AN EXPERIMENT IN THERAPEUTIC PLANNING:

Learning with the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw First Nations

by

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Abstract

Many of the communities in which planners work are characterized by deeply rooted conflict and collective trauma, a legacy of various forms of injustice, including some that have been enabled by the planning profession itself. In this context, can planning play a healing or therapeutic role, without recreating or perpetuating the cycles of oppression? This dissertation reflects on my community-based action research on Tsulquate, a small First Nations reserve on Vancouver Island, where the Gwa'sala and 'Nakwaxda'xw people have lived since relocation in 1964. Between 2009 and 2012, and particularly over a year of intensive fieldwork, I engaged in this community to assist in the ambitious task of addressing intergenerational trauma, the importance of which was expressed within the Band's newly created Comprehensive Community Plan. Written as mixed-genre creative analytic process (CAP) ethnography, the dissertation tells the stories of my engagement, and in particular of a series of public, intergenerational workshops I facilitated using a methodology called Deep Democracy. I document evidence of modest but promising patterns of individual and collective 'healing' and 'transformation' in the course of the workshops, and evaluate the effectiveness of my tools and approaches using first person (reflective), second person (interpersonal), and third person (informant-based) sources of information. I argue in favour of a role for a therapeutic orientation in planning, suggesting that planning is in fact particularly well-suited to a therapeutic task given its collaborative-community focus, its ability to connect the past to the future, its practical orientation, and its relative lack of 'baggage' compared with the other helping professions. The ability to play a therapeutic or healing role is contingent, however, not only on planners learning new skills, but also on developing a set of 'metaskills' or personal attitudes – compassion, playfulness and beginner's mind – that are essential for effective and ethical involvement in such sensitive settings. I argue that reflective practice is key to the making of therapeutic planners, and outline a developmental path based on a combination of personal and assisted reflective practice: journaling, meditation, artistic practice, peer coaching, and supervision.

Preface

This dissertation is an original, independent and unpublished work by author, Aftab Erfan. Proposal for the research was approved by the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Certificate Number H10–01244).

This dissertation is entitled "An Experiment in Therapeutic Planning" to signal the exploratory nature of this work within the emerging area of therapeutic planning. It is not intended to instruct a person to become a therapeutic planner and anyone reading this dissertation will be advised against thinking that it is a manual for practice.

Table of Contents

List of Illustrations

Acknowledgements

What you are about to read is an unconventional dissertation in many ways, but in one way it is entirely conventional: my name appears as the sole-author on the cover page. This is altogether an academic delusion, rather laughable considering the number of people who contributed to the next few hundred pages. At a minimum, this document should have been co-authored with Jessie Hemphill, who deserves half of the credit and an honorary degree. Jessie literally made it possible, not only through her invitation to Tsulquate and her ongoing co-design and implementation of the action research, but also through a most genuine and loving personal, intellectual and artistic exchange with me over the past three years. My friendship with you and the experience of a truly generative partnership is by far the most valuable thing I am walking away with.

From here my gratitude extends to the rest of the Hemphill family- uncle Bob, auntie Colleen, Lucy and Ritchie – who housed me and fed me and entertained me and inspired me in ways that I cannot repay. And to the extraordinary Jamaine Campbell whose large, witty influence seeps through the pages of my story. On a few occasions people in Port Hardy asked me if I was related to you, and I always wanted to lie and say yes.

Port Hardy was a gorgeous setting for this research. I'd like to thank the locals, and in particular the members of the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw First Nations whom I got to know and work with. For a long time I had no idea what the title of my dissertation would be, but the subtitle was always clear: "Learning *with* the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw First Nations". I cannot thank you enough for what you shared with me, the ways that you challenged me, the ways you included me and excluded me, and for allowing me to tell your stories.

My luckiest gift in life has been a knack for finding excellent teachers and mentors. Leonie Sandercock, my PhD advisor, definitely falls in this category. She has been an all-around perfect supervisor, not only supporting my research and writing, but also showing me the ropes of academic life and exposing its personal dimensions. It wasn't at first obvious that my work would be so well-aligned with yours, but I am very happy it ended up this way. I also hit the jackpot with two great PhD committee members, Nora Angeles and Michelle LeBaron. I was touched and influenced by Nora's feminist community development orientation and Michelle's perspectives on cross-cultural conflict resolution and the role of the arts. We had the liveliest committee meetings. Thank you for being so adventurous alongside me, for trusting me to go off and do this work, and for all the advice along the way.

I had two other –largely self-appointed– academic advisors in John Friedmann and Bill Torbert, both of whom are supposed to be retired. John challenged me in the early stages of formulating the research and has since given me an unofficial 'stamp of approval' on multiple occasions that has meant a great deal. Bill has been most influential methodologically, creating permission to look inside and in-between as well as outside, and to write something that somebody might actually want to read! Thank you for the guidance over meals and walks and phone calls and emails, and for the richest cross-generational friendships I've known.

Dedication

For my friend Jane Storey, who shaped this story in more ways than she will know.

1.0 Introduction

1.1. How this inquiry came to be

A few years ago I went to South Africa to learn about an approach to group facilitation called Deep Democracy. On one of my few days as a tourist, I visited the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg. This is a remarkable modern museum. The exhibits take visitors on a dramatic emotional journey, not only through artifacts but also through architecture, and through a series of subtly interactive exhibition spaces that force us to literally *experience* something of the history of the rise and fall of apartheid. At the ticket booth, I was classified and directed to [symbolically] enter the museum through the designated "non-white" door, before finding myself walking into a room full of dangling nooses commemorating 131 political executions, and eventually into a Hall covered wall-to-wall by large photographs of South African crowds waving, laughing and jumping with joy at the sight of Nelson Mandela released from prison after 27 years. The piece of the exhibit that had the most powerful and lasting impact on me was footage of Hendrik Verwoerd, former Minister of Native Affairs and later Prime Minister of South Africa, often referred to as the "Architect of Apartheid". In this short, black and white clip, shot sometime in the 1960s, a smiling Verwoerd explains the logic of spatial segregation at the heart of apartheid. He tells us why it is better, for the sake of keeping social harmony, that *different* people live in *different* neighbourhoods:

> "There is a policy which is called by the Afrikaans word apartheid, and I'm afraid that it has been misunderstood so often. It could just as easily, and perhaps much better, be described as a policy of good-neighbourliness. Accepting that there are differences between people; but while these differences exist and you have to acknowledge them, at the same time you can live together, aid one another, and that can best be done when you act as good neighbours always do…"

Did I hear that right? I rewind and re-watch: "a policy of good-neighbourliness", he repeats and my heart sinks in my chest as I recognize the words from my own profession: Apartheid happened at the hands of planners! The policy that forced removal of black South Africans from their homes and into notorious townships, that launched a half-century of racism, disempowerment, arrests, beatings, executions, exiles, and massacres that shocked the world, is rooted in familiar planning ideologies

that –intentionally or not – continue to promote segregation.[1] Whether it goes by terms like single-use zoning, ethnic enclaves, gated communities, restrictive covenants, social housing, or crime prevention through environmental design, a prevailing planning philosophy implies that it is better to spatially separate the rich from the poor, newcomers from old-timers, obnoxious teenagers from peace-seeking seniors, owners from renters, single-family residents from apartment-dwellers– so that each relatively homogenous group can live happily in its quarters, be serviced according to its needs, and not step on others' toes.

What was chilling about Verwoerd's comments was that they would have seemed reasonable to me, had I come across them at an academic planning conference and not in the middle of an apartheid museum. Perhaps we can say that planners have fundamentally good intentions –as champions of peaceful, courteous, harmonious social relations – but that their initiatives sometimes go wrong or have unintended negative consequences. But that may be too naive or too generous of an analysis. More and more often, critical planning scholars are pointing to evidence of self-serving, justice-defying, status-quo-protecting and ultimately malicious intentions on the part of planners and planning institutions, some suggesting that planners are "facilitators of social exclusion and economic isolation" (Mier, 1994, p.239 cited in Bollens, 2002). This is what Bent Flyvbjerg has famously called the "dark side of planning".

Examples of systemic injustice and structural violence at the hands of planners can be found in Davidoff's (1960s) and Krumholz's (1990) early accounts of the oppression of impoverished groups, Fainstein's call for the "just city" (2010), and the recent literature on the marginalization of racial, ethnic, cultural and religious minority groups (Qadeer & Chaudhry, 2000; Qadeer, 2004; Sandercock, 2000; Wallace, 2000). A parallel literature is now emerging that examines the role of planners in the processes of colonization of Indigenous populations –not only in places like South Africa, but

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[1] Several detailed accounts exist on the role of the city planning profession and ideologies in the making and unmaking of apartheid South Africa. They include *Apartheid City in Transition* (1991, Swilling, Humphries, and Shubane editors), *The Apartheid City and Beyond* (1992, Smith editor) and *The Spatial Formation of the South African City* (1981, Davies).

throughout the United States, Australia and Canada (Jackson 1998; Jojola 1998, 2008; Woolford 2005; Porter 2010; Dorries 2012). Central to these processes are not only land-use policies, legal and bureaucratic exercises of power, but also a colonial and racist *attitude:* that "we" –primarily white– planners know better than "them" – primarily Indigenous– subjects. Significantly, this literature argues that colonization – including its prevailing attitude– is *an ongoing process*: the past is present, and continues to block many attempts at 'moving forward' into a more equitable future.

The dissertation you are about to read is situated against the background of these critiques and recognition of planning profession's troubling history. There is hardly a need to document any more examples of such injustice. Instead I join a normative voice that calls for the decolonization of planning practices (Hibberd and Lane 2004; Hibberd, Lane and Rasmussen 2008; Cook 2008; Jojola 2008; Porter 2010), and in particular I wonder: what, practically, can we do about the damage that has been done?

This line of inquiry is consistent with a long-standing tradition in planning scholarship that has been called "pragmatic planning" (see Charles Hoch's lifetime of work, and Patsy Healey, 2009 for a synopsis). This tradition goes back to the original US pragmatists of the late 19th and early 20th century –who influenced the management sciences that birthed the planning field– and the neo-pragmatists of the 1970s and 1980s – who influenced the rise of "progressive" planning – and draws ideas from a diverse set of thinkers ranging from Habermas to Foucault. The pragmatic tradition is generally concerned with the questions of "what works?", "what makes a difference?" (James, 1920) and "what should be done?"(Flyvbjerg, 2000). Importantly, the pragmatic tradition is a critical and status-quo-challenging tradition, and its emphasis on "what works" should not be taken as "a mask for sustaining the conventional, the oppressive, and the narrow-minded" (Healey, 2009).

At the origin of pragmatic thinking is an acknowledgement of the limits of scientific reasoning and the fallibility of logic (Dewey, Pierce, cited in Healey, 2009) in the face of the world's complexity or "wickedness" (Rittel and Webber, 1973). Thus, at the core of

the pragmatic approach is a quest for practical wisdom, *phronesis* (Flyvbjerg, 2000 after Aristotle), or practical judgment: a "holistic" way of knowing that combines scientific, moral and aesthetic understanding (Dewey, James cited in Healey, 2009). One direction in this line of thinking characterizes practical judgment as a "communal and intersubjective" commodity (Bernstein, 1983), produced through a process of "social learning" (Friedmann, 1973) where one's ideas are always tested against and shaped by the ideas of others. This is a departure point for the communicative or collaborative tradition of planning (Fischer and Forester, 1993; Innes, 1995; Healey 1997 etc.) which advocates for communal, public forums where groups of people can search for a kind of practical wisdom by "making sense together" (Forester, 1993). An extension of communicative planning is therapeutic planning (Sandercock, 2003) which suggests that the collective practice of sense making can help change the quality of strained relationships among people and have a healing impact. As the title of my dissertation suggests, this is the (largely underexplored) territory of planning I am keen to explore.

<u>The Concept of Therapeutic Planning</u>

I am using the term "therapeutic planning" after Leonie Sandercock, having overcome an initial hesitation about this concept in the course of several years of conversation and contemplation-in-practice. My first hesitation was that the term is sometimes associated with Sherry Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation (1969), where she places "therapy" in the bottom rung as a form of "non-participation". Arnstein here refers to processes whose real objective is not to enable people to influence or enact decisions, but rather to enable power holders to pacify the participants by giving the impression of listening to their concerns.

Acknowledging Arnstein's work, Sandercock clarifies that she is using the term therapeutic planning in a whole other way, to signify "an essential quality of community organizing and planning". Therapeutic planning for her is "the process of bringing people together not only to share their experiences and work in solidarity, but also to work through their differences … in transformative ways". She sees a central role for

relationships and emotions in these processes, where participants can "talk of fear and loathing as well as of hope and transformation" (2003, p. 159–166).

Similarly, I see therapeutic planning as a way of working through interpersonal and intergroup differences (i.e. conflict) *and* I also see it as working through internal differences and personal dilemmas (i.e. trauma). In common vernacular, we refer to *conflict* as a struggle that exists between people and *trauma* as a struggle that lives within a person. But these categories are imprecise and interdependent (Marris, 1974, p.98 and p.155). I see conflict and trauma as having a similar texture. They are both characterized by an emotional reaction to differences that cannot readily be reconciled. The therapeutic planning I have in mind has the potential to work with both.

I am attracted to the possibilities that the notion of therapeutic planning offers, but I had a second hesitation in using the term: "therapy" is strongly claimed –and we might say *owned*– by the professional domain of psychology. Professionals go through years of psychological training, are exposed to different theories and methodological approaches, practice for hours on clients under supervision, and go through intensive therapy for themselves, before they become eligible to *do* therapy with others. What would it mean for us planners, who have *not* had that kind of rigorous psychological training, to claim that word for ourselves? Would we be overstepping our professional boundaries if we spoke of therapeutic planning? Would we be making too serious, too ambitious of a claim? Would we be promising something that is outside of our professional jurisdiction, outside of our powers to deliver?

To answer these questions we need a better understanding of what is meant by therapeutic planning. In the original mention of the term, Sandercock (2003) says that she uses *therapy* "in its psychological sense". The trouble is that within the field of psychology there is no singular "sense" of what is meant by *therapy,* who can be called a *therapist*, and what can be called *therapeutic* (Nicki Kahnamoui, Executive Director, Art Health Network Canada, pers. comm). These are contested terms with "bleeding" boundaries (Wadeson, 1996, Esterlla, 2011). One widespread (but by no means

conclusive) view seems to frame *therapy* as a formal process which implies professional work done by a trained (ideally, certified) individual who draws (ideally, explicitly) on certain psychological frameworks and orientations (Psychoanalytic, Analytic, Humanistic, Cognitive-behavioural, and Developmental etc.), to remedy a specific (ideally, diagnosed) psychological problem. But in other views the term therapy, and particularly the adjective *therapeutic,* seems to be used more casually to refer to a quality of interaction (not necessarily between a therapist and a client) or experience that has a cathartic impact, or a liberating effect, or a harmonizing result on a person or people[2]. A therapeutic experience, in this sense, does not necessarily involve a clinical intervention.

When we use the word *therapeutic* in common vernacular and in colloquial speech (*not* in a specific "psychosocial sense") we have something much closer to the second view in mind. I think that this is also what Sandercock is referring to when she uses the term *therapeutic planning,* judging from her very first example of a therapeutic planning process (of Wendy Sarkissian's work in South Sydney, 2003) as well as her later writing (about her own work, Sandercock and Attili, 2012, 2013) and my conversations with her. Her definition of therapeutic planning –and mine– does not require identifying with a specific psychological orientation, nor does it imply a role for a psychologically trained therapist or a psychological diagnosis of a problem[3]. She is –as I am– using the term in its common sense, to underscore a role for talking about emotions in planning debates with a hope for tapping into its healing potential.

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[2] The most thoughtful and interesting discussion I have seen on these distinctions is within the expressive arts field on the distinctions make between the terms "PhotoTherapy" and "Therapeutic Photography" (see for example, European Journal of Psychotherapy & Counselling's Special Issue on Phototherapy and Therapeutic Photography, Volume 11, Issue 1, 2009). While the debate continues, phototherapy is now typically defined as the use of photography within a specific framework of formal therapy and used within a therapy session; whereas therapeutic photography is defined as a more informal process, possibly self-initiative and unassisted by a trained therapist, using photo-based activities that may nonetheless have a therapeutic impact. A parallel heated debate exists about the boundaries between music therapy and community based music (Ansdell, 2002).

[3] To draw a parallel with the previous footnote, what we are talking about is "Therapeutic Planning", not "PlanTherapy".

In the course of my research, and in the context of my work with the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw First Nations, I came to a cautious but well-grounded conclusion that it is appropriate to speak of a therapeutic role for planning. I was somewhat –pleasantly– surprised at the *therapeutic impact* I was able to generate while working within a planning framework (see sections 3.6, 3.12 and 5.1 for evidence). I am cautious about overstating this impact. I would certainly not claim that people I worked with were healed once and for all, and I cannot even demonstrate long-lasting positive impacts of my project given its relatively short timeframe. My work will certainly not qualify as therapy "in its psychological sense" as understood by some. But I am convinced that the kind of planning engagements I made possible, and what transpired as a result, was *a step towards something that had something to do with healing.* I offer this dissertation as an exploration of this healing impact.

Research questions and implications

Following from the above, there are two key questions at the heart of this exploration:

   1. [How] can planning play a therapeutic role in communities marked by trauma, without reproducing the patterns of colonization?
   2. What do planners need to learn, and who do they have to become, in order to play this role effectively?

