

Approaching Gestalt and Holistic Inquiry



orientation

Chapter one

Researching Holistically - Doing 'Less' and 'Being' More

*Don't try to force anything.
Let life be a deep let-go.
See God opening millions of flowers
everyday without forcing the buds...*

Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh in Hayward 1990

- 1.1 Illuminating a holistic and Transpersonal World - The Universe as a Dancing Gestalt? \$\$
- 1.2 Gestalt - Illuminating Patterns within a Contextual Whole \$\$
- 1.3 Innate and Tacit Intelligence - Transpersonal Influences over and above the Self: \$\$
- 1.4 Humanism - Ethics with a Human Face \$\$
- 1.5 The Practitioner-Researcher - Life and Work as Research \$\$
- 1.6 The Researcher is the Primary Research Tool - Developing 'Mindfulness'? \$\$
- 1.7 Existence as Life-long Research - A Concluding Summary \$\$

1. Researching Holistically – Doing ‘Less’ and ‘Being’ More

Research is akin to a tree: the roots draw from metaphysics and philosophy; the trunk is formed from observation and experience; the branches are shaped from interest, experiential engagement and imaginative speculation and the fruits are further questions.

Preamble

This chapter is designed to orientate you with the aims, style and content of this text. To encourage your reflection upon how Gestalt and holistic facilitation may be integrated in an approach to research, you will be invited to consider how what is on offer here compliments the world view that is gaining ascendance in the twenty-first century, which is suggested to be rapidly moving towards an ecologically informed holistic position. I also attempt to illuminate the core concepts that underpin this work. The definitions provided should not be taken to be truly definitive but rather as starting-points of your own research. We will also survey what holistic inquiry might focus upon, along with poetic aspects of inquiry in this vein. Hopefully, by the close of this chapter you will have begun to reflect upon your own world-view plus the bias and values you operate by.

1.1 Illuminating a holistic and Transpersonal World – The Universe as a Dancing Gestalt?

One of the great shocks of the twentieth century came about when Science began to realise – largely from insights born from the study of ecological systems and quantum physics – that it could not reach an understanding of the physical world merely by collecting ever more quantitative data or statistical analysis. This was especially brought home when physicists discovered that solid matter started to dissolve at the sub-atomic level into wave-like patterns of probabilities. There were therefore no ‘*things*’ to be studied, but rather *sequences of dancing gestalt-like patterns* that interconnected with everything else:

The final net result is a whole-making universe, that it is the fundamental character of this universe to be active in the production of wholes, of ever more complete and advanced wholes, and that the Evolution of the universe, inorganic and organic, is nothing but the record of this whole-making activity in its progressive development.

Smuts quoted in Clarkson 1993 p.5

Periodic leaps in awareness which questioned established ‘*scientific paradigms*’, the world-view of the scientific community used to define legitimate problems and solutions (Kuhn 1962), were termed by Kuhn ‘*paradigm shifts*’, times when the dominant world-view underwent a

revolutionary break from tradition. At the dawn of the twenty-first century the ‘old paradigm’ that has been on the wane for some time appears to be one that venerates:

- The universe as a mechanical system composed of rudimentary building-blocks;
- The human body as a machine;
- The view of society as a competitive struggle for existence;
- The belief in unlimited material progress achievable via economic and technical growth;
- The belief that the female is subordinate to the male as a basic law of nature.

After Capra 1997

Conversely, the ‘new paradigm’ that has already begun to take hold:

- Is holistic and sees the world as integrated rather than a collection of dislocated parts;
- Fosters a gestalt-like appreciation of the interdependence of the individual and their socio-cultural field;
- Is deeply ecological (see Devall and Sessions 1985) to the degree that it includes spiritual awareness;
- Views the world as a network of phenomena that are fundamentally interconnected and interdependent;
- Recognises the intrinsic worth of all living things and sees human beings as merely a part of the web of life.

After Capra 1997

Evidence for this shift is not just confined to physics (Capra 1991) but is also discernible in the emergence of such new disciplines as ‘transpersonal ecology’ (Fox 1983 and 1990) and ‘eco-psychology’ (Roszak 1992), where ‘*the whole*’ rather than ‘*the parts*’ are emphasised. As our post-modern world looks to the non-physical sciences and metaphysics, a holistic Gestalt-inspired stance to the facilitation of research, one which is alive to the transpersonal, is not just for now – but something of the future.

