the connection between research and bodily movement and what research could be and what it could cease to be. And that led me to a listening of Kakali Bhattacharya (2020) and her thinking about what research could be.

All the while I still had the voices of all eleven of the people I had spoken to, dialogued with, in my head.

Out of all these words and dialogue comes the following which I offer as a continuation....

Rather than my old analogies
And analysis
And making contrasts
And pulling things apart to see into their constituent parts
(a pulling apart of the flower's petals, a splicing open of stamen and sepals in order to name and know)

Rather than an individual, lonesome voice
(the ego howling/calling in the dark)
claiming a space for how right they are
and what everyone else has missed, or not known.

Rather than writing within the lines
Like a good girl
Intro, lit review, methodology, findings
Final conclusions/solutions

Rather than all this

You together collectively and in your individual/own selves

Have shown me

Connection

In our words and sharing.

And how we might conceive of ourselves as
journeying together
Writing from the heart
Bringing things together and holding them so, letting them speak...
and move us

And in our coming to an always fluid understanding
A new analogy, in our uniqueness

Like the flower, magical, always whole, always mystery
Always understood in its entirety
Petals and stamen and pistil and roots touching other roots and
the wind that nurtures and the rain that falls

Flower

How we create knowledge together
An always shifting, forming, dynamic
Opening and closing to the sun..

Acknowledgement

To all of my fellow conversationalists: my greatest thanks and appreciation for
what your conversation offered.

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