In considering these questions, my research has implications for *planning theory* in that it elaborates on a role for therapeutic planning –expanding on Sandercock's articulation and on an ongoing discussion on communicative/collaborative planning, and the pragmatic planning tradition more widely. It builds on the work of a small handful of scholars who have explicitly engaged with question of psychological aspects of planning practice, most importantly (1) the writing of Peter Marris (1974 in particular) which examines the processes of grieving at both individual and collective levels, with insights for how planners can support social change with sensitivity to the traumas that it inevitably causes and the healing that it requires; and (2) the work of Scott Bollens

(2002, 2006) on deep rooted conflicts[4], the potential of the city as a setting for peace-building, and the role of planners in healing that is rooted in social learning.

My research also has implications for *planning practice* in that it offers practical insights about approaches to intervention that might serve a therapeutic purpose. Finally, it also has implications for *planning education* in that it illuminates the nature of a –largely emotional and experiential– learning path of planners wanting to play a therapeutic role, and the kinds of support needed to develop relevant competencies.

As suggested by the title of this dissertation and indicated in the Preface, this research is an experiment. I use the work "experiment", not in the scientific sense (an orderly and reproducible procedure aimed at verifying or refuting a well defined hypothesis) but in the artistic sense, where an experimental approach may involved a radically new or innovative style or engagement with ideas that are untested, not yet established or finalized. Put another way, this is an exploration into the emerging area of therapeutic planning. It is not intended as a manual for how to do therapeutic planning, or how to teach it to aspiring therapeutic planners. Instead, its purpose is to further open a space within planning theory to talk about the potential for a therapeutic planning role and its associated methods and competencies, and to share some of what I learned in my own attempt to learn to play this role. In this experiment, I relied primarily on a process methodology that I was competent in (Deep Democracy, introduced below in section 1.3) – but I do not by any means suggest that *this way* is *the way* to do therapeutic planning (though it may be *one* way). A decade from now, I hope that we can name many different approaches to therapeutic planning. In writing this dissertation I hope to raise to our consciousness some of the qualities that such approaches may require, so that we can recognize one when we see one, or create one as the case may be.

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[4] I understand trauma, particularly collective trauma, as a special case of deep-rooted social conflicts which are by definition: (a) connected to our identities, our ways of making meaning in the world and our understanding of ourselves (Redekop, 2002, p.14), (b) associated with histories of systemic injustice, marginalization or structural violence (Ogley, 1991, p.xvii), and (c) manifested in feelings of disempowerment and paralysis which can none-the-less erupt into violence and abuse (Redekop, 2002, p.25).

The case study

In 2008, while I was in the first stages of my doctoral program, the School of Community and Regional Planning (SCARP), where I was enrolled, was invited into a partnership with the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw (GN) First Nations. The partnership supported several graduate students doing research in support of the creation of a Comprehensive Community Plan (CCP) for the village of Tsulquate – a small GN reserve on the edge of the Town of Port Hardy on the northern tip of Vancouver Island.

A theme that emerged in the creation of the CCP was recognition of the collective trauma that plagued the community of approximately 800 people, and the need and desire for healing processes. This gave me an opening to engage with the band around the questions that most interested me. The young Indigenous planner in charge of the CCP, Jessie Hemphill, took a facilitation class with me in Vancouver and subsequently invited me to bring Deep Democracy, specifically, into her community. Between 2009 and 2012 I engaged in an action research project with the GN, in implementing some of the action items of the CCP with an eye to bringing about a healing or therapeutic impact. I ended up facilitating about a dozen group sessions, among other things. The body of this dissertation is the story of that engagement.

Engagement with literature

This dissertation draws on and speaks to a number of different bodies of literature. Instead of reviewing these literatures upfront, I have integrated the relevant material into the stories told in the body of the dissertation, highlighting various debates and points of view to inform and understand my own work. The following is a brief summary of these literatures and their placement within the dissertation:

- Planning theory literature, focusing on the critique of planners/planning institutions' hand in colonization and an aspiration for a decolonizing role: sections 1.1, 1.2, 2.3, 5.1

- History of First Nations in Canada and at the site of my research specifically, key trends and pressing issues among Canada's Aboriginal populations: sections 1.1, 2.3, 3.1, 3.7
- Indigenous studies literature, including discussion on certain aspects of Indigenous worldviews and ethics, perspectives on trauma and healing, role of Indigenous myth and ceremony: sections 2.5, 2.10, 3.3, 3.12, 4.10
- Facilitation and conflict resolution literature, including various philosophies and views on the role of facilitators and their necessary skills and metaskills: sections 1.3, 2.4, 2.5, 3.6, 5.2
- Evaluation literature, in particular concerning assessment of innovations and attempts at social transformation in a complex system: sections 3.1, 3.6, 3.12
- Literature on the nature of trauma, mental illness, and healing from psychological, anthropological, sociological and linguistic perspectives: sections 3.1, 3.6, 4.2, 5.1
- Developmental learning literature, with focus on reflective practice: section 5.2
- Literature around the social transformation potential of the arts, including expressive art therapy, art evaluation, power of fiction, power of visuals (including metaphors): sections 1.4, 1.5, 2.6, 3.1, 3.6, 3.12, 4.10, 5.2, 5.3
- Research methodology literature, particularly on action research/action inquiry, including debates on research ethics, Indigenous research methodologies, difficulties in community-based action research, and the writing process: sections 1.2, 1.4, 2.7, 3.5, 5.3

1.2. Research and data gathering methods

Epistemology and the approach to research

What I love most about planning is that, unlike many other fields within the social sciences, it has a practical – or action-oriented – focus. As I mentioned, I see the research presented in this dissertation as belonging in the tradition of 'pragmatic planning' (Healey, 2009) and 'phronetic social science' (Flyvbjerg, 2001). One of the most important aspects of this kind of research, best exemplified by Bent Flyvbjerg in

his doctoral dissertation, is recognizing that the researcher does not need to be an objective outsider who looks upon an issue for the purposes of the study, but rather that the researcher can be quite centrally involved in – and influencing – the process that he or she is studying. Flyvbjerg has argued that this kind of 'closeness' to the subject is not only okay but can be quite informative in the research process, leading to new insights and information otherwise inaccessible.

As I mentioned, there are very few planning scholars who have written on the topic of therapeutic planning or more broadly on approaches to deep rooted conflicts. Even fewer have done so by getting 'close' to the subject. The best-known examples of planners working with trauma or deep conflict are found in John Forester's work (particularly in *Dealing with Differences,* 2009), which is based primarily on practitioner interviews, which I consider an "arms-length" exploration. As such, the methodological approach of my research is unique and promises to contribute new kinds of insights to the field.

My approach can be classified as a 'case study' in that it follows many of Flyvbjerg's recommendations for how to conduct such a thing: getting close to reality, emphasizing little things, looking at practice before discourse, studying cases and contexts, asking "How", doing narrative, joining agency and structure, and dialoguing with a polyphony of voices (Flyvbjerg, 2001). Among classic types of case studies (Järvinen, 2000), my work is best classified as Experimental Action Research, which has a more practical orientation and more flexible scope than any other type. In fact, action research is a broad category that draws freely on more traditional forms of qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 2007) and makes possible the integration of many different data sources.

There are many different articulations for the concept of action research, including Kurt Lewin's original formulation: action research as "a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action, and fact-finding about the result of the action" (1946). The *Sage Handbook of Action Research* identifies it as a "family of practices of living inquiry that aims, in a great variety of ways, to link practice and ideas in the

service of human flourishing" (Reason and Bradbury, 2001). Simply put, the most central identifying factor appears to be the dual role of researcher-actor, and an attention to the interplay of what he or she does and what he or she learns, with a commitment to continuously adjusting one based on the other. In the case of my action research I acted in various capacities within my host community (as organizer, facilitator, teacher, artist, leader etc) with an eye to exploring the questions around therapeutic planning cited in the last section. In turn, partial findings about the research questions influenced the direction of the action at every step of the way. More than anything, the body of my dissertation is an explicit illustration of the co-evolution of my actions, my learning and my evolving questions.

One approach in the "family" of action research approaches that is of particular interest and relevance to my project is Torbert's concept of Action Inquiry as "a social science…which is conducted simultaneously on oneself, the first person action inquirer, on the second-person relationships in which one engages, and on the third-person institutions of which one is an observant participant" (Torbert and Associates, 2004). First person inquiry is introspective, personal and revealing, concentrating on what *I*, the action-inquirer/research subject experience –think, feel, sense, intuit etc.– and what information that experience provides about the phenomenon under study. Methodological approaches such as biography and auto-ethnography are centered in the first person mode. Second person inquiry is defined by "the intent of people in relationship to inquire into their actions and into what is between them" (Sherman and Torbert, 2000). The research subject is the I-Thou relationship, and an influx of emerging methodologies –including dialogical formulations, participatory performance, multi-voiced methods, and some forms of participatory action research– are centered in this mode (Gergen and Gergen in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Finally, the third person inquiry is the most familiar form of qualitative inquiry, defined by an I-It relation between the researcher and research subjects who are viewed as knowledgeable informers about the phenomenon under study, collectively enabling the researcher to draw out patterns and conclusions. Most instances of ethnography, phenomenology and grounded theory, for example, are centered in the third-person mode. All three of these

qualities of attention –on the self, relationship and institution– provided the guideposts for this action research and were the basis for data collection as I describe below.

Data sources and collection methods

The material that appears in this dissertation is based primarily on my action research engagement on Tsulquate reservation between May 2009 and July 2012, and particularly during two intensive periods of fieldwork (the fall of 2010 and the fall/winter/spring of 2011/2012). During these periods, I spent a lot of time in the community. My primary task evolved to be the organization and facilitation of a series of about a dozen workshops on the topic of parenting – which was an opening for inviting people to talk about trauma and work towards healing. As such, these workshops were "experiments in therapeutic planning". Beside these sessions and the formal interviews that followed them, I had numerous meetings with various community members – Elders, staff, chief and council included– and many more dinner conversations, particularly with the members of the Hemphill family, who hosted me for periods of time on Tsulquate. I also had countless experiences of "being" in community as a participating observer: walking around the reserve, visiting the forest or the ocean, dropping in on friends, and attending many community functions: birthdays, funerals, all-band meetings, council meetings, community planning conversations, a healing feast, a graduation ceremony, and two play potlatches at the local school. In the course of this engagement I collected the following data:

First person:

– I kept a journal and I wrote in it every night I was in the field, and many nights when I was *not* in the field. Between 2009 and 2012 my journaling amounted to 288 single-spaced pages of writing. In the journal I recorded the following information: description of events of importance (either to me personally or to my project); my own reactions, thoughts and feelings about events; sensations and emotional responses to settings, people or events; awarenesses, insights and learnings as they related to the project or to my facilitation practice more broadly; my dreams, day-dreams and visions; my assessment of my own psychological state.

– Immediately before and immediately after each session that I facilitated I voice-recorded my own reflections, feelings and thoughts.

– I had regular –and ad-hoc– coaching and supervision sessions with my Deep Democracy teacher and mentor, Myrna Lewis, which usually focused on assisting me in deepening my practices, helping me with decision-making, and working with some of my reoccurring anxieties and psychological patterns. Occasionally, I also had peer-coaching sessions –particularly with my colleague Sera Thompson– on the same topics. I recorded and transcribed eight such sessions.

– I kept a visual journal where I regularly sketched what I was seeing and experiencing. I also created a number of aesthetic responses (Knill, 2005) to what was happening and what I was becoming aware of, most often in watercolor, most often depicting metaphors or other images relating to my own internal state.

Second person:

– Within my journal, I kept track of observations about the people I was meeting in the course of the fieldwork. I recorded many details of what they did, what they said, how they appeared, and the impressions they made on me.

– I recorded – sometimes through a voice-recorder, often in my journal – segments of conversations that I had with people, particularly as they related to the themes of this dissertation. In particular, I recorded several conversations between Jessie and I.

– I recorded debriefings or side-conversations about the sessions I was facilitating, with co-facilitators, colleagues, or participants who often remained behind to chat.

– I conducted eleven interviews with workshop participants in the month following the sessions, which I voice-recorded when permission was given. I identify these interviews as a form of second person inquiry since they often felt more like a two-way conversation than a traditional academic interview where the researcher asks questions of informants. Rather, these were co-evolving, mutual inquiries into what had taken place between us and in the sessions we had been part of.

– Over time, I became involved in a series of exchanges (both 'private' and 'public') with Tsulquate community members on FaceBook. These exchanges –along with text-messaging – became a regular and highly significant way for sustaining and

strengthening relationship with community members that I was getting to know. I kept track of these exchanges as they related to the project.

Third person:

– I voice-recorded the majority of the sessions I facilitated. I later listened to the recordings for emergent patterns, themes, metaphors etc.

– I conducted a simple survey about needs, desires, and expectations for the parenting workshops at the very beginning of the first session, and a second simple survey about the outcomes and achievements at the end of the last session. The participants present at each of these two sessions took part in the surveys. I also attempted to engage workshop participants in simple artistic processes meant to generate information.[5]

– In 2011 I was invited to join two FaceBook groups (first, the official GN Facebook page, second a kind of "dissent corner" page set up by a GN community member) which I came to understand as a form of replacement for the very significant spaces of gathering that members of this community used to have and continue to seek (Jessie Hemphill, pers.comm.) I was witness to, and occasionally participated in many friendly and many controversial exchanges in these online spaces. There are ethical complications around using the material from these exchanges in a dissertation (since the space was not understood to be a research space, and I was only invited in as a trusted friend of the community) – but what I read has influenced my thinking and my understanding of the community. I have related a few pieces of information from these exchanges within the dissertation, taking care to protect the privacy of the individuals involved, and honour the trust with which I was allowed to participate in these forums.

– I also had access to two other primary data sets that were peripheral but complementary to the research in this dissertation. One was a set of 14 interviews conducted by two UBC professors (Penny Gurstein and Margot Young) in June 2011 as part of an informal evaluation of the university's partnership with the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw band, and as part of an ongoing research project on the challenges and

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[5] In my assessment, the surveys and the artistic exercises did not provide a rich information set, for reasons that I discuss in sections 3.5 and 3.6.

successes of community-based research. The second consisted of 23 interviews conducted by SCARP masters students in a class I taught, each of whom interviewed an experienced facilitator from the Deep Democracy community, asking about the facilitator's use of the methodology and his or her learning path[6].

By the end of the action research engagement I had far more "data" than I knew what to do with. To make sense of what I had done, observed and experienced, I used narrative analysis, and particularly the act of writing itself, as a method of analysis, as I will describe in Section 1.4. In classic methodological terms, my analytical approach is best classified as direct interpretation (Creswell, 2007), which is a way of drawing meaning from single instances of events. To a lesser degree I have also done categorical aggregation of the information, which refers to the compilation of multiple instances in the data "until something can be said of them as a class" (Stake, 1995, p.74).

1.3. Process facilitation methods

Another type of method, relevant to the work presented here, is the process design and facilitation approach I relied on when I ran meetings in the community. I use the term "method" somewhat loosely here, understood not as a firm theory or rigid set of ideas about what to do, but more as the kind of "scaffolding" that Kolb and associates talk about (1994) in the conclusion to their important book about the landscape of the facilitation/mediation/conflict resolution field[7]:

> "Compared with other forms of intervention and social change, mediation is noteworthy for its almost complete absence of theory about social conflict and intervention. Nothing akin to the situation prevails in psychology or organizational intervention, in which powerful and influential models – such as psychoanalytic, behavioural, and systems

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[6] Even though I wasn't the interviewer (for both strategic and practical reasons) I was centrally involved in the development of the questionnaire and interview approach for both studies. My access to these data sets was approved by relevant Ethical Review Board processes, and the interviewees in each case were explicitly informed that I would be listening to the audio-files and/or reading the transcripts. Each interviewee gave his or her consent for my access to this information. In both cases, I also was the person who reported back the findings to each set of interviewees. For these reasons I feel comfortably justified in bringing information from these interviews into this dissertation where relevant.

[7] I feel that Kolb and associates' conclusions are only slightly outdated. My impression is that in the years since this writing the field of conflict resolution has adopted more frameworks from its neighbouring disciplines, but that on the whole the "scaffolding" remains thin.

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theories, among others – actively compete and provide at least a viable intellectual and emotional scaffolding for the otherwise beleaguered interveners." (Kolb & associates, 1994, p.489)

The scaffoldings I was relying on, in fact came from the field of psychology at its intersection with organizational and community development. In particular, I was relying on (a) Deep Democracy, and (b) the expressive arts field, both introduced below. Like most other practitioners I know, I chose my methods partly based on what the situation seemed to call for (from an initial scan, but also on a day-by-day basis, see the start of Section 5 for a discussion on this) and partly based on what methods I was reasonably confident with already (what I had spent years learning about or at least being exposed to) as I walked into the field. Through the study of the literature I was aware of a much wider pallet of facilitation methods I theoretically *could* have used (including close cousins to both Deep Democracy and the expressive arts), but in actual fact *could not* have used because I did not have the training or the access to mentors I would have required to become confident in them in the timeframe of this project[8]. So in many ways, I chose the methods that were available to me, for the important reason that they were available to me. This dissertation does not argue for the relative worth of these methods over others, nor does it propose these as the methods best suited for doing therapeutic planning. It was simply not designed to make those kinds of claims.

Deep Democracy

Between 2006 and 2010, I trained extensively in Deep Democracy, a facilitation approach that evolved in post-apartheid South Africa at the hands of Myrna Lewis (my teacher) and her late husband Greg.