The deep ecological and holistic awareness fostered by eco-psychology where care for ‘*the whole*’ is expressed, in a Taoist-like way stresses man’s place in the natural world while honouring the ‘oneness’ and interdependency of his existence and being. Note how this influence is expressed in the quote below:

Care flows naturally if the ‘self’ is widened and deepened so that protection of free Nature is felt and conceived as protection of ourselves... You care for yourself without feeling any moral pressure to

do it... If reality is like it is experienced by the ecological self, our behaviour naturally and beautifully follows the norms of strict environmental ethics.

Fox 1990 p.246-7

In a Gestalt and transpersonal approach to human inquiry, as with quantum physics, you don't end up with solids so much as phenomenological patterns determined and shaped by a greater whole. At the simplest level, a facilitator cum practitioner-researcher – be they a teacher, researcher or counsellor – who attempts to account for influences of 'the whole', must automatically take note of the transpersonal, for their search for understanding of the larger picture leads them naturally to consider influences above and beyond the self:

God is day and night, winter and summer, war and peace, surfeit and hunger: but he takes various shapes, just as fire, when it is mingled with spices, is named according to the savour of each... Men do not know that what is at variance agrees with itself.

Zobar quoted in Clarkson 1991

But Gestaltists don't jump to the conclusion that nature is the '*band of god*' nor indeed ascribe properties to deities or theories; they rather keep the question alive and, in a post-modern sense, shun big narratives in favour of more local and situational events (Flick 1998). In this way, though alive to 'the whole', they keep the holographic germ of individual experience firmly in focus. Interestingly, the quantum physics notion of an innate non-personal intelligence holding fields of influence together (Capra 1991), again comes uncommonly close to the Taoist concept of the 'natural mind':

Tao, when put in use for its hollowness, is not likely to be filled.
In its profundity it seems to be the origin of all things.
In its depth it seems ever to remain.
I do not know whose offspring it is;
But it looks like the predecessor of nature.

Tao Te Ching

Taoism extends and moves Gestalt notions of the 'field', 'interrelatedness' and the 'fertile void', into transpersonal territory. It also cautions us to consider the 'unknown' and 'unknowable', and to be alive to metaphor and paradox, while raising our awareness to a kind of knowing which extends beyond the intellect and senses. When quantum physics and Eastern philosophy start to converge in this way, it is wise for us to reappraise our world-view.

All the world is working together. It is all one living whole, with one soul through it. And, as a matter of fact, no single part of it can either rejoice or suffer without all the rest being affected. The man who does not see

that the good of every living creature is his good, the hurt of every living creature is his hurt, is one who wilfully makes himself a kind of outlaw or exile: he is blind, or a fool.

Murray quoted in Clarkson 1991 p.31

1.2 Gestalt – Illuminating Patterns within a Contextual Whole

Gestalt, through the cultivation and development of an aware and respectful relationship, inquires into the unique patterning of forces that shape perception and behaviour. It stresses that within every person and relationship we meet with a quality that we have never encountered before nor can ever meet again – for all is in flux. In this context, any conclusions we come to are current and temporary (Frank 1939), situational and relative:

One cannot step into the same river twice nor grasp any mortal substance in a stable condition, but it scatters and again gathers: it forms and dissolves, and approaches and departs.

Heraclitus quoted in Staemmler 1997 p.46

Framed by such unique influences, the present is approached as a wondrously never-to-be-repeated moment.

For us to appreciate uniqueness and immediacy to this degree, three components must come together. First, a practitioner-researcher facilitating inquiry in the Gestalt mode needs to practise what Buber (1951) calls '*inclusion*': an existential position which is open and sensitive to novelty, curious about the human condition, suspending of judgement and alive to uncertainty:

Cultivating my uncertainty to me means two things: First, I have to stay aware all the time that I am uncertain in regard to my attribution of meaning; I deal with a positive, desirable and delightful feeling that reminds me of the interpersonal reality of which I am a part. On another level, this can provide me with a feeling of security, for it tells me I am in touch with reality. My uncertainty becomes an aspect of my internal support system. It warns me not to attribute meanings one-sidedly and reinforces me to regard my client as a partner in the therapeutic process.

Staemmler 1997 p.45

Here practitioner-researchers pay attention to what is '*becoming*' as much as to what is obvious – hence the title of this work. Second, in order to encourage 'whole-hearted' and meaningful inquiry, they convey understanding through the cultivation of a genuine, congruent and authentic presence founded on interest and concern. Third, they develop a transpersonal communication style which is:

...committed to dialogue, surrendering to the between. This is a form of contact without aiming, with truth and healing emerging from the interaction rather than from what is already known...

Yontef 1996 p.94

Inquiry of this nature is best performed through the medium of a transparent relationship which emphasises 'existence' while bracketing-off abstract theoretical explanations and 'cause and effect thinking'. For instance, although existential and witnessing, Gestalt does not represent a philosophical discourse but rather a philosophy for living:

Existentialism wants to do away with concepts, and to work on the awareness principle, on phenomenology. The set-back with the present existentialist philosophies is that they need their support from somewhere else. If you look at the existentialists, they say they are non-conceptual but if you look at the people, they all borrow concepts from other sources. Buber from Judaism, Tillich from Protestantism, Sartre from Socialism, Heidegger from language, Binswanger from psychoanalysis, and so on. A rich heritage, indeed. Gestalt therapy is a philosophy that tries to be in harmony, in alignment with everything else, with medicine, with science, with the universe, with what is. Gestalt therapy has its support in its own formation because the gestalt formation, the emergence of needs, is a primary biological phenomenon.

Perls 1969 pp.15-6

Being both inter-relational and holistic, Gestalt is a close cousin of field theory which attends to what Lewin (1952 p.150) calls: 'the constellation (the structure and forces) of the specific field as a whole'. This view represents a sort of social Taoism, in that it suggests a person cannot be understood in isolation from their dynamic cultural, social and physiological network - their total field:

Now what is first to be considered is that the organism always works as a whole. We **have** not a liver or a heart. We **are** liver and heart and brain and so on, and even this is wrong. We are not a summation of parts, but a **co-ordination** - a very subtle co-ordination of all these different bits that go into making the organism. The old philosophy always thought that the world consisted of the sum of particles. You know yourself it's not true. We consist originally out of one cell.

Perls quoted in Clarkson 1993 p.5

At root, in its approach to inquiry, Gestalt stands for creativity, contact and experiential wisdom founded upon the authority of the 'lived experience':

The therapeutic process is therapeutic in itself because it allows us to express and examine the content and dimensions of our internal lives. We live full lives to the degree to which we find a full range of vehicles

which concretise, symbolise, and otherwise give expression to our experiences. The depth, duration, and extent of cultivating each medium of expression are the other significant factors in defining the fullness of life. I have known many people who have spread themselves so thin that their lives took on a shallow, translucent, and sadly contrived quality. In the frantic flight to touch all we can in life, we wind up feeling like hurried tourists, snapping pictures of everything and seeing nothing.

Zinker 1978 p.8

Gestalt-inspired inquiry, emphasises not just intercommunication - but '*contact*'. By attending to the inferences, assumptions and values exerting influence over current behaviour, and to distortions and limitations of awareness, it creates an organismic picture of a person or group's immediate experience, as they move within reach of the contact-zone or boundary of others:

People regulate themselves organismically through the actions or processes called the contact boundary. The contact boundary is a function or organ of the entire organism/environment field. The individual components of boundary processes comprise awareness (what one is in contact with); motor behaviour (what one does); and feeling (affect). The contact boundary differentiates the field and has the dual functions of joining the individual with others and also maintaining separation. (...) But it is only by active exchange with the rest of the field that life and growth are Possible

Yontef 1996 p.91

Just as 'action', 'contact' and 'choice' are seen to signify health, so rigidity, stasis and control - characteristics that interrupt our organismic flow and cause boundary disturbance - are taken to be symptomatic of a person, group or organisation's state of dis-at-ease.