Myrna and Greg were both students of American psychologist Arnold Mindell, to whom Deep Democracy owes its foundations. Mindell is a physicist and trained Jungian

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[8] There is a difference between a scholar choosing a research method, and a practitioner choosing a facilitation method. We often expect scholars to be able to justify their choice of method entirely based on the research questions and circumstances at hand. This makes sense because learning a research method, once you have decided it is the one you want, is relatively quick and straightforward. We cannot have the same expectation of practitioners because learning a facilitation method (particularly one that is a match for a situation fraught with conflict and trauma) is far more time-consuming, expensive and difficult.

analyst who took his inspiration from quantum physics, Taoism, and Jungian psychology. The focus of Jungian therapy has been on dreams and the active imagination, using auditory and visual techniques as methods of analysis and inquiry. In his clinical practice, Mindell expanded this focus to include the body, its sensations, symptoms and illness as a dreaming process. He further differentiated his work from Jungian therapy by expanding its focus into social and world issues as a means for individual and collective change. Jung was cautious of groups, and felt that the route to world change was based on individual self-reflection and the return of the individual to their own deepest being. Mindell (1995a) on the other hand became interested in the study of conflict and trauma in large group settings. He said he found that group processes were sometimes more effective than individual therapy: patients who were stuck around certain issues could much more easily find release and imagine a way forward when the issues were processed in a group setting rather than a private therapy session. He also saw the work of personal healing and collective healing as being tightly linked.

Based on these convictions Mindell founded process-oriented psychology (also known as Process Work) and proposed a way of working with the group's unconscious and ultimately the collective unconscious. Process Work is distinct from most forms of psychology for its fluid format, emphasizing awareness and following the unfolding of the individuals' process in therapy rather than trying to achieve a specific state or behavior. As a result, it can appear to change form, resembling various known therapeutic forms at different moments within a session (Mindell, 1995b, p.59). Since the 1980s, Mindell, his wife Amy and colleagues have been part of a research society for Process Work, which "studies the dreaming process as it appears through body experiences, movement, personal challenges, relationship troubles and world conflict situations" (Schuitevoerder, 2000).

Meanwhile, some of Mindell's students have taken his work in different directions, one of which is the Lewis Method of Deep Democracy, an adaptation of Mindell's approach,

customized to meet organizational development need. The term "deep democracy" first appeared in Mindell's writing (1995a) when he made the case that a lot is missed when our meetings and interpersonal interactions are dominated by verbal exchange of opinions, ideas and other mental constructs *only*. He called for paying attention to and welcoming the expressions of emotional and symbolic dynamics, feelings and body symptoms, subtle movements and dreams of everyone concerned. He said that this approach to working with groups was "deeply democratic" in that it attempted to give voice and standing to these commonly ignored or under-appreciated elements of human experience.

While consulting to large public agencies in post-apartheid South Africa in the 1980s, Myrna and Greg Lewis tuned into the ignored and under-appreciated elements. They noticed that their clients were struggling to 'flatten' their structures as they were now officially mandated to do, bringing together historically divided sections of society under the new Rainbow Nation umbrella. But the unspoken emotional and symbolic baggage that individuals were bringing into their work places, and the deeply embedded patterns of racism, made it virtually impossible for them to work well together. The couple used a derivative of Process Work to help resolve some of the tensions within organizations (*not* to do personal therapy with employees, but to attend to the interpersonal and collective issues). More importantly, they articulated a simplified facilitation approach based on Mindell's work, that they could relatively quickly *teach* to people who could use it on their own when the consultants walked away. This became the first iteration of The Lewis Method of Deep Democracy (DD), putting the tools within the reach of people without a clinical psychology background and extensive training. The DD approach has now spread to over 20 countries and is used in businesses, governments, schools, hospitals, social movements, political parties, and increasingly also in community work.

Having not only read about but also experienced both Mindells' and Lewis' work, I might characterize DD as a more "down to earth" version of process work. DD is less geared towards resolving individuals' deepest psychological issues and typically less

ambitious in terms of a world-changing agenda; but it is instead practical, focused on processing traumas or conflicts *enough* that they stop blocking the functioning of individuals and groups so that material issues can be addressed. A DD process also seems less intimidating to be a part of and to learn to practice because it has fewer mysteries and complexities[9] and its facilitation techniques have been broken down into "steps"[10]. For these reasons, DD is a more practical toolkit for professionals such as planners who may want to "borrow" some facilitation techniques for working with difficult community dynamics, but do not want to invest the time or energy to become professional therapists.

Distinctive Aspects

One of my aims within this dissertation has been to *demonstrate* the DD facilitation approach, by way of stories and examples, instead of describing its theory and practices in detail[11]. But in order to provide an introduction, I here highlight some of DD's distinctive aspects, putting it in the context of other facilitation approaches in use.

- The starting point for a DD facilitator is a belief that a group has, within itself, the resources –knowledge, creativity, sensitivity, care, power– it needs to work out its own problems[12]. This inherent resource is talked about as the "wisdom of the group". Often relevant pieces of wisdom are buried in the group's unconscious (i.e. not openly expressed, or not adequately heard) and good facilitation helps bring them to the surface so that they can be integrated with the conscious material (a concept central to the analytical school of psychology that is the

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[9] For example, in DD the facilitator's role is usually clearly articulated and constant, whereas in process work the facilitator's role can change continuously, making it somewhat challenging to follow what is happening.

[10] I think that well-defined, numbered "steps" in a group process are a myth. They are an over-simplification. But they give practitioners –particularly novice practitioners– something to hold onto, something simple that they can remember in the heat of the moment. In that sense they are very useful.

[11] An attempt at creating a practice manual has been made by Myrna Lewis in her book "Inside the No" (Lewis, 2008)

[12] Or: the group has the *resourcefulness* to be able to get those resources. Clearly a group may feel it needs to bring in resources – expertise, funding etc- for a certain task or project. The view here is to look for these resources within the group and its immediate community *first*, in response to the observation that far too often dependence on external resources is unsustainable, and may create additional problems (e.g. imposing culturally irrelevant solutions) instead.

inspiration for DD). Much of the DD facilitator's work, then, is to "conscientize" the group to its own wisdom. The view of groups as inherently wise is also shared by those who work in an appreciative inquiry or asset-based development model (Block, 2009; Kretzmann and Mcknight, 1993).

- Given that the group –*not the facilitator*– is the wisdom-holder, the task of a DD facilitator is enabling and allowing the natural underlying pattern of a process to unfold. A DD facilitator takes on an attitude of neutrality when working with groups (please see the end of this section for a full discussion on neutrality). That is to say that it is *not* the job of the facilitator to set up or follow a definite meeting agenda, or decide what should be talked about and what should be left alone, or even dictate what format (verbal, visual, visceral, silent) the exchanges should take[13]. His or her job is to carefully follow what is "alive" and support conscious decision-making about directions that the meeting participants collectively seem to seek. This is a fairly uncommon philosophy amidst the gamut of facilitation approaches in common use – most of which prefer some form of structured, organized approach (e.g. Fisher, Patton and Ury, 1992; Stone, Patton and Heen, 1999 etc). DD's closest relative in this regard may be the Quaker model of facilitation (Elder cited in Kolb and Associates, 1997), which has a focus on helping a process unfold instead of determining its direction.

- The DD facilitator often "follows the heat of a process" into emotional spaces, where participants may directly speak about charged conflicts and heavy

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[13] In my own practice, I have found that this view of facilitation offers flexibility and manifestation of different forms. For example, when I was working in Beirut I had a group of individuals that did not want to discuss feelings but said they wanted to express their ideas through drawings; so we got some paper and markers and everyone drew and told stories. There was a need for creativity and playfulness that was very alive in the room and it determined the form of the interactions. Similarly, when colleagues were working with the Bear River First Nation in Nova Scotia, the community members did not want to walk around as the facilitator had suggested; so they stood in a circle and had an argument (speaking one at a time!) while the chief ceremoniously added wood to the fire in the centre. There was a need for going back to the Nation's traditional ways of doing things that was very alive in the group, and it dictated the physical form of the process that unfolded.

traumas. This is to be done with care, with respect for "edge behaviour"[14], and only after explicitly getting permission from the group to open a more emotional space (Lewis, 2008). The DD facilitator has a number of supportive tools to use within this space, most significantly "amplification" – a paraphrasing technique that strengthens the emotional language and intensifies the process. The approach of directly engaging emotional issues and cutting into the depth of conflict and trauma is somewhat uncommon, though by no means exclusive to DD[15]. Instead, many facilitators see emotions as "clouding the real issue" (Atkinson cited in Kolb and associates, 1994). They tend to acknowledge deeper issues and circumvent them (Burgess cited in Forester, 2009), or intervene with humour in order to lessen the emotional intensity of the process (Susskind cited in Kolb and associates, 1994). From their point of view, engaging with conflict and trauma directly is risky. The DD facilitator takes on that risk.

- The DD facilitator "reads" a group situation not in terms of the individual's experiences, but primarily in terms of the patterns that emerge within the field of energy that a group consists of. These patterns –called *fractal patterns*– become apparent at various scales. For example, as a group of people speak about the pattern of domination/marginalization that has characterized their history (societal scale), feelings of being marginalized or tendencies to dominate may begin to emerge among group participants (e.g. some people may feel voiceless while others talk excessively) (group scale), and at the same time the facilitator may notice that her sensitivity is getting pushed away by her sudden need to control the group (individual scale). Fractal patterns are often archetypal (universally recognizable) and can appear in polarities as contrasting energies (e.g. domination/marginalization, idealist/pragmatist, feminine/masculine etc). The DD facilitator attempts to notice fractal patterns at different scales (as a way of figuring out what really is going on in a group),

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[14]Edge behaviour is a physiological mechanism (often an uneasiness in the body) that attempts to stop people from revealing too much of themselves when or where it is unsafe to do so.

[15] Several prominent German conflict resolution approaches, for example, are equally big on directness in engaging with conflict (Thomas Jordan, Associate Professor, University of Gothenburg, pers. comm.).

make the group aware of them when appropriate, and work to integrate them through the group process.

<u>Critique and limitations</u>

Deep Democracy proposes a way of working with groups based on a certain way of understanding the world. Whether this way of working with groups or its underlying worldviews are inherently effective is difficult to establish. We can certainly engage in an intellectual conversation about their relative merits and we can most certainly critique them[16]. This is *not* the objective of this dissertation, nor is it the purpose of the dissertation to defend Deep Democracy or even to test it. But since this is primarily the facilitation approach used in the research it was important to think through and remain alert to its potential limitations and pitfalls so as to be able to use it in a responsible way, and supplement or even discard it if or when it no longer served. Here is some of the critique I thought about:

- In so far as DD is based on Jung's view of the world –specifically, the existence of a collective unconscious and of archetypal patterns– it can also be subject to the critique of that view (see for example, Goldenberg, 1976; McGowen, 1994; Noll, 1994). For the most part, critics have dismissed this portion of Jung's work as "sheer mysticism", lacking scientific foundation and existing only in the realm of metaphors that are stretched to fabricate reality. Critics have also accused these concepts of ignoring important gender and cultural distinctions (i.e. "Is the collective unconscious really the white, Indo-European, male unconscious disguised as universal?") and performing a normalizing, hegemonizing function. Despite these important issues, Jung's metaphysical ideas have remained popular and continue to shape an understanding of the world. As a DD practitioner, I recognized that I was making a "leap of faith" into these ways of seeing. I could not prove or disprove these metaphysical speculations. But as I used this lens, I had to watch for its potential to be irrelevant in the culture I was

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[16] There is not a formal critique of either Lewis' Method of Deep Democray or Mindell's Process Work within the literature, though Jung's work, which is the basis for both, has of course been widely criticized.

working with. I only proceeded to continue to use this lens because it actually resonated so strongly at my research site (see Section 2.5).

- In so far as DD is enthusiastic about "following the heat" of the conflict and going right into the centre of conflict, it is subject to the critique that a direct way of engaging with conflict may not be responsible or productive, given certain cultural contexts (as for example, is implicit in the expressive arts field). Sometimes talking about conflict directly can make it worse. This presents a risk, particularly in small communities where harmony is highly valued for its role in supporting peaceful coexistence. In such communities the norms of communication may have evolved to avoid precisely this "heat". I had to assess the degree to which the community members I was working with were inclined or reluctant to really explore their conflicts and traumas. Conscious of DD's own inclinations towards embracing conflict, I had to carefully assess my actions, and back off from driving people into conversations they did not want to have.

- The conflict resolution technique in DD begins by asking for an explicit agreement on the part of the participant to three fundamental principles: (a) that the conflict take place between sides and not between people, (b) that the purpose of going into conflict is to stay in relationship, and (c) that as a result of engaging with the conflict some personal growth in awareness will take place. It is quite likely that participants may *not* be agreeable to one or the other of these principles because (a) the suggestion to distinguish between sides and people may not always make sense[17] especially in "interpersonal conflicts", (b) parties to conflict may not be in a relationship already and may not want to stay in a relationships, and (c) there may be no interest in or capacity for personal

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[17] In some cultures, the distinction between a person's self and his or her actions is not part of the cultural lexicon. Furthermore, developmental psychologists might say that making such a distinction requires a certain level of mental development that most people may not reach within their lifetime (see for example, Kegan, 1994), so this facilitation method may be asking something of us that we are by large not capable of. I don't necessarily agree with this based on my observation of many young (and presumably psychologically undersdeveloped) people –across several different cultures- seemingly making the distinctions quite readily, but I can't refute the possibility that this would be a limitation.

growth. The conflict resolution possibilities of DD are importantly limited by these principles. If group participants are not willing to engage in this way other conflict resolution approaches are required.

- DD depends almost exclusively on verbal exchanges. Some movement is built into the DD tools (e.g. the Soft Shoe Suffle, see Section 2.4), and metaphors occasionally make their way in (e.g. in Amplification, see Section 3.11)– but there is no explicit way for facilitators to ensure that non-verbal modalities enter the group process in a creative way. Thus, the capabilities of DD are limited by the limitations in verbal communication, and by the willingness or ability of people to understand each other through that channel. This may be further problematic in a community where people are not particularly verbal. As a DD facilitator, I find myself often having to decide when to abandon the DD tools in favour of other modalities that might make progress more expedient.

<u>The expressive arts field</u>

A secondary approach to facilitation that influences my work is based in the arts. I have more or less always had an art practice of my own (primarily visual) since my school days and in 2008 I trained in and began to practice as a graphic facilitator. The gift of graphic facilitation is to bring visual elements into a meeting room in various forms, to assist with the understanding of what is going on –especially for the large portion of the population who are primarily visual thinkers– and to shape new possibilities through visual mediums. While there is not an academic discourse associated with graphic facilitation yet, we might place this approach within the broader field of the expressive arts (Winkel and Junge, 2012). I have been introduced to this field primarily through my family members: both my mother and my sister are counselors that use the arts in their practice. My sister in particular was studying to become an expressive art therapist as I began to work on my PhD, and I ended up reading a lot of what she was reading and talking to her about it.

To be clear, I do not see my work as expressive art "therapy" and do not associate this

dissertation with that school. Rather I locate myself within the expressive arts field more generally, recalling once again the issues with the terms "therapy" and "therapeutic" described in section 1.1. I do believe in the therapeutic possibilities of the arts, which I tried to invoke with some success in the fieldwork for this dissertation (see Section 3.7, 4.7), but I don't identify with any of the specific psychological orientations that art therapists might draw on. Here are a number of basic principles articulated by some of the founding members of the expressive arts field that I see as promising in supporting a therapeutic facilitation direction:

– The possibility of using different artistic modes (visual arts, drama dance, poetry, music etc.) opens up the possibilities for the engagement of different sensory experiences, and therefore different ways of knowing, understanding, communicating and relating. This is the powerful notion of *intermodality* (Knill, Barba and Fuchs 2004).

– The very act of creating art is an act that promotes agency, reminding us of our capacity to shape our world. Founders of expressive arts have drawn on the word *poiesis,* the classic Greek word for the act of making in general and artistic making in particular (Levine, 1997), to draw attention to the productive –self building, world building– possibilities offered by the arts.

– Artistic work often "touches us", we are "moved by it", we have an emotive response to it that engages us at a deeper level. This is sometimes called having an *aesthetic response* to the work. This has the power to change our reality in a way that an intellectual engagement lacks.

– A work of art and particularly the process of art making also has the ability to take us away from our everyday reality that binds and limits us. Instead it frees us up for new possibilities. This is sometimes called *decentering* (Knill et al, 2005) and has the potential to open up new horizons for action.

– Making art with other people often has the impact of building relationships in a way that talking to them from across the table will not. Art making can restore a sense of community. It builds *solidarity.*

– Finally, the process of making art –particularly if well-facilitated– encourages

us to stay in the *liminal space* between what already is and what is becoming, where we have little control over the outcome and have to tolerate a certain amount of chaos and discomfort. If nothing else this is good practice for being in conflict and for staying in the process until something shifts.

Like any other approach to facilitation an arts based approach will have its own challenges, some of which are explored in this dissertation. Not every community is ready to participate in the arts, and the willingness to make art may in fact be difficult to get to. The type of art that a facilitator might encourage can lack cultural resonance for participants. Art making can be logistically complicated and the expectation that facilitators be comfortable in and prepared for different modes of art making may be unreasonable in a situation of limited resources. Also, the arts usually are not enough in themselves – once we have used an artistic process to shift something in the group we may yet have to return to talking to be able to move forward.

No method is perfect and every method has its strength and weaknesses. I have been asked, "how is it possible to use two such different methods in tandem?" My response is another question, "how it is possible not to!?" I have hoped to highlight in my description of the two methods of working with groups that some of the shortcomings of one method are the strengths of the other. I see the two as being complementary in two ways: In terms of offering tools that the other is missing (e.g. the intermodality lacking in DD can come from the arts, the lack of a lens for reading the group in the arts can come from DD), and in terms of offering a whole new paradigm when the one we are using does not seem to fit any more (e.g. DD's notion that conflict should be tackled directly is in opposition to the arts notion that conflict should be circumvented and not directly tackled. Neither one of these positions is always true and they are both true. Depending on the situation at hand it is nice to be able to choose one or the other.)