We see from the above discussion that a Gestalt-informed researcher is more concerned with what is actually experienced and being felt, seen and heard in the immediate environment, than what is thought or interpreted. By following the movement of a person or community's 'continuum of awareness' - moment-to-moment focus - we then begin to appreciate what is of greatest need or interest (being brought to the fore) and what is contextual (left to melt into the background). This is not to say intellect, theory and interpretation are forgotten, but rather that they play second fiddle when we endeavour to refine 'immediate experience', to develop a 'felt sense' of the world and to build a 'picture of awareness' (Yontef 1996). Awareness is then stalked by attending to the individual's 'personal psychological process', plus exploration of the 'immediate experience of the person embedded in her or his environment' (Smith 1996 p.3). In this context, 'raising awareness' to how we co-construct our world becomes a primary outcome:

Through a creative involvement in the Gestalt process, it is my hope that a person:

- Moves toward greater awareness of himself – his body, his feelings, his environment;
- Learns to take ownership of his experiences, rather than projecting them on others;
- Learns to be aware of his needs and to develop skills to satisfy himself without violating others;
- Moves towards a fuller contact with his sensations, learning to smell, taste, touch, hear and see – to savour all aspects of himself; moves towards experience of his power and the ability to support himself, rather than relying on whining, blaming or guilt-making in order to mobilise support from the environment;
- Becomes sensitive to his surroundings, yet at the same time wears a coat of armour for situations which are potentially destructive or poisonous;
- Learns to take responsibility for his actions and their consequences;
- Feels comfortable with the awareness of his fantasy life and its expression.

As the work progresses, the person flows more comfortably in the experience of his energy and uses it in a way which allows his completeness of functioning.

Zinker 1978 p.96-7

In the last analysis, though eclectic and drawing from a multitude of sources – field theory, Zen, perception psychology, biology – Gestalt is nevertheless a distinct system that represents ‘process’ rather than ‘content’:

I consider this blend of existential and Zen philosophy, this organismic personality theory, and this phenomenological experiential style of working to be the necessary and sufficient conditions to define the Gestalt approach. I don't define the Gestalt approach by techniques.

Smith 1978 p.74, quoted in Smith 1996

1.3 Innate and Tacit Intelligence – Transpersonal Influences over and above the Self

My understanding of the ‘transpersonal’ and the innate intelligence that works through, around and beyond ourselves is informed in part by Taoist philosophy – that suggests we are intimately connected to Nature, and Gestalt – which emphasises that we are interrelated to everything else, which together lead me to propose that:

- We emanate from and live within a dynamically interrelating and

intelligent universal field – which suggests the cosmos is innately intelligent;

- Intelligence is generalised as well as localised throughout the cosmos, which has physical as well as transpersonal manifestations – as above so below in ourselves;
- As human beings we are not separate from the unified field but rather focal points within it, where consciousness peaks to create and witness a changing scenery – we are therefore intimately and energetically related to everything and everybody else;
- From this perspective we are not our bodies or our ego, nor our personality, but multi-dimensional beings connected to a unified multi-dimensional field – who are this moment focused within a physical-social-emotional-projective-intuitive experience;
- Within this context, matter is a phenomenon of consciousness and reality is a phenomenological creation we have constructed from perception – we perceive that which we have first learned to conceive.

Taking the above points each in turn, it may be suggested that:

- If we take the stance that ‘the cosmos is innately intelligent’, then everything has meaning and purpose and nothing ever happens by accident – even though we may not be able to perceive this from an individual vantage-point;
- As practitioner-researchers, we need therefore to consider how the innate intelligence of an organisational or relational system might be worked with;
- As we are ‘intimately and energetically related to everything and everybody else’, our respect should extend to reverence of all we are, all that we meet, and all that surrounds us;
- Because we ‘are at this moment concentrated and focused within a physical-social-emotional-projective-intuitive experience’, we need to attend to this, our multi-faceted nature, in our address of client-systems and research;
- As ‘we perceive that which we have first learnt to conceive’, we need to realise that we are dealing with a symbolically co-created reality rather than a cause-and-effect series of tangible facts; in the ‘real world’, the quantum one beyond our senses, there are no colours, no shapes and no smells, just stimuli waiting for organisation.

In this context, the *I-Thou relationship* a practitioner-researcher shares with their client becomes a reverential one, wherein both parties meet aspects of themselves while exploring the divine nature of life. Sanctified by a shared authentic presence, facilitative inquiry now becomes both a service and an act of celebration.