The neutrality debate
Throughout the stories in this dissertation I often describe my "performance" as a facilitator by referring to the quality of my neutrality. Lewis identifies neutrality as the

core metaskill of DD practitioners. But neutrality is a contested concept –certainly a contested word– in the conflict resolution field. What are the objections to it, how do I understand it, and how do I justify using it in this dissertation?

In their survey of the mediation landscape, Kolb and associates (1997) suggested that neutrality is one of the central myths of the field, and at the same time the central pillar to which most conflict resolution practitioners pledge allegiance. The concept has been soundly critiqued by Wing (2007), Mayer (2004) and Susskind (e.g. cited in Forester, 1999), among others. The critique is primarily on two grounds. First is that it is not actually possible to be neutral. We may call ourselves neutral, declare a lack of alignment with any specific group in conflict, and claim to look at problems "objectively" (whatever that means); but in reality every one of us has loyalty to values, worldviews, biases and cultural or personal lenses –that we are most likely not aware of, because they just seem so "natural" to us– that we are not able to shake. Neutrality, therefore, is a myth at best and a fraudulent mask for pushing our own agenda at worst. The second objection is that framing the conflict resolvers as neutrals is seriously limiting the potential of the conflict resolution field, both because people are suspicious about claims to neutrality –for good reasons too– and because the framing limits practitioners in playing more strategic, more creative and more politically significant (status-quo-challenging, power-disrupting) roles in conflict situations. Mayer and Susskind propose that we frame our role as advocates and activist mediators instead, transparently aligning ourselves with a social justice agenda and set out to help parties –particularly less powerful parties– improve how they engage in conflict to further their goals.

Given these critiques, which I largely agree with, why do I continue to use the concept of neutrality in my practice? In a nutshell, my reason is pragmatic: on the whole, thinking about neutrality –as I understand it– helps me more than it hinders me. I don't think of it as "magical" (Wing, 2007), but I do see it as helpful.

How do I understand neutrality? What is clear to me is that I do not understand it the same way that many other practitioners do within the large field of conflict resolution[18]. A consistent definition of neutrality is hard to nail down, and the word has different meanings in different cultural contexts (Mayer, 2004, p.83). I suspect part of the suspicion around the term comes from this lack of a consistent definition. I also agree with Mayer that "neutrality makes sense only as a statement of intention, not of behaviour" (2004, p.30). And I agree that framing one's work as a neutral can be a trap, limiting the possibilities of the alternative roles an intervener may strategically be called to play. For these reasons I actually never use the term "neutral" to publicly describe myself or to advertise what I do[19]. Rather, I hold it as a private intention, an aspiration that is only momentarily realized, a pragmatic objective that serves me as I hold space for a group process.

To me, neutrality is an intention not so much to drive a group process, but rather to be driven by a group process and assist it towards its emerging directions and destinations. This intention includes resisting the urge to privilege one set of views but to be equally welcoming toward views, ideas, feelings, beliefs, values, worldviews, epistemologies (*etc*) that I identify with and those that are different from mine. It is really an intention to be non-judgmental, or rather to "suspend" judgment, in the attentive –not dismissive– way that Bohm has talked about (1996). It is to have a "guesthouse attitude" (Mindell, 2002) towards the truth of "other's" views, no matter how outrageous my culture (or the culture of the group) typically finds them to be, so that we can truly begin to bring the differences into the open (Follett, 1941). It is also an

[18] For example, I am almost never concerned with either "impartiality" or "equidistance", which Wing identifies as central elements of neutrality (Wing, 2007, p.4), because in most community situations I work with the "parties to conflict" are not so clearly defined or stable that I can even attempt to define such a precise position for myself in relation to them. It is impossible to know, for example, if elders are going to band together against the youth, or one family against another family, or men against women in a controversial conversation about care for children. In practice, the "parties to conflict" form and dissolve quickly, and alliances are fluid during a session. They seem to have little to do with the obvious elements of participants' identities or preceived level of power or powerlessness. So it seems more useful for me to be completely present to the roles and polarities that are emerging, making space for each to have their voice, rather than to frame my work as fighting any particular power a-symmetries.
[19] In describing what I do I use the term "facilitator", which literally is someone who makes things (in this case, a group's collective process) easier.

intention to avoid being attached to a procedural meeting agenda or meeting outcome, so that the process can become what the group needs instead of what I imagine it needs. Put another way, an attempt at neutrality is an attempt to intentionally invite single, double and triple learning loops (McGuire, Pauls, Torbert, 2007) so that facilitators can change not only tools and techniques, but also outcomes, strategies, frameworks and qualities of attention in the moment-by-moment flow of their work.

Clearly, total neutrality is a philosophical impossibility. As soon as I declare (even privately) an intention to engage with a group, I bring with me a host of values inherent in that action: for example, the value of dialogue itself, the value of inviting marginalized voices, the value I place on conflict as a rich source of wisdom and creative possibilities, and a host of others related to *why* and *how* I do my work. In so far as I am attached to any such values I am not completely neutral. Even my basic attachment to the intention to be neutral itself flies in the face of the very intention to have no attachment! Some form of partial neutrality is more likely, and more desirable (i.e. I can still hold commitments to de-colonization, friendship, creativity etc. – but facilitate a session with a lot of openness, including openness to these values being challenged). And even partial neutrality is hard to enact in practice, as I have shown in the stories in this dissertation. At best we can maintain it for a short while in the moment-by-moment work of facilitation, only to realize we have lost it again and attempt to come back to it. The actual practice of coming back to neutrality involves the continuous inner work that is about becoming conscious of all of the world's contradictions, as they exist within each of us. It involves not a denial of our biases and attachments, or the realities of power inequalities in groups that critiques point to (Wing, 2007), but a continual engagement and disruption of them. It requires building the deeper metaskills (compassion, playfulness, a-beginner's-mind) that enable neutrality. This is not easy work and for many it may not make sense. But I find that holding an intention for [impossible, partial, momentary] neutrality helps me remain centred and flexible. It makes sense for me.

Given all this complexity around the term, why do I use it in the writing of this dissertation? Why not use some other term that is less problematic? My primary justification is that I am really writing this dissertation primarily for an intended audience that consists of two communities of practice I am situated within: one is the community of planners (and aspiring therapeutic planners to be more exact), and the second is the community of Deep Democracy practitioners (or aspiring practitioners). I feel that talking about neutrality is appropriate for both these audiences.

Within the Deep Democracy community the word neutrality is used and very commonly debated along the lines described above. When my colleagues, mentors and I use the term, we have a loaded, complex, slippery but none-the-less commonly-understood agreement about what it means[20]. In the many conversations with member of the Deep Democracy community that underlie the fieldwork for this dissertation, neutrality was a central theme and talking about it served my work. It seems incongruent to call it by another name in the writing. As well, to the extent that this dissertation speaks back to the Deep Democracy practitioners and adds to their knowledge base, it is only right that it uses the terminology current in that community. I hope that my discussion of the critique of the term above is also a contribution to the Deep Democracy community, causing us all to think more critically about what we mean by the terms we use.

Within the community of planners the term neutrality has no currency, but I feel that it is strategically appropriate to use. Perhaps the most important contribution of my dissertation work is to serve as a cautionary tale to aspiring therapeutic planners (and perhaps also other planners working in communities) not to default to the 'expert' position that has historically shaped our profession, but rather to engage with communities with radical openness (that is, neutrality) about what it is they need, what is right and wrong, and how it makes sense for them to proceed. Introducing the concept of neutrality –even despite it baggage– is aligned with the spirit of my overall

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[20] Interestingly, unlike Lewis's Deep Democracy practitioners Mindell's Process Work practitioners don't use the concept of neutrality as a central concept at all. Perhaps I also use the term somewhat strategically to signal my own sense of "belonging" to the former rather than the latter.

provocation to planners. Through our debates, we may ultimately end up choosing *not* to use this word within planning, but it is an effective term for sparking the debate on the potential for a therapeutic planning role that I wish to spark.

1.4. Analysis and writing methods

I have chosen to write this dissertation in two parts. The first is a *presentational* reflection of my action research project. In this part, which comprises the main body of the dissertation, I rely primarily on literal and visual devices that you may recognize from fiction and other art forms. Here I put forward a gallery of pieces that, individually and collectively, tell stories of what happened in the course of the project (narrative), and describe how I made sense of what happened (analysis). The second part, consisting of this introduction and a more extensive conclusion, is a *propositional* expression of my action research experience, which is to say that it is written, primarily, in essay format, drawing on the much more familiar linguistic and structural devices of academic writing. In these sections I attempt to complement what has been presented in the body of the document, contextualizing the work and highlighting the main findings.

Here is what you will find in the body of the dissertation: In each of my sections – "beginning", "middle" and "end" – I present a number of vignettes, or accounts of experiences and reflections from my fieldwork in forms including poetry, short stories, dialogues, reflections, mini-essays, photographs, drawings and paintings. I present these from the point of view of three main fictional characters who are PhD students working in the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw community. These accounts are woven together by an ongoing dialogue between the three characters and others, which appears intermittently throughout the sections and reads as something like a play.

The vignettes are narratives of, or aesthetic responses to, actual significant moments in the research: these are more or less "true stories" of what happened to me, and to others I worked closely with as part of the research. Many of these are autobiographical accounts, reflection of my first person inquiry, and are by definition subjective,

introspective and reflective. They are intended, primarily, to present the intellectual, cultural, emotional, psychological and occasionally spiritual experiences that were central to the action research. The dialogues between the characters, on the other hand, are intended primarily to present an analysis of my experiences. In the dialogues the characters discuss the content of vignettes and related issues, bringing various viewpoints to bear on them, and linking them with theory and other literature. The dialogues, then, are also "true stories" in the sense that many of these conversations actually did happen, though at different times and in various contexts. They represent my second and third person inquiry.

Why am I writing in this unusual way, and am I the only one? Certainly I am *not* the only one. In the *Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods* (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) sociologist Laurel Richardson describes this approach as *mixed genres Creative Analytic Practice (CAP) ethnography,* in which "the scholar draws freely in his or her production from literary, artistic, and scientific genres, often breaking the boundaries of each of those as well" (p.934). Mixing of autobiographical, relational and scientific ways of knowing (i.e. first, second and third person inquiry) are common in notable examples of mixed genres CAP ethnography. These include Trinh T. Minh-ha's *Woman Native Other* (1989) which includes poetry, self-reflection, feminist criticism, photography and quotations to help readers *experience* postcoloniality; Susan Krieger's *Social Science and the Self: Personal Essays on an Art Form* (1991) which integrates pottery and painting with text; Sara Lawrence–Lightfoot's *I've Known Rivers: Lives of Loss and Liberation* (1994) which uses fiction-writing techniques and self-reflexivity to tell stories of being African-American and a professional; and Naomi Wolf's *Vagina: A New Biography* (2012) which weaves autobiographical accounts with medical and scientific texts, history and literally analysis, and cultural commentary on the connection between the vagina and the brain[21]. Mixing of genres has also become an acceptable practice within

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[21] There is also a broader tradition of feminist writers making their own bodies into objects and subjects of art and sites for research. They often weave embodied, autobiographic elements within the classic essay form of feminist social criticism (see for example Susan Bordo and Kathy Davis), performing a more subtle form of "mixing" the genres.

scholarly journals such as *Studies in Symbolic Interaction, Qualitative Inquiry,* and even in a recent issue of *Planning Theory and Practice* (December, 2012).

I made the choice to present the dissertation in this way on the following grounds: **Postmodern forms for postmodern times–** The core of postmodernism is "the doubt that any method or theory, discourse or genre, tradition or novelty, has a universal and general claim as the "right" or privileged form of authoritative knowledge" (Richardson, 2000, p.928). If the authority of the academic essay as a form is no longer taken for granted, we are suddenly faced with choice about how to express our research. But more fundamentally, if we buy into the postmodernist *doubt*, we mistrust all methods equally and think critically about which ones we use, to what purpose and with what limitations. In the case of this dissertation, I have made that choice for each chapter, each vignette, working in the mode that seems most appropriate. This way of "writing" presents the challenge of striking a balance between purposeful fragmentation and the overall coherence of the document. Additionally, it has caused me to write and re-write (draw and re-draw) many drafts of various segments, in order to discover, for example, if a story comes through more vividly in the form of a poem or a short essay or a sketch.

On the other hand, these experimentations offered opportunities to juxtapose different presentations side by side to signify different or complementary "takes" on a story. The dialogues between characters opened possibilities of introducing different, often opposing viewpoints on various themes. And the free, fictional format presented the opportunity to bring forward first, second and third person forms of inquiry, which sometimes supported different sets of findings or conclusions. The question may arise: "which point of view is valid?" or "which findings are accurate?" Within qualitative research, the issue of validation is traditionally addressed through attempts at triangulation (Denzin, 1978; Flick, 1998), where the researcher deploys different methods –e.g. Interviews, census data and documents– to validate his or her findings. But as Richardson points out, "these methods carry the *same domain* assumptions, including the assumption that there is a "fixed point" or "object" that can be triangulated" (2000, p.934). Instead, she proposes that in post-modernist mixed-genre

texts we don't triangulate but rather we *crystallize.* The imagery of the crystal "combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach". As a result, what the readers get out of the dissertation will also depend upon their own angle of response. While I draw out my own findings in the conclusion of the dissertation, the readers are welcome to do the same for themselves based on the stories told.

Writing to be read – Richardson laments the fact that much of what is written by social scientists is "boring". She asks, "How do we create texts that are vital? That are attended to? That make a difference?" (2000) These are important questions to me, as are questions of audience: "Who do we write for? How do we make the writing appropriate for our audiences?" Certainly, this being a PhD dissertation, there is an academic audience, and in particular I am writing for my examiners. Additionally, in the course of this action research I have engaged deeply with a cultural community –the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw people– to whom I feel accountable and with whom I want to share what I learned. Significantly, I have also thought of this work as a contribution to a [non]professional community of practicing planners, community developers, change agents, facilitators and conflict resolvers. This is, after all, a dissertation in planning, intending to produce knowledge for informing action (Friedmann, 1987) and supporting the development of practical wisdom (Flyvbjerg, 2001).

When I think about these multiple communities/audiences, it is clear that the writing has to be accessible and engaging beyond academic rhetoric. In putting this dissertation into this form, drawing strongly from story-telling traditions (particularly familiar to my First Nation readers) my hope is that members of my various audiences will simply be able to open the dissertation somewhere in the middle, read something, and get something out of it. Apart from the most enthusiastic or obliged academic kinds, I do not expect many people will read the dissertation entirely, and I hope that both the language (literally and visually) and the "bite-size format" offers something for those who just want to "check it out".

More true to the experience and purpose– A primary purpose for doing this action research has been to convey something of the lived experience of doing the work of therapeutic planning, struggling with myself and others in a context of deep rooted conflicts and traumas, and learning in the process. A close examination and illustration of this *lived experience,* I believe, offers more in response to the research questions than an intellectual analysis of the results. Some have argued that arts-based creative analytic practices are particularly conducive and appropriate in this kind of exploration, "help[ing] us to access aspects of experience that may not be available to us within actual situations" (McNiff, 1998, p.74). This was certainly my experience. In addition, fictional forms liberated me from the need to work solely with what happened at any one time or what any one person said or did, allowing me to tell a more powerful story of the felt experiences by drawing various events and themes together in creative ways. In this sense, the fictionalized version of the story is, perhaps paradoxically, more *accurate.* It has the additional benefit of allowing me to bring in many voices while protecting the anonymity of community members I worked with.

In producing these pages I found myself constantly trying to hold myself up to the intentions expressed above: to create something that is not only novel and interesting, but also enjoyable, responsible, true and ultimately offering relevant insights towards answering my research questions.

1.5. The setting and characters

The stories you are about to read in the body of this dissertation feature characters we might classify as *fictional*, in a setting that we might call non-fictional or *real*, partaking in events and conversations that are essentially –but not strictly– *factual*. I submit upfront that the categories in italics are imprecise, fluid, contested and possibly entirely arbitrary. Social scientists have argued for many years that *all reality* is fictional in the sense that it is socially constructed (Berger and Luckmann, 1966), and even our own identities are merely a reflection of the stories we make up and tell about ourselves (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000). Within the planning literature, scholars have described the central role of stories in performing planning (Sandercock, 2003) and indeed in

shaping a material future (Throgmorton, 1996). Taking a different angle, social critics have warned against the dangers of a society that privileges entertainment over news, making fantasy and illusion more powerful than *truth* (Postman, 1985; Hedges, 2009).

Whether we like it or not, *fiction* can be more real, and it is probably more consequential, than *factual reality*. The power of *fictional reality* presumably rests on its ability to evoke a more complete (emotional, physical and spiritual – not purely intellectual) reaction in readers, engaging us and holding our attention in a world where there is a lot of competition for our attention. I am choosing to tell my story in this genre, because it is the most compelling way I can tell it. In my attempt at making it compelling I am hoping to give it a chance to be read more widely and to potentially make a bigger impact in the world.

Against the backdrop of these debates and the unsettling of these categories, I will now describe the *real* setting of my story and its *fictional* characters.

Tsulquate Reserve

Located on the edge of the town of Port Hardy on the northern tip of Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Tsulquate is a 60-hectare reservation belonging to a First Nations community of some 800 people. The community is comprised of the Gwa'sala and the 'Nakwaxda'xw people, historically two separate Nations within the Kwakwaka'wakw ethno-linguistic group of people living on the British
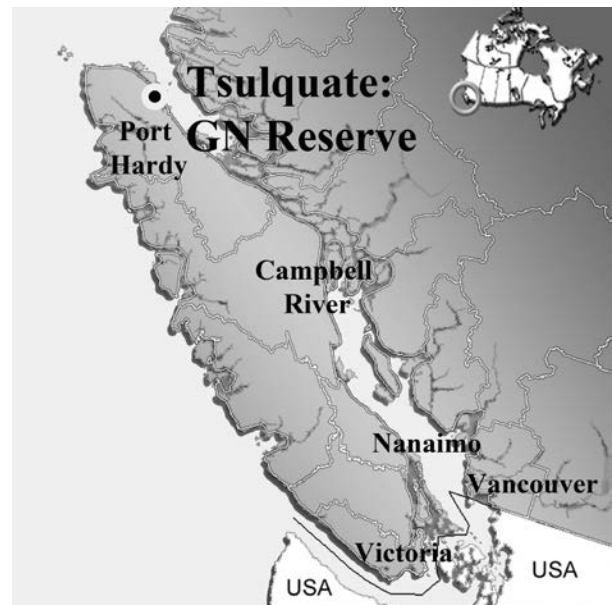
Illustration 1: Location of Tsulquate Reserve

Columbia mainland around Smith Sound and Seymour Inlet, respectively. At the time of European contact, each of these nations was living in relative isolation and on the basis

of self-sufficiency, relying on subsistence activities such as trapping, clam-digging and beachcombing (Boas, 1975).

In 1964, the Canadian Government – through the Department of Indian Affairs– relocated the two Bands from their traditional lands to their present location on Tsulquate. The relocation was disastrous in many ways, starting from the fact that the people arrived on the reservation expecting adequate housing and basic infrastructure but finding none. The bands were nearly decimated. Their combined population had by this time declined by 90% compared to the pre-contact period (from 2100 in 1884 to about 200 in 1964, cited in Emery and Grainger, 1994, p.124). The horror of the story has been effectively described in a work of fiction, tellingly titled *How a People Die* (Fry, 1974).

Somewhat miraculously, the people have survived and in the years since the relocation life has improved significantly on the reserve. The reserve now has physical, cultural and administrative structures that are a source of independence and pride. The band has also made gains on the legal and political fronts having been awarded compensation under the Government of Canada's Specific Claims Policy for damages arising from the 1964 relocation (Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw Council, 1988) and making considerable advancement at the treaty negotiation tables since 1994.

Despite these improvements, the community continues to face many difficulties, unfortunately not atypical of First Nation communities throughout British Columbia (BC) and Canada. The latest available Census (2006) results help paint a partial picture:

With a much higher birth rate than almost any other subset of the BC population (12%), the community is quite young (median age of 20). There are about 30 single-parent families on the reserve, almost all headed by women. Unemployment rate is at 38.5% compared with 6% for BC. The vast majority of employable adults rely on government subsidies and social assistance. 75% of those over 15 do not have a high school diploma (compared to less than 20% of the BC population) and most young people drop out

before they reach grade 12. Many of the homes are old, badly constructed, poorly maintained, and in need of major renovations (53% compared with 7.4% of all homes in BC). While homelessness is not common, the existing homes are often overcrowded and families often struggle to make rent (payable to the Band Office, which owns and manages all of the housing on reserve). The population is struggling with alcoholism, drug abuse, mental illness, obesity, diabetes, gambling addictions and sexual abuse. Suicide is a familiar source of sorrow, as are deaths resulting from addictions and unhealthy lifestyles. Much of this is attributed to the intergenerational trauma associated with the history of the community, including the relocation and the impacts of the Indian Residential School experience.

My project comes in the immediate aftermath of a Comprehensive Community Planning (CCP) exercise – the first of its kind on Tsulquate. Between 2008 and 2010, over twenty community gatherings were convened under the CCP umbrella, engaging over 200 band members. The meetings were complemented with other traditional planning research methods including review of existing literature and resources, questionnaires, interviews, mapping, photo and video projects. The resulting plan is a visionary document, an expression of the community's hopes and plans for its future. It articulates a set of Goals followed by a list of Work Plans organized under eight thematic headings (culture, economy, education, governance, health, infrastructure, land and resources, and social issues). In addition, the CCP articulates a set of three Main Issues, "broad issues which don't fit into any one category but are in fact affecting all aspects of the community": community unity, communication and trauma. One way to talk about addressing these three is to talk about *healing or* therapeutic planning. The word healing, in particular, resonated strongly with community members I spoke to early on. As such, I saw this as an appropriate setting for exploring the research questions I was most interested in.

Abrielle, Ravenna, Hanane and friends
As I mentioned in the previous section of this introduction, I have created three main characters through whom I tell the stories and present various perspectives on the

themes of this dissertation. Each of the three characters is based on an *inner quality* I found in myself or within my close associates, which seemed to assist the task of facilitative/therapeutic planning. The importance of personal qualities and attitudes, or what in Deep Democracy we call *metaskills,* has been described by other author-practitioners (e.g. Mindell, 1995b and Kirtek, 2002). Collectively, they have suggested over a dozen metaskills that may support a facilitator's successful engagement. These include truth-telling, personal integrity, courage, patience, innovation etc. While it is hard to argue with the importance of *any* of these qualities, my careful reading of my first, second and third person inquiry notes, lead me to notice three qualities from this long list that stood out repeatedly, and suggested themselves as crucial to the way *I* did this work. The three metaskills of compassion, playfulness and a-beginner's-mind and their relative importance, are in this sense a [post-fieldwork] discovery of this research. They are the metaskills I feel most fit to speak to from my own experience.

I chose to base the three main characters on the three central metaskills as a way to be able to pull apart and explore their interactions and transformation within me over time. I wanted each metaskill to literally have its own traceable journey, and be in conversation with the others. Support for this idea came from an unlikely source: my temporary obsession with comics and graphic novels at the time I started writing this dissertation. As I was studying the way comics are constructed, I learned that a common approach within the genre is to base each character on one unifying idea or concept[22] (McCloud, 2006). At the time I was also browsing an unusual PhD dissertation (Robin Postel and Stephen Lewis's *The Poker Game,* 2002*)* in which four archetypal characters explored the nature of dialogue together (and through dialogue), quite effectively.

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[22] Examples include the four superheroes of Captain Planet who were based on the qualities of air, water, fire and earth, and the four main characters from the popular comic book series ZOT! who were created after Carl Jung's four proposed types of human thought: intuition, feeling, intellect, and sensation. Other archetypes such as "hero" or the "old wise man" or the "old witch" are also commonly drawn upon when creating comics (McCloud, 2006, p. 68).

As I walked down this path I also struggled: I wanted to tell complex stories and I did not know if I could do this with simplistic caricatures. I was aware that in reality the qualities they represented lived within me and within others, not in pure and isolated form, but in incomplete, always-struggling-to-become form and in interaction with other qualities – so my characters ran the risk of being flat and not believable. But as my comic-making teacher, Scott McCloud explains, theme-based characterization does not have to come at the expense of communicating subtleties and complexities in the human interactions. The aim is not to simplify the characters at all, but to bring into the setting a broad range of approaches to life, as a way of producing a more fully three-dimensional view of the world (McCloud, 2006, p.69). Thankfully, I found that my characters quickly grew and rounded themselves out with personality as I began to write.

I settled quite quickly on three main characters, Abrielle, Ravenna and Hanane. (A fourth character, Xenia, started as a leading woman, but I had too much trouble writing from her perspective directly, so I chose to move her into more of a supporting role. She continues to be a strong contributor in almost all dialogues.) Here is a thumbnail sketch of each character:

Abrielle (early 30s, mother of one, of European descent)– based on the quality of *Compassion.* The name Abrielle is of Italian origin and means "mother of many nations". The character has recently become a biological mother and brings her young baby, Ocean, into the story with her. She also embodies a mothering archetype. Abrielle is a Canadian-born, white woman who is largely influenced by Eastern traditions of thought and spirituality. She is private and comes across as an introvert. She is, by inclination, sensitive and fragile. She struggles with an existential sadness that manifests itself in periodic episodes of depression. Her dominant psychological hang-ups are about being inherently worthy and valuable.

The quality of compassion, which is exhibited by Abrielle throughout the story, is a central metaskill in Deep Democracy and seen as the root of the facilitator's ability to be

neutral. Mindell (1994) defines compassion as "nurturing, caring for, and attending to those parts of ourselves that we like and identify with while attending equally to and appreciating those parts that we do not like, that we disavow and that are far from our identity" (p.69). In attending to, and consciously accepting all aspects of ourselves, we also become more accepting of all aspects of others, including those that would otherwise irritate us or scare us – enabling us as facilitator to invite these "shadow qualities" into the room. A closely related concept is *equanimity* from Buddhist Vipassana meditation, which refers to a neutral focus, and "the ability to accept whatever nature is pointing to in a given moment with a neutral and fair heart" (Mindell, 1994, p.73).

Ravenna (late 20s, single, of Metis origins) – based on the quality of **playfulness.** The name Ravenna is a reference to the raven, a symbol of a benevolent trickster in much of Pacific Northwest Aboriginal mythology and culture. The character comes from partial native heritage, but is born, raised and educated in a large city. She identifies with and feels a strong political connection to Canada's Indigenous people, but is disconnected from the deeper roots of Indigenous cultures and unfamiliar with life on remote reserves. Ravenna is an extrovert, high achieving, and very bright – balancing the right and left brain hemispheres as a critical intellectual *and* a creative artist. Her psychological patterns center around what she sees as the victimization of her people, resulting in a desire to fight to right the wrongs of the world, with a kind of idealistic naiveté characteristic of activists.

The metaskill of playfulness – also closely associated with humour, creativity and the trickster archetype– is of particular value to a facilitator who is trying to unlock stuck dynamics. Humour and play allow for a shift in mood, for saying what cannot otherwise be said, for making tense situations less scary, and for making new aspects of experience visible. All through history and across cultures there have been jesters, clowns, comedians, cartoonists and jokers who are able to poke gentle fun and give us another perspective on our ordinary lives. In this sense, these qualities make possible "a sense of freedom and spontaneity towards life's unexpected events" (Mindell, 1994,

p.94). They are also some of the most difficult qualities to hone and make appropriate, particularly in a situation of extreme conflict and deep trauma, such as the setting for this story. Ravenna attempts to provide an example of how these qualities "play out" in practice.

Hanane (early 20s, single, Middle Eastern origins) – based on the quality of *a-beginner's-mind.* The name Hanane has multiple origins, reflecting the global identity of this character who immigrated to Canada as a teenager. In Arabic, Hanane stands for "softness" or "tenderness", while in Japanese it means "a blossoming flower", both connected with the character's youth and childlike qualities. The more common form of the name, Hana or Hannah, means "gracious" in Hebrew and in Farsi refers to a fragrant variety of flower/herb used for dyeing and beautification. Hanane is observant, has a way with awareness to details and is daring with her questions. She has a particular gift for making friendships with people on the reserve, almost as a way of countering her central psychological questions which are about her own feelings of belonging.

The concept of beginner's mind comes from Zen Buddhism and is reflected in the famous saying by the Japanese-American monk Shunryu Suzuki: "In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities; in the expert's mind there are few." I understand it as the ability to look at the world with fresh, unbiased, even uneducated eyes. In Mindell's words (1994) "The beginner's mind is a mind– or perhaps heart– that is open and unbiased. It is not shaded by knowledge but is free and spontaneous enough to follow what we normally forget or overlook" (p.82). The attitude of "not knowing" is particularly useful to facilitators, and especially in a situation such as the one described in this story, where problems are numerous and pretending to have solutions is a dangerous game. The non-expert, beginner's mind quality must struggle to stick around even as we become more knowledgeable about the contexts we work in, as exhibited by Hanane in this story.

A number of secondary characters make significant contribution to this story. Among them is Xenia, the local young planner who has invited the other three into the

community (roughly based on Jessie Hemphill, and named after one of my favourite young kids on Tsulquate). Xenia straddles and bridges the world of the action researchers and the community. Her name means "hospitality" in Greek, but also can mean "stranger", referring to the character's generosity as a host, and also her own sense of alienation or isolation as a person who walks in two worlds. I imagine Xenia as exhibiting the metaskill of *light touch* –as opposed to heavy-handedness–, a minimalist attitude which makes slight interventions, notices feedback, and lets go if there is no response" (Mindell, 1994, p.111), thus often finding and traversing the path of least resistance.

The story also features a fictional community Elder, Charlie Spruce. As the only adult male with a strong role in the story, Charlie Spruce represents what I see as the height of masculine leadership and wisdom. In writing this character, I drew on five different men[23] all in their 50s and 60s (three native, two non-native), with whom I have experienced a deep connection, and who have influenced me at different stages of this exploration. I experienced all of them as exhibiting something of the metaskill of *shamanism* (Mindell, 1994, p.124)– an almost magical or mystical ability to let themselves be moved by a situation, following their own seemingly irrational impulses, sensations and intuitions, consequently generating surprising and illuminating insights. Their role as clear-seeing advisors and supportive friends, embodied by Charlie Spruce, particularly in his relationship with Hanane, has been an important source of fascination and encouragement.

A few other characters appear as themselves. Ocean, Abrielle's baby, is based on my own firstborn, Sufiyan (Seff) Murphy. We watch him grow from a 4 months old baby to a one-year-old toddler in the course of the story, and although he doesn't yet have words with which to participate in conversations, he plays a big role in the action research process as a source of basic human connection. I refer to this character by the name Ocean in part to honour the setting of the story, and also in part in reference to a

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[23] I have credited some of these Elders by name on the few occasions when I have cited them directly and with their own permission.

favourite play of mine, *Birth and After Birth* (Howe, 1977) in which the mother (named Sandy) is coming to terms with the aspects of her identity, agency and freedom that are constantly eroded by the demanding task of caring for a young child. My Deep Democracy teacher and mentor, Myrna Lewis, appears several times in the role of the coach and supervisor, which she played generously through the course of my field work. Both mine and Jessie's life partners – Jeremy and Jamaine– also appear as partners to Abrielle and Xenia. Many members of the GN community make a cameo – with name changes when necessary to protect their identities, especially when stories surround potentially sensitive topics.

Here, now, is their story.
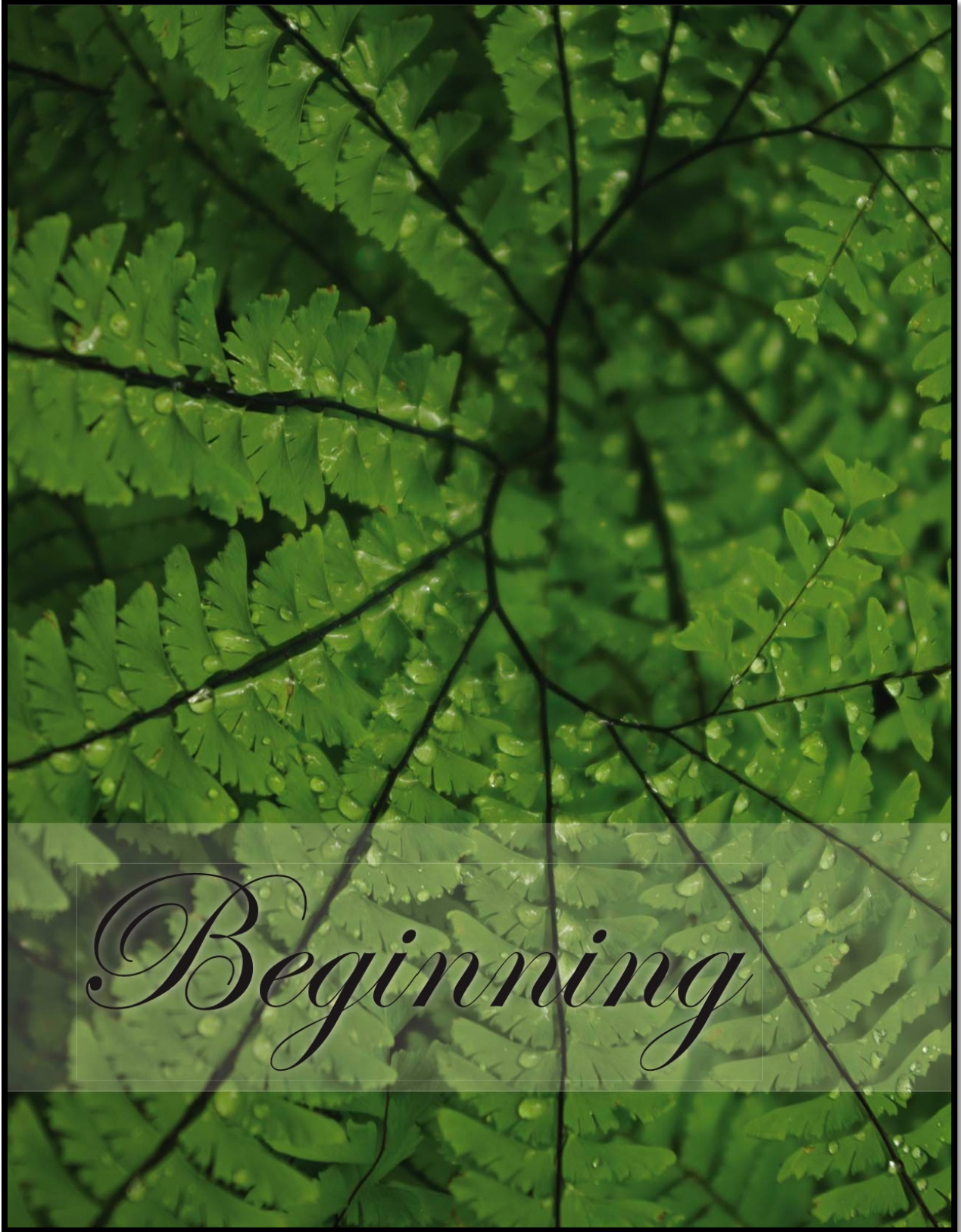
Illustration 2: Beginning Title Page (photo by Jessie Hemphill)

2.0. Beginning

2.1. First Encounters
[A story in three voices]

Hanane– The trip up the east coast of Vancouver Island is long, and the scenery gets progressively more stunning as we push on. A 2–hour ferry ride from Vancouver to Nanaimo, then a 2-hour drive to Campbell River, and another 3 hours after that … we are finally greeted by large carvings and municipal signs welcoming us to the District of Port Hardy. I find myself slowing down to the pace of this far-up-north place, aided by the hours of staring at Douglas firs, cedars, spruces and alders on the edge of the road. I feel comfortably insignificant against the vastness and the majesty of the Pacific North West landscape, which never seems to become ordinary no matter how much time I spend on this side of the world. "How long can we afford to dwell in this beauty, before we have to get to work?" I wonder out loud to my fellow travelers.