When I experience the other fully, acceptingly,
 When I experience the flow of his feeling,
 The beauty of movement, of expression, of longing,
 Then I know the meaning of reverence, holiness,
 And the presence of God.

Zinker 1978 p.17

1.4 Humanism – Ethics with a Human Face?

Holistic researchers and educationalists, in a similar way to Gestalt practitioners attempt to account for the whole human system within its natural setting, inclusive of:

- Individual, social, cultural, symbolic and spiritual dynamics;
- The phenomenological world we co-create;
- Experientially derived wisdom and knowledge.

Philosophically, with its championing of open-mindedness and the veneration of experientially derived knowledge, humanism supports this stance. It also under-writes the transpersonal by supporting the wisdom of our hearts besides the development of our minds, while remaining mindful of more subtle ways of knowing:

No construction, however broadly based, will have an absolute authority; the indomitable freedom of life to be more, to be new, to be what it has not entered into the heart of man as yet to conceive, must always remain standing. With that freedom goes the modesty of reason that can lay claim only to partial knowledge, and to the ordering of a particular soul, or city, or civilisation.

Santayana quoted in Blackburn 1968 p.11

By marrying holism with humanism, inquiry is also given an ethical base, which fosters personal growth and development.

To make more abundant and more secure and more developed what is already in our hands and in our hearts is the meaning and measure of the task, the source of our confidence, the guide of our hopes. The responsibility of the humanist is response before it is answerability. He has responded and tasted, and therefore he takes on responsibility and makes exertions, for himself and for others.

Blackburn 1968 p.188

In this light, a humanistic value-base in service of educational and research ethics suggests:

- An individual's mind and body, as well as their intellectual, emotional and spiritual being are indivisibly related one to the other;

- That given the resources, individuals have the potential to work towards resolving their own problems;
- That it is important to meet life in an open, inquiring and creative way in order to maximise our growth as individuals;
- That reason and democratic process should underpin all we do, individually and socially.

From this perspective, *you, your person-hood and humanity are most important tools of inquiry*, and relationships are the prime medium through which you conduct research.

To research the transpersonal you need to proceed imaginatively and intuitively, using symbols and metaphor to raise to attention the tacit human ways we relate to each other and the world. Indeed, you may have to employ a metaphor in order to compare and catch more appropriate metaphors:

As we gain comfort in using the implications of different metaphors in this way, we quickly learn that the insights of one metaphor can often help us overcome the limitations of another.

Morgan 1997 p.353

For example, as I write this passage I'm aware of identifying with the image of a monk, one who isolates himself from the mundane world to attune to the abstract and divine. This metaphor does not quite fit what I'm about, but it catches the dutiful side of writing. Dwelling upon the monk, another metaphor arises, that of the artist; seeing myself on a continuum with monasticism at one end and artistry at the other, feels much more comfortable and appropriate. When my writing flows I feel very much the creative artist, when the muse forsakes me the dutiful monk fits well enough. Alerted to humanistic values of democracy, experiential learning, autonomy and holism, while mindful of their own humanity, a facilitator cum practitioner-researcher is better able to:

- Experiment with their 'being' – as well as what you do;
- Impact and be impacted by others;
- Use facilitative and gestalt-based phenomenological inquiry as fitting and necessary;
- Move with awareness to whatever new research position presents itself;
- Question themselves and all before them.

Humanists, similar to Gestaltists, inquire from within a relationship. Because they do not consider themselves superior, they do not isolate themselves behind a facilitative, researcher or leadership role from the human race or those they study.

1.5 The Practitioner-Researcher – Life and Work as Research

A researcher systematically explores experience with a view to refining knowledge; a practitioner applies knowledge skilfully with a view to improving practice. As both must be integrated in real-life situations to affect excellence, we arrive at the notion of the practitioner-researcher. *Without research, practice becomes sterile.* Likewise, if practitioner-researchers in such professions as counselling and teaching fail to illuminate new knowledge within those involved, then something is drastically wrong.

As a practitioner-researcher, a human instrument who experiences alongside others, I regard myself as my primary facilitative and research tool and, because I am a social being constructed in the same way as those I study, I look within myself and to my own experience to glean a richer understanding of others.