> Ravenna– We are here, YES WE ARE! The moment I've been impatiently waiting for is here. This is what I have been wanting to do all along: a project that takes me into a setting I care about, where I can actually *do* something more useful than reading and rehashing theories about what *can be done*. The first tedious years of the PhD program suddenly feel worthwhile. And to everyone who said an action research project was too ambitious for the timelines of the PhD and that we would never manage to set it all up in time to get here and do the work, I feel like saying: "look at us now!"

> Memories of our first trip up to Tsulquate, over a year ago, are alive and running through my head[24]: We came at the beginning of the CCP process, with our large paper and our markers, and we made drawings of what was being said in community meetings. We made words and symbols and colours and arrows

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[24] Note for those interested in the "factual" events and timelines of this action research: I first went to Tsulquate in the spring of 2009 as part of a 5-person team from UBC. In the fall of 2010 I made three trips along with one other UBC colleague. In summer of 2011 I went back with three UBC colleagues. And between fall of 2011 and summer of 2012 I made another eight trips on my own. The events and reactions described in this section represent a summary of my "first encounters" which in reality took place at various times over several trips.

shooting in every direction! People loved it. A delegation even came from a neighbouring Band to check out our work. Some of the drawings made it to the pages of the CCP, and now that the document is done we have been invited back to do more work. Butterflies fly excitedly in my stomach, my eyes search eagerly for recognizable faces and stories, and my mind has already dreamed up a million ideas for things we can do, before our first dinner is fully consumed. I stay up laughing and chatting with Xenia and her family late into the night. I am in my element.

> Abrielle– Little Ocean holds onto my collar, putting his warm face against my chest and looking out at the world. I feel lucky that he is too little to suffer from travelling and being away from home and away from his dad. (I'm not sure I'm going to handle it as well as he is.) He sweetly accepts where I am taking him. He trusts me, for no good reason. And I just hope – for his sake even more than mine– that coming here is the right decision. After our initial trip last year I was sure I wasn't coming back: I could see loads of trauma and conflict, and no real willingness for this community to look at them. Now the landscape appears to have changed– people seem more ready, and we seem to have more of an explicit invitation to bring our full skill sets into this place. We're scheduling to start with training workshops on Deep Democracy, to get more people familiar with the way we work, and to build some local facilitation capacity to lead the difficult community conversations with us.

> Now my question is whether *I* am ready to be here. Am I too weak, too shaky, too sleep-deprived to step in? Will I be crushed by the weight of what is happening in this community? Or will I be lifted up, inspired by the strength of its people to go on in spite of everything?

Ravenna– Our generous hosts invite us in with open arms. We have been given a place to stay here, at the home of Xenia's parents, while they go to spend a year in Hawaii, where her dad will be making a fortune selling his west-coast landscape paintings –and his newer adventurous nudes– in the vibrant art

market of the Big Island. I am tickled at the idea that the paintings produced from this modest house on this small native Canadian reserve will go on display next to the work of other international artists, making their way into prestigious galleries and the walls of important people half way around the world. It is incredible to be so isolated here, and at once so connected to the world.

Hanane– The house doesn't look like much from the outside, but once we step in my jaw drops. The large beams and the exposed wood throughout give it a log cabin feel that immediately transports me to an old boyfriend's family home. But the extra high ceilings, the openness of the main living area, the generous spaciousness of the kitchen, and the many quirky features – sinks built directly into the walls of bedrooms, a vacuum suction feature incorporated under the dining room cabinet to remove the need for a dustpan– are not like anything I have come across before. On one of our first nights Xenia's father tells us the story of how he built the house as an amateur architect-designer-builder, virtually single-handedly, using timber and other natural materials from the traditional territories, for about $30 per square foot[25]! He meant for this to be a demonstration project: introducing an affordable construction alternative and a do-it-yourself mentality that could turn the reserve's dire housing situation on its head. Sadly the model never did catch on– community members were quick to dismiss it because the house took six years to build. I hear many half-told political, social, cultural and psychological sub-stories as I listen – but it baffles me to learn that an innovative, proven, affordable, local solution to one of the band's biggest challenges is sitting right here on the reserve, not being utilized.

Are we foolish to think that we can create change here in this community, when people who have lived here for decades cannot?

> Abrielle– My colleagues/sisters/partners-in-crime constantly impress me and stress me out. Ravenna has the ability to socialize with anybody. Within moments of meeting any community member she has struck up a conversation with them and they are all sitting around the table, telling

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[25] Current cost of building a house in Vancouver is an order of magnitude higher at about $300/sqf.

stories and laughing out loud like old friends. Hanane, in her own more subtle way makes strong and immediate connections. She will have hours of one-on-one conversation with a woman stirring a pot in the kitchen or a guy chopping wood out back. They both tire me out by generating so much chatter – and I also feel entirely inadequate next to them. I never seem to find anything much to say to people I have just met. I'm sure they must dislike me and I keep wondering if I will ever survive in this community given how bad I am at being "friendly"! Thank goodness for Ocean. His presence gives me easy conversation topics– and often also an excuse to retreat to my room when my anti-social tendencies become too hard to negotiate with…

Hanane– Our first weekend on the reserve, I spend the afternoon watching Jerry skin a deer while he smokes cigarettes and drinks beer. He gives me a detailed description of each step, showing me the correct angle of the knife as it touches the flesh, emphasizing the importance of not puncturing the bladder sac (cause that is the one sure way to spoil the whole animal). He takes so much care in instructing me, you'd think I'm getting ready to skin my own deer next week! Xenia films the lesson, smiling regularly at her cousin's seriousness and skill, and my corresponding fascination and clumsiness. The next day I go berry picking with Xenia and then watch her make four different types of jam and jelly. (Crabapple jelly is my favourite one.) She tells me about fishing trips in the summer with her aunts and uncles and describes in colourful detail the process of smoking and jarring fish, also a family activity. I am blown away at how much of the food consumed in this house is prepared from scratch by the people who live here. Xenia calls it the most central element of her Indigenous heritage.

Ravenna– One chilly night after supper we cover the kitchen floor in blankets and lie down around the wood stove like children in their play fort. Jamaine brings out his guitar and we sing along to a hundred silly songs. Ocean sits still and acts like the world's best audience: fascinated by every note, completely focused on every sound, his eyes tracing the distance between Jamaine's thick voice and Xenia's sweet but powerful accompaniment. For a few hours all of the

world's troubles seem to disappear and I can't help but wonder if music can heal absolutely everything.

> Abrielle– Before she leaves, Xenia's mother comes up to Ocean and I as we hang out in the constant gentle drizzle by the front door. She takes a ten-dollar bill out of her pocket, rolls it up and puts it in Ocean's little hand. "In our culture, the first thing an Elder did when they saw the new wee babe was to put a bill into their little hand" she explains. "That was to ensure their wealth. And not just monetary wealth." (Colleen Hemphill, GN Elder, pers. comm.) I'm so moved by this, I find myself on the edge of tears. In some small way my little boy now belongs here. I thank her and ask, half jokingly, if the amount of wealth will be related to how long he holds onto to the bill. She laughs and says the only important thing is that the baby gets a good grip.
>
> Then she says, "I think you will do very well here." I look at her, touched but unconvinced. "You have a good way with listening and that goes a long way in this community. Most outsiders who come here never give people a hearing." I smile as a way to say thank you. Then she adds: "Just don't try to be productive, and don't try to fix anything– and you will do great."

2.2. Tsulquate: a pedestrian eye-view

[Hanane's poem][26]

Auntie Irene
Lives in the second house
Once you take a left,
The only one with a ramp,
You can't miss it.
The one at the end of the road
With a boat hanging in the deck
Is fisherman Dorey's.
And the one by the bridge,
With the trampoline outside
And several shirtless boys
Always bouncing
Belongs to some part
Of Jack Walkus' large family,
I'm pretty sure.

The dogs roaming around
Giving birth to pups
Right in the middle of the road
Seem to belong
To no one in particular.

By my third visit
The reserve is familiar
And small:
Very small
Once I realize
I can walk from one end to another
In under fifteen minutes.
Not many people walk it,
Certainly, not many outsiders.
Sometimes I have the feeling
That I am walking
Through the band's collective living room.
People sleep in such close quarters here
They share so much
– hopes, challenges, genes–
But are also so divided,
Like housemates

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[26] The stories reproduced in this poem were told by GN Elder Richard George during an interview with Margot Young, and appear here with his stated permission.

Who are not on speaking terms
And keep leaving notes on the kitchen counter.

While I was learning my way around
Somebody at the Band Office
Learned I was a planner
And dug out a property map
Showing the layout of the res:
Every lot and every house
– All one hundred of them–
Arranged along the few winding roads.
(No digital copies exist.)
I xeroxed the map for a workshop
Handed it out
With colour pencils and crayons
And asked parents
To mark on the map
Places where their children play.
Nobody did.
Instead they studied the map eagerly
Folded it
And pocketed it.
To go and show others, I presume,
Or put up on a wall:
The shape of their community,
Suddenly made visible to them.

I wonder
If that's why we have come:
To make visible
What is already,
Undoubtedly,
Invisibly,
Here.

Meanwhile,
What is visible to me?
And what do I overlook?
At first
The landscape of the res
Is bleak and depressing to me:
Unkempt homes
On deteriorating foundations,
Broken windows,
Old cars, campers, furniture
Hoarded on front lawns;

Children biking recklessly
On the roads
Playing in dust
And rust
Among concrete and metal,
While lush woods
Lay –ironically– on the edge of the village.
The play-structure
Down by the bridge
Almost always unused.

This is not a place
That would get a passing grade
If it had been designed
In my first year planning studio class.

Is it possible
To heal
In such an uninspiring setting?

In the middle of these thoughts
I run into Charlie Spruce
Who is walking
Down to the doctors',
Hoping his daughter
Will pick him up on the way.

'Beautiful day!' he says,
And I notice that it is.
We chitchat
And walk around the Community Hall
Until we overlook the beach.

'We recently did a beach topic
In our Kwak'wala language class'
Says Charlie,
Who is learning his mother tongue
At the age of 50.
'We went through pictures
Of rocks and shells
And everything you see on the beach.
After we got that done we're like:
"Oh we got done early!"
So I said:
"What did you do on the beach
When you were little?"

Then, I had three ladies
They said:
"Oh, we went swimming,
We played tag,
We waded in the water."
I said:
"Did you ever go skinny-dipping?"
And they all laughed.
And then they started telling stories
About when they were young
And how they used to go
And chase the boys.
And there was a lot of good times
When they were young,
In the old place,
And they were safe.'

I nod and smile
And before my mind's eye
I see young girls
Carefree
Giggling
Across the strait,
On the mainland:
The traditional territory
Of the Gwa'sala and the 'Nakwaxda'xw.

'And then there are stories
About the raven, the crow, the seagull.
I remember listening to an Elder,
Harry Walkus,
And he told us about this beach
In around Blunden
– I can't remember the name of it–
But there is rocks,
Flat rocks,
All along the shoreline.
And they are different colours.
And I said:
"How come they're all different colours grandpa?"
He said:
"That's where we painted all the birds.
And then we got lazy,
We couldn't paint the crow and the raven.
That's why they are both black!"'

We laugh out loud
And at once I feel sad
Nostalgic
For the beauty and meaning
Of the place
Charlie and his people came from
The memory of it
Tangled up
– Painfully or joyfully – Reflected
In every feature
Of this place right here.

Illustration 3: A Portrait of Tsulquate

2.3. A local history of colonial planning

[Ravenna's exploration]

I am leafing through books, reports and internal documents at the Band Office library, attempting to get a picture of the history of this place and its people. A few times I get excited when I come across the name of a distant relative. Far more often I get so outraged at what I am reading that I have to take a break and join the small collection of staff at the building's entrance for a smoke, before I can make my way back into the texts.

You don't have to be an Indigenous Studies major to have heard about the evil twin mechanisms by which white settlers of Canada established and sustained a colonial regime that subjugated Indigenous people for the past 250 years: there is the Indian Act (1876), which, among other things, defined "a person" as "an individual other than an Indian", and the Indian Residential School system (1880s to 1996) that officially and unapologetically set out to "kill the Indian in the native child". (Enough said about those.) The evil twins also had an equally wicked brother called Land-use Planning who is better known by names such as "relocation" and "putting Indians on reserve". Only recently has the character of this third brother, and his role in colonization been exposed. We are slowly getting to know him as the bureaucrat who used fancy professional technologies like settlement policies, accounting techniques, surveying and mapmaking, strategic planning and economic rationalization to effectively "enforce and reinforce the colonial status quo" (Woolford, 2005).

It is my reading about this third brother, who could have been a classmate or colleague of mine, that both fascinates and troubles me the most. I'm not naive about my profession. I already know of its shadow side. But to read the accounts of the day-to-day planning decisions that put this very people I am working with in this very place I am standing at, is real and gut-wrenching in a whole new way. It is also so ridiculous, so absurd, that I find it almost laughable. I mean, what were those guys thinking!? I can't help but keep imagining a wacky story in which the task of relocating the Gwa'sala and the 'Nakwaxda'xw people was designated to a young, bright-eyed planning assistant right out of school, who had the bad fortune of being placed in the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) in the early 60s[27]:

> **In his first week the planning assistant goes to his boss, the Superintendent at DIA: "Sir, I noticed that we have these outstanding applications on file for water, sewer and electricity infrastructure to two little native villages – one is some place called Takush, in Smith Inlet, and the other one is Bahas, in Blunden Harbour. I can't pronounce the names of the two bands, but each of them made a few applications and we haven't responded to any of them."**
>
> **"Oh, right", the Superintendent responds, glancing at the pile in the young planner's hand. "*Those* applications... Well, actually it turns out those two villages are quite problematic".**
>
> **He passes a recent DIA engineer's report to the planning assistant, and points to a page for him to read.**
>
> ***" The populations of the two Villages are 108 and 57 respectively – 16 families at Takush living in 8 houses, and 8 families at Bahas living in 4 houses, 3 others having been recently destroyed by fire... The existing housing on both reserves is extremely bad. Except for two new houses... the houses are practically uninhabitable..." (cited in Emery and Grainger, 1994, p.81).***
>
> **"Sounds bad", the planning assistant reacts out loud. "Are we legally responsible for this?"**

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[27] The story of the young intern and his director is fictional, rooted in the facts that I found in the literature, cited throughout this section.

"Technically, yes" the Superintendent responds. "Our mandate is the 'protection, civilization and assimilation of our charges'. (Tobias, 1983, p.39 cited in Emery and Grainger, 1994, p.29). We're supposed to take care of them."

"Okay, well I see in this same pile some old engineering plans for making both villages more liveable…" (Chief G. Walkus, letter to Indian Agent, 1952, cited in Emery and Grainger, 1994).

"… except that we're not going to do that anymore," the Superintendent interrupts. "I have orders from above to relocate the Bands" (Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, 1996, p. 426).

"Relocate?" the planning assistant raises his eyebrows.

"Administrative Relocation. We move them out of their remote villages and close to one of our towns. It's really a win-win situation. It makes it easier for us to provide services, it makes it easier for them to get to education and employment opportunities – the few that they might qualify for… And anyway, 'the relocation will be a very advanced step towards integration.' (C. Roach, Superintendent, Kwawkewlth Agency, letter to J.V. Boys, Indian Commissioner, B.C. 1962, quoted in Emery and Grainger, 1994")

"Has anyone ever done this before?"

"Oh yes, it's practically a best practice! We have relocated many people." The Superintendent proudly points at the map on his desk, as if giving a geography lesson, "…the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia, the Haberonimiut in Labrador, the Sayisi Dene in Manitoba, the Yukon First Nations … (Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, 1996, p. 398) We have a history of it in BC too, actually. The Songhees in 1911, and the Cheslatta Carrier people in 1952. We had to move *those* people to make room for development (Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, 1996, p. 399) but anyway… it is really the best arrangement for everybody."

"Okay… I guess this is how things are done" the planning assistant says reluctantly.

"And I am thinking…" the Superintendent explores the map through his glasses, as if dreaming a big dream "I am thinking we put these people near Port Hardy."

"You mean… we're not even going to ask them where they want to move!?"

"Oh, we asked them a few years ago, in the 50s. We tried to ask them but it was a big disaster. They couldn't agree on a location! (Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, 1996, p. 425) So I think we should

just tell them where to go this round. Why don't you go run some numbers and see if we can accommodate them close to Port Hardy?"

The planning assistant goes to his desk with his head spinning a little. He takes out a map of his own and reads whatever he can about Port Hardy, and about the Gwa'sala and the 'Nakwaxda'xw. He returns in an hour.

"Umm, sir, I didn't notice this when we were last speaking but… you realize Port Hardy is on Vancouver *Island*, right? Whereas Takush and Bahas are on the *mainland*. That would be quite a big thing to move almost 200 people across the strait, don't you think?"

"It's a long way, but we have enough vessels now. It's not an issue," says his boss, casually.