As the reality we inhabit is a socially constructed one, where cultural 'meanings' rather than 'facts' predominate, to understand our world we must balance information which is intimate and experiential, with that which is interpretative and wide-ranging. In this context, the questions we form are more important than the results we defend, and knowledge becomes warm-blooded and tacit, rather than cold and factual in nature.

Logical thinking cannot yield us any knowledge of the empirical world; all knowledge of reality starts from experience and ends in it. Propositions arrived at purely by logical means are completely empty of reality. I never came upon any of my discoveries through the process of rational thinking.

Albert Einstein

1.6 The Researcher is the Primary Research Tool – Developing 'Mindfulness'?

In this work, the researcher is seen to need sufficient social awareness as to enter, facilitate and shape the relational world they seek to inquire into alongside their co-researchers cum subjects. Though group workers especially come to mind, we all employ facilitation of one kind or another in our work.

As to what a researcher who facilitates a climate for inquiry may need to do, Rogers (Rogers 1967/83) suggests they may be best employed:

- Setting the initial culture and trust for exploration;
- Helping to elicit and clarify purpose;
- Acting as a flexible resource;

- Responding to expressions, intellectual content and emotional attitudes while endeavouring to give to each individual the time and attention they warrant;
- Taking the initiative in sharing themselves – both thoughts and feelings – in ways that do not impose, but rather represent a simple sharing others may take or leave;
- Accepting and openly acknowledging their own limitations.

Honouring the human condition in the above way, a practitioner-researcher might draw from their personally acquired store of practical skill and intuitive wisdom to:

- Generate understanding;
- Liberate and refine new knowledge;
- Raise personal and social awareness;
- Educate and empower those involved.

In this context, the facilitative skills of a practitioner-researcher dictate their investigative and social competence. But what exactly are they facilitating?

As a holistic researcher I seek to facilitate creativity alongside rigour and to educate those my inquiry involves. I want 'the process' of my inquiry as much as what 'results' to make a positive contribution. I reason that as life is developmental and growthful, and as humankind are by turns clear and chaotic, focused and defuse, I must respect these qualities in my facilitation and inquiry. This means I permit myself to be a researching artist as much as a researching scientist, for I am prepared to surrender myself to the expressive poetry of inquiry.



Artistic and Poetic Expression in Research – Inquiring with the Heart

In the passage below, by staying with my moment-to-moment awareness, a picture is produced of the sensory bombardment I experienced when wondering the streets of Kowloon the evening before my departure home to the UK:

I'm still trying to soak up all the atmosphere around me, the colours, the people, the temple smells, the fascinating variance of street life: smart young children in uniforms; shabby old men playing mahjongg and dealing thin oblong cards in the parks; the burning of incense and red prayer sheets upon the temple walls; tiny knee-high shrines along the streets; huge brass urns shaped like dragons issuing forth tea at corner bars; giant leopard-spotted moray eels and bright multi-coloured fish of pinks and blues punctuated with crimson streaks in restaurant

aquariums opening to the street; fish markets with live lobsters, small eels and fish of every size and hue; old traders pushing flat wooden wheelbarrows through crowded alleys; the smell of steamed pork dumplings and frying noodles; strings of red Chinese sausage; red taxis booting through the streets; herbalists with all manner of bone, antler and dried fungi and roots stretching from floor to ceiling in small square-compartmented old wooden shelving; and the people: small and delicate with transparent skin, some round with flat noses, others exquisitely delicate with fine lips and skin from olive to brown, more often with serious expressions and downcast eyes.

Barber 1995

The above account portrays the 'poetic' flavour of coming back to sensory engagement – after task-completion and a phase of over-involvement and intellectual intensity. I had often heard of other facilitators experiencing a sensory rush, and now I was experiencing one at first hand. This 'deep description' puts the unfolding drama of research into context, while describing the swing from intellectual task to sensate process, a natural consequence of holding oneself in and being in a state of intense readiness for far too long. In this context, the researcher contacts their senses and the 'artist within' to convey the unique emotional climate they are living and working within.



Facilitative skills, when married to holistic inquiry and Gestalt, encourage you to relate in the same way that (hopefully) you relate to life, so that enjoyment, excitement and an openness to all join seamlessly together.

So, with earlier examples before us, how is facilitation actually practised? In **Figure 1**, we find an example of the 'qualitative' concerns a researcher inquiring in a holistic mode takes with them, namely, an attention to the interplay of:

- 1 Micro and Macro influences: how small- and large-scale influences of person, the group, culture and the cosmos affect inquiry;
- 2 Perceptive functions: what we see and hear, imagine and think about;
- 3 Conscious and unconscious processes: the known and the unknown;
- 4 Bias: personal beliefs, values and givens;
- 5 Methodology: how the investigation process affects inquiry;
- 6 Growth: learning and other developmental effects;
- 7 Differing levels of experience: keeping our senses and intuitions in dialogue;
- 8 Personal politics: making, breaking, and maintaining rules.

The above will be returned to later in this work. To handle all perspectives at depth is impossible; rather, you stay respectful in the knowledge that there will always be more than you know or understand, can control or account for; you also research with love.

1.7 Existence as Life-long Research – A Concluding Summary

Gestalt, the transpersonal, humanism, the practitioner-researcher role, qualitative research and facilitation share much in common, for they support communion rather than isolation and holism in contrast to segmentation. When harnessed together, as you will discover in this text, these inputs make a powerful blend for mindful and educational 'real world' enquiry, where emphasis is upon:

- Solving problems rather than just gaining knowledge;
- Predicting effects rather than finding causes;
- Illuminating large effects rather than relationships between variables;
- Concern for actionable results and testing programmes and interventions, rather than merely developing and testing theories;
- Researching outside rather than within research institutions;
- Multiple methods rather than single methods;
- An orientation to clients and subjects rather than academic peers.

After Patton 1995

As for how 'real world' inquiry differs from 'artificial world' inquiry, Weick (1985) cites as an exemplar of artificial research a laboratory study into interpersonal attraction by anticipating interaction with a stranger whose traits are listed as more or less similar to one's own (Byrne 1961). He compares this with a study of 'fear and loathing' at a college social function where researchers actually took part in a college mixer (Schwartz and Lever 1976). He also cites an inquiry into 'reactions to fear' via anticipating electric shocks (Folkins 1970), in contrast with 'learning first hand how to work on high steel in a twenty-one story building' (Haas 1977). 'Real-life' research, therefore, looks not only 'upon' but 'within' the dynamics of events, and is performed in intimate relationship with the field. If your facilitation doesn't enact 'real world' research, what is it doing?

Holistic research, in the vein described here, thus extends 'real world' enquiry by looking not only 'within' but 'beyond' the self, to the transpersonal. It also fosters respect for the human condition through facilitation which is generative of personal development, empowerment and responsibility.

Figure 1 Concerns and questions of holistic research

Micro and Macro Influences

Influences of the person, their relationship to the research field and with the researcher, the influence of their membership to various networks, groups, communities, organisations and other systems; cultural and social traditions that affect the research field; the inquiry's connection to life and the universe – ethnographic and transpersonal influences and micro and macro influences upon and within inquiry. **Questions generated:** How do I account for individuals and the effect of personal meaning? What social or group dynamics affect the field of inquiry? How do micro and macro influences interrelate?

Perceptive functions

Influences of thinking, feeling, sensing, imagining and intuiting – ways we perceive and construct the phenomenology of our personal everyday reality. **Questions generated:** What intellectual maps, theories or beliefs affect people's actions? What emotions energise and motivate behaviour? Are people more attuned to what they see or hear, or to what they actually do? What beliefs or dreams drive me and those I am researching?

Conscious and unconscious processes

Influences of socialisation, belief, transference, learning and the imagination; meanings we project out upon the world; mental defence mechanisms and idiosyncratic psychological interpretations; symbolic imagery that affects a study's psychodynamics. **Questions generated:** What unconscious processes shape events here? What may I be blind to in this setting? What do I miss as a researcher? What resistances or shadow dynamics affect people here?

Bias

Personal and group politics, 'isms', gender, class, racial and professional influences; assumptions and expected outcomes for the researcher and research – intrapersonal and interpersonal effects. **Questions generated:** What am I setting out to prove? What gender, class, racial, professional and cultural assumptions colour my vision? Are my values and hypotheses overt or covert? Which lines of inquiry do I choose? Which lines do I reject?