"I also read that the Gwa'sala and the 'Naxwaxda'xw are really into hunting and fishing, so I think they would be quite lost if we moved them into such a different environment…"

The Superintendent chuckles. "Ah, don't you worry about that! These people are quite used to moving. They are tribal people, remember? They live one place in the summer, a whole other place in the winter (Holm, 1983 cited in Emery and Grainger, 1994, p.63). That's their way of life."

"Oh yes, I know about seasonal migration, but those happen *within* the traditional territories of each band. We're putting them way outside their traditional territories! Not even in the same *type* of territory! How are they going to survive?" (Emery and Grainger, 1994 p.63)

The Superintendent looks serious now. "It's very sweet of you to worry about these people, but you really don't need to. They're resilient. They have lived in this region for thousands of year. They'll do fine. And at any rate, this is our policy. It's coming from above. I have no choice in the matter."

"Okay, I have another question," the young planner presses on. "You want me to move both bands to the same little village? Cause I'm thinking, these people – the Gwa'sala and the 'Nakwaxda'xw – they hardly know each other. They live far away from each other now. And they have always lived within their own extended family networks (Emery & Grainger, 1994, p.66–68) – to mix them up doesn't seem like such a good idea…"

"Hold on, did you read the Franz Boas book I told you to read?"

"I did."

"Well then you should know that your point is irrelevant! These are all Kwakiutl people. They are literally brothers." He picks up Boas

book from his shelf and reads out loud: "'The Gwa'sala sub-tribe of Gi'gElgam ("the first ones") and the 'Nakwaxda'xw sub-tribe of Ge'xsEm ("the chiefs") were so closely related that stories described the former being nursed at the right breast of the mother while the latter was nursed at the left breast' (Boas, 1975)." He giggles and goes on. "See? They couldn't be any closer than *that*!"

"All right, but what about the place we're moving them into and *its* people? Surely they haven't been nursed at the same breasts!"

"They are another Kwawkewlth band, they speak the same language. Also, they don't even *live* near Port Hardy. Their main village is nine miles away at Fort Rupert. They probably will barely notice that we have given part of their territory to their brothers and sisters."[28]

As the planning assistant reluctantly picks up his things to leave the Superintendent adds "Hey, I really like that you're paying attention to these details, but you don't need to worry, we literally do this all the time, we know what we're doing (Tobias, 1983 cited in Emery & Grainger, 1994, p.29).

"What are they like? The Gwa'sala and the 'Nakwaxda'xw people? Have you met them?"

"The Indian Agent met them many years ago. He said that the Gwa'sala are 'fairly industrious and law-abiding, but are at a standstill as far as progress is concerned'. As for the Nakwaxda'xw Band, he said 'the members of this band are probably the least civilized of any in the agency, and they do not bear a very enviable reputation'. (Reports of Indian Agents, W.M. Halliday, Kwawkewlth Agency, Alert Bay, 31 March 1912, cited in Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, p. 425) We are *helping* these people and we are doing a good job." He ended with confidence.

In 1960 the young planner is mystified when the proposal for amalgamation at Tsulquate is rejected by both the Gwa'sala and the

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[28] As it turns out, the three bands were related *only* in language. They had always considered themselves as being quite different from one another. When the three officially became one band, a whole set of problems followed. The former Kwawkewlth suddenly became a minority within their own land and the Gwa'sala and 'Nakwaxda'xw people now had more political clout because they outnumbered them. The political and administrative situation became so nonsensical that the people at Fort Rupert felt it was necessary to elect a Village Committee to advocate on behalf of their community because the 'official' political body - the Kwawkewlth Band Council, comprised almost entirely of the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw people- was preoccupied with the legacy of the relocation. Eventually, the Kwawkewlth band launched a grievance to dissolve the amalgamation in 1968 and ask for compensation for the loss of their land. After a number of years the issues were finally settled (Emery & Grainger, 1994, p.66-68)

'Naxwaxda'xw bands, based on a vote of their membership. But the Superintendent assures him, "We'll get them to move. We just need more carrots and sticks" (Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw Council, 1988, p.1).

And so the junior planner is given the task of articulating the carrots and sticks– promising improved services, and threatening with cuts to services if the bands refuse to move.

Then they go back to the bands in 1962 for another vote. By now rumour has it that many Band members are reluctantly admitting that a move closer to education and health services, and to a community that had sewer, water and electricity, might be best for their children (Emery & Grainger, 1994, p.36.). So a large community contingent comes to the school where the DIA official is making a presentation.

The Superintendent uses the school blackboard to describe the things that will come as a result of the move (Emery & Grainger, 1994, p.11) . "Should I write these down and make photocopies for everyone in the room?" the planning assistant asks. "Don't bother. They don't much like to read here!" whispers his boss.

The vote goes through this time and the bands agree to move. But in the years to come, the Elders who were present at the meeting repeatedly scratch their heads, not being able to remember exactly what was promised to them, and –in the absence of an official record– not being able to find out (Emery & Grainger, 1994, p.12).

Excited about the progress in his little project, the planning assistant goes back to the office to make arrangements for the move. A few days later he comes to his boss. "We've got a problem."

"What is it this time?" the Superintendent asks.

"I am trying to draw the subdivision plan for the new Tsulquate reserve. I went to the engineering division downstairs and it turns out we have no detailed maps of the area. In fact the area has not been surveyed at all" (Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw Band Specific Claim, p.29).

"And what's the problem?" his boss asks.

"Well... I learned in planning school that you need a ground survey before you can lay down a subdivision plan. I mean, I learned that you should also *walk* the land before you plan it but that obviously is not an option here..."

"Why would you need a survey? There is nothing there! It's empty land."

"I at least need to know if there are major natural features – rivers, lakes, wetlands, cliffs, important habitats..."

The Superintendent scratches his head. "I never heard of this 'ground survey' problem. Do we have budget for it?"

"We certainly don't."

"Well then you've got to figure out how to do without it."

So the planning assistant goes back to his desk, grabs the general topographic map of Tsulquate from the engineering division, takes his ruler, and simply draws a number of squares on the map representing building lots. As it turns out he *does* miss some important geographical features: at least one of the lots he draws ends up being largely in the river, and many of the lots end up being on solid rock outcroppings that make it virtually impossible to build given the technology of the time. In fact no more than 17 of the lots the planning assistant draws turn out to be developable (Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw Band Specific Claim, p.29).

"How are the arrangements for that relocation coming along?" the Superintendent wants to know a week or so later.

"We've got our guys building houses out there and we've got boats to carry people over to the Island. So it's generally under control."

"Excellent."

"I do have two remaining concerns though. One is that I feel we really should have some type of social planning to go along with the relocation to help people adjust to such a different way of life. But the social services division is not answering my phone calls."

"I know. The guys at social services are too busy with the adoption scoop right now.[29]"

"So we're not going to have a social plan?"

"We are not mandated to. I'd like to, but I don't see how we can."

"Okay then... My second concern is that I don't have time to develop an implementation plan."

"Implementation plan? Is that what they told you to do in planning school too?!"

"Yes."

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[29] Adoption "scoop" or "60s scoop" of First Nations and Métis children occurred between 1960s and 1980s. Thousands of children were taken and adopted out from their communities without the knowledge or consent of their families. 70% went to non-Aboriginal homes.

"That is cute!" The Superintendent jokes, probably not suspecting that the absence of these two elements will later be considered largely responsible for what will be called "the worst social disaster to occur on Vancouver Island" (Ben Maartman, Company of Young Canadians field staff memo to CYC Executive, Ottawa, Feb 18, 1975 cited in Emery and Grainger, 1994, p. 46).

Having by now submitted himself to "the way things are" at DIA, the planning assistant casually reports to his boss that there are "a few things still missing" a day or two before the relocation is scheduled to happen in 1964.

This is a bit of an understatement: of the eight houses the bands were promised only 3 are built; the promised pressure water system, sewer system and recreation centre are not in place (and won't be built until 1969, 1971 and 1988 respectively); there is no safe anchorage for the fleet of fishing boats as a result of which the bands lose their entire fishing fleet (and their principal means of livelihood) within days of arriving in Tsulquate (Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw Council, 1988). A few minor details[30].

Within a year of the relocation, the planning assistant finds himself rushing to his supervisor's office: "Things are bad on Tsulquate."

"What did you hear?"

"People are dying. Apparently the 60-plus age group is just dying out. The babies too: 20% of the ones born this year died in infancy. (Culhane, 1984, p. 21 and 24) The older kids don't have good care; they are going into foster homes by the dozen. The provincial social workers said they can hardly keep up. (Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, 1996, p. 427)"

"And what is the morale like? What's happening on the streets?"

"It's a nightmare. People have no livelihood, they are drinking lots (Robert Walkus, Sr. cited in Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, 1996, p. 427) Rumour has it that some are trying to make their way

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[30] In reality, the promised carrots that casually went missing around the time of the relocation, along with the many examples of neglectful and irresponsible planning practices described above, was devastating to the two bands. What compounded the troubles was the lack of adequate private, collective and familiar natural spaces where people could work through their confusion and anger the way they had for centuries before (Emery & Grainger, 1994, p.8.) The traditional methods of healing had been taken away along with the land.

back to their homes in their traditional territories. That will undo everything we've done."

The Superintendent sighs. He rubs his eyes and nose anxiously and sighs again. Then he goes back to his paperwork and orders without looking up: "Send someone to the home villages to burn down their houses." (Superintendent Roach interview by Nowasada/Klaver, 1985, cited in Emery & Grainger, 1994, p.81)

The planning assistant is speechless. He feels a cold sweat building on his forehead.

"Did you hear me?"

"Yes sir." He proceeds with the order, no more questions asked.

And *that* is what planning has historically done for the community we are here working with. Perhaps the only piece of luck we have is that most band members haven't read the devastating stories I have been poring through. Otherwise, I am sure they would turn us away at the bridge.

Illustration 4: Workshop Announcement

2.4. Stumbling as education

[Abrielle's supervision][31]

SECTION ONE: ACCOUNT OF SESSION AND REFLECTION-IN-ACTION

Abrielle– So, should I tell you what happened in a nutshell?

Coach– Yes, I am dying to hear.

Abrielle– Okay, so we had a session yesterday morning with about 20 of us in the room –including me, Hanane and Xenia. The others were community members: about half of them were staff of the Band Office and other engaged adults, the other half were teenagers, who had come with two of their teachers from the on-reserve alternative school. And it turned out that we had a very very difficult dynamic with that kind of combination of people in the room. I ended up having to change plans multiple times to engage people, and despite that I ended up losing some people.

Coach– Some people left?

Abrielle– Yes!

Coach– Okay, tell me about it one bit at a time. Blow-by-blow. What did you do and what did you see?

Abrielle– So at the very beginning we were sitting in a circle, and I started by asking everyone to check in and just tell me briefly who they are and how they're doing.[32] People said the usual variety of things: I am tired, I feel hyper or whatever. But the kids… well, a couple of the kids checked in, and the rest of them weren't saying anything at all. And then suddenly one of the teachers who had come with the students said, "Okay, I'm going to introduce the rest of our students for you!" And she went around the room and said the names of the students who hadn't spoken. I was a little taken back by this, I had never seen this happen in a check-in before, of somebody speaking on behalf of others so explicitly. So, right away I had alarm bells going off in my mind, thinking "okay, this could be a hard meeting*." (chuckling)*. I slowed down and checked again if anybody wanted to say anything more then, hoping that some of the youth would speak for themselves, but none of them did, and eventually I moved on.

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[31] This section is based on the transcript of a supervision call with Myrna Lewis. The event described took place in Nov 2012. Jessie Hemphill and a UBC colleague were present (represented here as Xenia and Hanane.) Please note, I have not polished the text in order to keep the original dialogic quality of the interactions.

[32] A check-in is a way to give everyone a chance to arrive and have a voice early on in a meeting, and to bring to the collective awareness what is in the room – including feelings and special needs. Instead of going around in a circle, the convention in Deep Democracy is to invite participants to check-in "pop-corn style", which is to say that participants speak whenever they are ready (or "hot", like pop corn), in an undetermined order.

I started to teach them about Deep Democracy, as was the plan, starting with the iceberg and the idea that there is a conscious and unconscious part to the group.[33] We talked briefly about examples of what was in the conscious and unconscious of the group in the room, and people got a little personal here, sharing things about themselves that others in the room probably didn't know. It was going well enough. Then I moved to teaching them about the terrorist line[34] and people seemed even more engaged, offering examples from their own lives and their community. But the youth, well, a few of the boys were really not into it. They were slouching in their chairs, with their head in their hands and their eyes closed, falling asleep. Just not into it.

I figured that we needed to move into something more active, I thought I'd introduce the Soft Shoe Shuffle[35] to help them move around and become more engaged. So we stand up and I explain the Soft Shoe Shuffle as a conversation technique that involves walking, and I say lets just talk about your reactions to the terrorist line teaching. But what happens now is *(chuckling)* that the conversation turns very quickly to the politics of the band, the issues of leadership and governance. It was a hot conversation, and a good honest conversation– people were talking about accountability and apathy and they were even owning their parts in the problems. But, again, the youth were not engaged. I think one of them offered something at the beginning, but very quickly all the youth were standing on the outside just watching. I was surprised at this. Everything I had heard and read about this technique said that it works really well with kids and teenagers. So I was a little shocked. I kept hoping one of them would say *something* for me to amplify them[36] and bring them back into the group. Finally one asked if he could have a snack from the table, and I amplified this saying "Enough talking! Let's go eat!" And so we went for a break.

So in the break I quickly spoke to Hanane and Xenia about what they were seeing – and we all agreed the Soft Shoe Shuffle conversation was very rich. But I was worried that we were leaving the youth behind and I just couldn't see the dynamic improving if we went back into the exercise. So I suggested instead that I would teach the group the four

[33] The key metaphor of Deep Democracy is an iceberg – the visible section represents the conscious part of the group, the things that are being said that everyone is aware of, the larger invisible section represents the unconscious part of the group, the things that not everyone is aware of. This is based on Jungian psychology, identifying the collective conscious and unconscious.

[34] A key concept in Deep Democracy is the existence of a tendency to resist the direction of the group's leadership (particularly a "king" or authoritative figure), particularly when we feel that our ideas are not listened to or our feelings are dismissed. This is provocatively described as a "terrorist line", suggesting that the acts of resistance start in a covert way (little jokes, gossip etc) and end up becoming more overt if not acknowledged (disruptions, openly verbal conflicts, and ultimately disbandment).

[35] The Soft Shoe Shuffle is a simple Deep Democracy technique. It is like having a conversation on our feet. Somebody says something and stands somewhere in the room. Other people stand close to that person if they agree with the point, or they walk away if they disagree, stand somewhere else and make their point. Very quickly we get a picture of where people stand on various ideas. People who don't like to talk can still participate, simply by walking around in response to what is being said.

[36] Amplifying is a Deep Democracy technique: The facilitator repeats what a person is saying (standing next to him/her), but makes the message louder, sharper, more direct, taking out some of the politeness, magnifying any humour or emotionality that might be there – so that it is easier for others to hear what is truly being said. Amplification often brings out the hidden dynamics in a group, changing the conversation, often taking it deeper more quickly.

steps of decision-making,[37] and then invite them to make a decision about how to go on. The girls said they would defer to me because I seemed to know what I was doing *(laughing).*

So we debriefed the Soft Shoe Shuffle fairly rapidly, and I then went over the four steps of decision-making and wrote them on the flip chart – and then tried to use them on the spot. So I said, you know let's decide as a group what we should do next. I said: we can go back to the Soft Shoe Shuffle and talk more, or I could teach you some more things, we could decide to just stop now and go home, or we could do whatever we want. What do you guys think? And they listed about five options. The youth were talking again at that point. We voted on the options and we got 11 out of 19 votes in favour of staying and changing the topic of the conversation so we can talk about hopes and dreams for the community. Now the other eight people – almost all of the youth– voted for the option to leave *(laughing.)* Because I was aware of this big split in the room I decided to slow down and really spend some time on the last step of the decision-making: asking people what they needed to go along with the majority decision.

That was kind of interesting, asking that question. They said things like, you know, let's make sure we talk about something that everyone can relate to and talk at a level that everyone can understand; that we should be allowed to eat during the conversation whenever we want; that if we're going to be here we all make an effort to be present. And then there was one of the staff who actually had to leave for another meeting at this point, and he kind of used the opportunity to say "thank you, and this was great, and goodbye", and so I generalized that situation as a condition for going forward with our decision:[38] "we recognize that some people may leave, and we're okay with that."

I have to say that we were clearly at some kind of edge in the group because there was a lot of rowdiness and it was really hard to get the youth to be attentive enough to even raise their hands for the decision, so I had to repeat myself several times. And actually, in the course of the decision-making, two of the young boys kind of got kicked out the room. They were being really rowdy and disruptive, punching each other… So the teacher pulled them aside and eventually took them outside, and the two of them didn't come back. And another student was gone for all intents and purposes – he was by this time sleeping next to the door, lying on the floor. So what I am saying is, that "leaving" role really manifested itself. All the other youth stayed for the rest of the session even though they now had the option to go home.

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[37] Deep Democracy articulates some easy-to-remember steps for decision-making: 1. Gain all the views. 2. Make it easy to say "No". 3. Spread the "No" (see who else disagrees, to avoid creating scapegoats). 4. Take a vote and if there is a majority view ask the minority what they need to come along? Then integrate the minority's suggestions into the decision. This is an alternative to both the majority-democracy and the consensus decision-making models.

[38] Part of the understanding in Deep Democracy is that if something is true for one person in a group it is probably true for others as well – even if they are not able to articulate it themselves. This is based on an understanding of the group as a field, instead of a group of individuals. In this case, we can see that there is a role of "leaving" in the group that wants permission and understanding. It is expressed by one staff member, but probably true for several of the youth. So the facilitator makes that permission and understanding explicit and applied to everybody.