Methodology

Gains and costs of choosing a specific line of inquiry, focus, technique; the research approach and the effects of strategy and intentionality upon inquiry. **Questions generated:** How does my choice of research method limit me? How do I account for the unexpected? Is my research method suited to getting at the data I need? What skills do I need?

Growth

Educational and developmental outcomes; intrapersonal and transcendental influences that arise from critical reflection and meditation; tacit knowledge that illuminates deeper aspects of being. **Questions generated:** How am I growing and

developing as a researcher? What do I need to develop to improve my research ability and skills? How does my research benefit or develop others? What difference does my inquiry make and what value might it add?

Differing levels of experience

Physiological, social, personal, spiritual – the many layered and laminated nature of multiple fields and realities that contend for our attention. **Questions generated:** Do I pay enough attention to physical evidence? Do I attend to social and relational pressures? Do I need to account for psychological influences within people and groups? Do people act from the stance of 'personal reality' or a culturally created 'group reality'?

Personal politics

What the researcher/research sets out to prove; overt and covert influences from those who fund the research; why the research was initiated in the first place; how research findings will be used – inquiry as an agent of change; what is seen as acceptable and/or unacceptable; who sets the rules and polices them. **Questions generated:** What cultural or political pressures and meanings have effect here? What do I seek to gain from this research? How are people socialised or controlled by the research process or the research field?

Adapted from Paul Barber 1999

If a man will begin with certainties, he shall end in doubts: but if he will be content to begin with doubts, he shall end in certainties.

Bacon quoted in Clarkson 1991

Stand with humility before life – everything before you is a miracle. You cannot get everything 'right'; you do not have to be perfect; just share the range of your awareness at any time – what you 'see and hear without' and what you 'feel and imagine within'. Be aware of your limitations, do not judge yourself too severely for not finding the right answer – there isn't one to find.

Non-existence is called the antecedent of heaven and earth;
Existence is the mother of all things.

From eternal non-existence, therefore, we serenely observe
the mysterious beginning of the Universe;

From eternal existence we clearly see apparent distinctions.
These two are the same in source and become different
when manifested.

This sameness is called profundity.

Infinite profundity is the gate whence comes the beginning
of all parts of the Universe.

Tao Te Ching

Reflections

In this first chapter you have been introduced to a range of beliefs/principles/values that underpin a 'Gestalt approach to holistic inquiry'. Take some time out to write up in your reflective journal particular principles that have made an impact on you, as well as principles and values that you are less comfortable with.

(August) It's made me realise that research is not simply going out and imposing a questionnaire on others and writing up the results. It is about relationships – and there come with it personal and social responsibilities. My concern at moment is how all this squares with a very political and bureaucratic culture – the one I will be researching within, but I guess at least 'recognising' and naming this context is part of the process.

Acquaint yourself with the ideas and notions presented in Figure 1, then go on to using the categories and questions presented here to explore your own field of inquiry; i.e.:

(September) Application of Figure 1:

Micro and macro influences: *I am very conscious of how phrases like 'work-based learning' have been misrepresented, ill-judged. I am conscious also of my own very strong bias here that 'practitioner research' is a better descriptor of what we're trying to encourage. I intend to start by having a debate about what exactly everyone understands by 'work-based' learning and to explore examples of what this really means, at both the individual and systemic level.*

Perceptive functions: *I am again drawn to my own strong FEELINGS here – also the fact that being an INFJ in Myers Briggs terms – I am very strongly influenced by 'feelings'. I guess I need to listen more to what drives others.*

Conscious and unconscious processes: *Similar theme – what do I miss as a researcher? I need others and quality 'supervision' here.*

Bias: *My big problem – I'm not entering this inquiry with as much openness as I should.*

Methodology: *Will I be too dependent on an action-oriented approach to research?*

Growth: *How can I judge this? Will it be more personal than professional?*

Differing levels of experience: *Unravelling what has led colleagues to experience learning as they have, their differing styles of making sense, their*

investment in intellectual sense-making and out-comes, the need to counterbalance this by raising awareness to other ways of 'knowing'.

Personal politics: *What is it I really want from this? Conscious I've spent more time reflecting on the process and ignoring who this should benefit – potential students and the organisation in the long term.*

In the course of your journey as a practitioner-researcher and reading of various studies, as well as the case studies of this book, return to Figure 1 periodically to critique and evaluate your practice.