And then here we were, talking about our hopes and dreams. It was like a sharing and a brainstorm, and I just started to map what was being said on the flip chart. At this time, by the way, I had also kind of "left the room". I was there in the flesh, but there was a good 10 or 15 minutes when my mind just kind of went *wooosh*, and I was really struggling with being present. I felt confused and numb, almost on the verge of tears. I felt like I wasn't even doing Deep Democracy, I didn't know *what* I was doing, I was just kind of absent-mindedly writing things on a flip chart. And probably a few minutes into that I became aware of my own state. Then I realized, oh, I am just doing the 4-steps of Deep Democracy: I am asking for the different views and bringing out and spreading the views. I eventually was able to bring myself back in.

So people talked about their hopes and dreams and there were a few themes that came out. One was about loving sports and wanting to play basketball, and then somebody said their dream was to put basketball hoops in the Community Hall so that the youth could have a place to play. This had a lot of energy and so I asked, okay well how could we actually make this happen? And then the youth went back to some of the stories they had told a couple of hours earlier when we were talking about the terrorist line. One story is that a while ago the band had put new flooring in the Community Hall, and some of the community members, young people I think, didn't like the new flooring and so they broke into the Hall and ripped it out. And they had complained at the time that they weren't consulted about what kind of floor they wanted. The second story was that the year before the students at the high school had been on a kind of strike when the school principal installed a cell phone jammer and cut off cell phone access on the school grounds. In response the students had gone on strike and refused to go to class, until they finally forced the principal to give them cell phone access again. And I mean this tells you how advanced the terrorist line is in this community: the youth are angry, they are ready to explode.

So then I said, you know, this is some of the history of what has gone wrong in the Hall and at the school before – and they said yeah, it was because the decisions were made top-down and the community members were not involved! So I asked: if we were going to implement the idea of basketball hoops, how would we do it *differently* so it wouldn't be a top-down decision? What could you do instead?

People took up that question and we started listing different options: the students could conduct a survey in the community, they could go door to door and see what the objections might be to basketball hoops and how they can be addressed... And then one of the things they said was actually that the youth could go on strike and force council to make a decision and allocate money for basketball hoops! So the youth were saying, well maybe if we are really loud then we can force them to give us what we want! And then suddenly out of this came the idea of establishing a youth council that would run parallel to the Band Council, and mimic the electoral model and meeting procedures and have some kind of official influence on the band, or can at least bring in the voice of the youth, who are more than 50% of this community. This was apparently not a new idea, but there was a lot of energy around it and we spent the rest of the session, a good 15-20 minutes, hashing it out. The youth seemed a lot more engaged now. At some point one of them said, you know we need a really cool kid champion who can push this

forward, and right away one of the boys raised his hand and said: "I will be the kid champion!" So it was cool, cause the leadership was really showing up in the room. And the adults stayed engaged too, a lot of them said that they wanted to support the youth council.

So yes, we ended on that note. We did a check-out, I asked them what they thought of the meeting and the comments were very positive. Mostly people said that they were feeling really excited and energized by the thinking around the youth council. Some of the youth commented that the basketball conversation really woke them up and now they really want to do what they can to help their community. Other people said that they enjoyed the meeting, the metaphors of Deep Democracy really made sense to them. The teachers talked about being excited and proud of the students who had participated and stuck around. One of the teachers articulated very beautifully something about how different people had engaged in different shapes and forms, and that everybody might be taking away something different from the session. The only negative comment, really, came from Xenia who said she felt kind of heartbroken about the people who had left and was sad that we weren't able to fully engage everybody. But other than that, everyone seemed really happy.

Coach – That sounds like a great ending. What did you do immediately after?

Abrielle– Right after, we – Hanane, Xenia and I– spent a bit of time talking more with the school teachers and they explained to us some of the dynamics of working with the youth – for example that there are some disability issues that they are dealing with. They said they work with the kids every day and they still find it really hard to engage them, so they thought it was amazing that so many of them had sat through the session. And they also said, you know, even if the students weren't talking, we could see that they were engaged, we could see it in their eyes, they were listening to you and they were whispering things to each other – they were engaged.

And then the three of us checked out together. Hanane was very happy with what had happened. But for me there was a feeling of anxiety about the fact that several participants had left, and both Xenia and myself felt anxious about how the staff had found it, whether they saw it as a waste of time? And also we both felt that I had done some Deep Democracy teaching and showed some tools, but it wasn't a very clear teaching. If part of my objective was to train some novice facilitators, I had really failed on that front. The session had felt more like an intervention, rather than a lesson. So I was quickly re-writing my project plans in my head! Because I realized that my idea of teaching some skills to people, and then involving them in facilitating larger community processes was not going to work.

Coach– And how did you feel about how you facilitated?

Abrielle– I felt that I actually facilitated it pretty well. I mean I couldn't have survived that session a year ago! I was able to follow the group pretty well and let it take me where it needed to go. What I had done after the break seemed to have really shifted the energy. Also I was happy with how we left it: the energy at the end was really good. So yeah, most of the anxiety was not so much with how I was leaving the participants but how I was leaving myself and my project! *(laughing)*

SECTION TWO – COACHING AND REFLECTION-ON-ACTION

Coach – There is so much richness here, and I didn't want to interrupt you so I could get the whole picture. And now there are so many different ways we can go with the coaching. One would be an analysis of what took place and what you could have done differently. Or it could be looking at your own personal feelings and where you are at now. What would be most relevant for you and where would you like to go?

Abrielle– I was feeling very emotional about the whole thing last night but I am feeling okay now. And I have to lead another session today, so maybe we should focus on what I could have done differently so that I can properly prepare for my next session.

Coach – Okay. I want to make sure I understand some of the details… at yesterday's session, how many people stayed at the end?

Abrielle – There were three youth and one adult who left.

Coach– And the adult had to go to another meeting and he had told you that before, right?

Abrielle– Yeah.

Coach– So only four people left and 15 stayed, which is pretty good. That's very good. I've done much worse than that! So I must say before we go any further, that I think you did amazingly, even though you don't seem to see that. But you had a very difficult group to work with, and it sounds like this group of teenagers who are on the terrorist line – understandably, because they don't have a voice – finally had a voice. So irrespective of if they "learned" DD, it sounds like the space you created was a safe enough space and that the process held enough that they could have a voice, and they did.

Abrielle– Uhum. Yes, I guess.

Coach– So let's go over the different parts. It sounds like from early on in the check-in, when the teacher spoke on behalf of the youth, there was already an indication that they didn't have a voice, which you picked up on. I am wondering if you could have done a slight intervention at that moment when the teacher spoke and said, you know, "even though this is usually how it is done here, it would be nice if everyone could say their own name". In a very gentle way. Not to feel that you're imposing, but just to say, you know, "this is a method and this is how we do it."

Abrielle– Yeah, I see what you're saying. Honestly I strongly hesitate to go against the community norms of the teachers speaking for the students – or the Elders speaking for the families– in a direct way. Because, my focus really is trying to be respectful of the cultural protocols in the community, which I don't yet 100% understand – so that might be a thing to work towards over the long term: to find a gentle way to assert myself without coming across as rude. I don't think this is the right time for it now.

Coach– Sure. And the other way you could have done it would be to do the check-in as a Soft Shoe Shuffle. You know, somebody says how they're feeling and other people stand next to what is being spoken, and that way almost mapping out the different feelings

and roles in the room. We use this in the really large processes with hundreds of people, have you seen that?

Abrielle– Yeah I think I have seen that. But again, given that the Soft Shoe Shuffle totally didn't work when I later used it in the session I would be nervous about starting off with it.

Coach– Right, but I'm thinking that you might have done the Soft Shoe Shuffle in a very simple and static way, when it is more like – how would I say – more like a warm up.

Abrielle– Oh, like an ice-breaker.

Coach– Yeah, so it doesn't have this feeling of "a big thing" about it. It would be a way to introduce people to this style. Anyway, just as a suggestion to think about.

Abrielle– Okay, yes, that makes sense. I might try that.

Coach– Now, you had this group of youth who were on the terrorist line from the word go. But it sounds like in the Soft Shoe Shuffle is when you really got the resistance showing up. Basically they stepped back and disengaged?

Abrielle– Yes. As I introduced that exercise I had even said, "if you don't like to talk or if you're shy that's okay, you just have to move around and stand next to people. You don't have to talk!" But in retrospect I think it was the actual physical aspect that was the problem. When we debriefed with the teachers after the session they said that many of these youth have been abused as children and they are very hesitant to get close to adults.

Coach– And also it seems like the topic itself marginalized the youth, because they couldn't follow what was going on.

Abrielle– Yes, absolutely. I mean, *I* could barely follow what was going on myself *(laughing)*. Ummm, would you ever… well, I mean at some point I was tempted to somehow amplify the actions of the youth, like the standing around or the lying on the floor or something like that.

Coach– Yes I would absolutely do that.

Abrielle– So I could amplify it physically by lying on the floor myself?

Coach– Exactly, that would be a way of bringing that "I don't want to participate" role into the consciousness.

Abrielle– And that would have been important because that's a big issues in this community: that absenteeism –the lack of accountability and the widespread apathy. In fact that was basically what the adults were talking about.

Coach– And at the same moment the youth were absenting themselves. So what the group was talking about was happening real time in the room.

Abrielle– Yes, exactly. And I was aware of that but didn't know what to do about it.

Coach– So I wonder if you could have said something like that to bring it to the awareness. Like you could say, "well, we are talking about people not being engaged in the community" – and then you would stand or even lie down next to the disengaged

youth– and say, "and maybe we are also that part right now: the not very involved, the absent from the discussion".

Abrielle– Got it.

Coach– Okay then, tell me again, you did a debrief of the Soft Shoe Shuffle? What were the dominant views then?

Abrielle– Well, some people seemed to really have liked it. They said things like the conversation was illuminating, that it was nice to have people stand next to them when they spoke so they didn't feel alone. But the thing that stood out was somebody said "I noticed that some people were participating and some people were not, and as somebody who *was* participating I found this annoying". And then there was almost a kind of defense against that, which came from one of the youth who said, "I was following the conversation, I was listening, I just decided not to move". If I had amplified it, it would be like: "Don't tell me that I am not participating! I *am* participating, thank you very much!!! But I am doing it in my own way. I am not doing what you want me to do, but don't accuse me of being absent!"

Coach– So it sounds like at that point in time there was a fair bit of tension in the room between the desire to participate and the feeling of I either can't or don't want to participate. And that could have been another opportunity for you to bring it into the surface with a little amplification.

Abrielle– Yes, that would have been a good idea.

Coach– I even wonder if you could have introduced a little bit of an argument at that point.[39] Because by now it's obvious that this participation or lack of participation is the big issue in this group and in this community – it's the field's issue. And there may have been a segue into it at that point. But Abrielle, as you hear me say that, what do you think?

Abrielle– Well I agree with you. I think I needed a segue and I missed it. But definitely an argument, if we could have managed to have one, would have helped with the tension.

Coach– Right. So as you think about your next group, just be aware that this dynamic may come up again, since it is so deeply embedded in the context and in the field – and anything that can allow you to go there would be very helpful.

Abrielle– Okay.

Coach– And just to make it very clear and put it in context of your larger learning about using these tools, let me put it this way: You've picked up on a subtlety in doing this

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[39] The Deep Democracy argument is a technique that identifies two opposing opinions or feelings or states (in this case, "I participate" versus "I don't participate") and have people speak from those two sides, one side at a time. Each person can speak from both sides and they often do – since the polarities tend to be present within each of us (e.g. there is part of me that wants to participate, and there is part of me that doesn't). Once both sides have said everything that can be said, insights often emerge for the participants, and there may be a transformation – a lessening of the tension- around that dynamic in the room.

work which is that often the thing to pay attention to is the interpersonal dynamics in the room – *that* is actually the issue, as opposed to the content of what is being talked about. The dynamics itself is playing out what people are trying to talk about, and following the dynamics can actually give you more information than what people are saying. Am I making sense?

Abrielle– Yes.

Coach– And by the way, this often happens in community work and particularly when people are not very verbal, or when people aren't used to going to meetings and talking. The dynamics become the thing that you need to work on, as opposed to the content. And I think you should watch out for that more when you go into your next session.

Abrielle– Uhum.

Coach– Now, all of that having been said, it sounds like the discussion that took place next, the one about the hopes and dreams was very interesting. So, you were using the four steps during that discussion, looking for various views etc. And did you in any way reinforce your teaching of the steps and say "this is what I am doing"?

Abrielle– No, I didn't. That was when I was totally checked out and struggling.

Coach– Sure.

Abrielle– I mean I wasn't even aware myself, it took me a while to be like, "wait a minute what am I doing? Oh, I am doing the four steps!" *(laughing)* But at the time I wasn't conscious.

Coach– Uhum. But it's very interesting… It would be interesting to look at why you checked out at that point in time and what was happening for you. Or we could continue to talk about what happened for the young people during that discussion. What I am really saying is, should we carry on the skills discussion, or should we stop now and look at the deeper stuff for you, why you checked out, cause that would be very telling and give you some good learning too. So what do you feel comfortable doing now?

Abrielle– It kind of scares me to look at the personal stuff, so maybe we should go there!

Coach– And what would you need to make it safe to go there? What's the "no"? If you honour and listen to that part, what does it need?

Abrielle– *(after a pause)* I guess I just need to make sure we have a complete process here, cause I don't want to be emotionally destroyed and then have to go into my next session *(chuckling).*

SECTION THREE– DEEPER COACHING AND INNER WORK

Coach– So, Abrielle, just go back to that point when you were writing on the flip chart and you tuned out. Just tell me what was happening for you.

Abrielle– (*pause)* Many things were happening for me. At one level, I was comfortable with the group's decision and with the idea that anyone could leave. I was kind of

relieved that the people who really didn't want to be there had left because there was a lot less disruption in the room now, and it was way easier to facilitate.

And then at another level, I felt devastated that people had left. I was heartbroken. I felt that I hadn't been engaging enough, that I had failed to change people's mind about how fun it was to be in meetings!

And then at a third level, I was a little bit surprised by the choice of "hopes and dreams" as the topic. I felt like it was a superficial topic, a non-controversial topic. And anyway, they have already *had* that conversation while they were in the planning process. I felt like this was a bit of a cop-out to go back to the surface and talk about motherhood and apple-pie. I guess I got hooked by that. I lost my neutrality[40].

(*Pause)* But overall I would say that the dominant feeling in that moment was one of disappointment and failure.

Coach– Okay, so if we look at that feeling of being disappointed... if you go into that feeling for just a little bit longer... just stay with if for a big longer, take it a bit further... what comes up?

Abrielle– *(after a long pause)* Well, what comes up is a sense that what I'm tackling is a much bigger beast than I thought it was *(chuckling).* That things are actually a lot harder in this community than I expected. And I don't have, I don't have what it takes to do it, or the tool isn't good enough to do it, or maybe a mix of those two things.

Coach– So, it sounds like you're coming into contact with you own sense of impotence in relation to the whole task, am I right?

Abrielle– Yeah, because I think this session was a typical example of what it is like to work in this community. You know, I've read about all sorts of traumas and the frustrations and the different issues. So in a way I have signed up for this with awareness, but when I am actually facing it in this way, I really question whether I have anything to offer. And there is almost a feeling that I have been so arrogant to think that I do. *(chuckling)*

Coach– And now, just stay there in that moment, just allow yourself to feel it, allow yourself to in a way *drown* in it, like "I can't do anything for this community, no matter what I do it's pointless, useless".

Abrielle– *(long pause, starting to weep)*

Coach– And when you can, just take your time, but when you can, just tell me what's happening for you.

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[40] Neutrality on the part of the facilitator is a main principle of Deep Democracy. The idea is that the facilitator can only make a truly inviting and safe space for the participants to reveal their truth, if he or she can be neutral. Neutrality means that I am not attached to any specific idea or perspective, and that I pass no judgment on what is said. This skill is closely associated with compassion and can be developed over time. Neutrality is not a constant state of being (and I don't give up all my own ideas and opinions, permanently) – it's only an attitude that I can take on as a facilitator, in favour of creating a safe space for dialogue.

Abrielle– Suddenly it's really easy for me to see why so many people are disengaged and why nothing gets done *(laughing in the middle of tears).* This sense of despair and hopelessness... that is probably how a lot of the people in the community feel, people who are supposed to be leaders, you know, I can see why they rather stay home and not step up. And maybe this is why the teenagers are disengaged too: they feel powerless in the face of what's happening in the community. *(More weeping.)*

And then immediately, there is a part of me that kind of wants to fight this feeling and say, "well, you know, this is just not a very useful way to think" ... I kind of sense this big battle inside me between the emotional side that is feeling these feelings of despair and wanting to stay home, and the intellectual side which says "if none of us do anything nothing will ever change"!

Coach– So just go into that argument in yourself between the rational side and the emotional side.[41] If you could argue the rational side, what would it say?

Abrielle– *(after a pause, thinking)* The rational side says: basically the reason the world doesn't change is that people have given up. And I am tired of everybody being so down on the possibility of change! And this is my biggest fear of being in a university setting: everybody is so into the criticizing – the planning journals and dissertations are full of analysis of processes and plans that were never good enough but they never have any workable solutions to offer. I think I have never read an academic paper that actually praises a planning process! And so if we believe them, we get paralyzed. Nothing can ever be good enough. This is what makes universities useless *(chuckling).* And I just think, that the mindset of being hopeful or having some kind of belief that things can be different is what we need for things to actually change. And I want to put myself in that mindset. I think I have the ability to put myself in that mindset and a lot of people that I really look up to are working from that place of optimism and being positive. I mean, it might be kind of naïve to think we can make change despite all the odds... But it almost reminds me of that fridge magnet quotes "Given the choice, isn't it always better to believe in magic?" I want to believe in magic!

Coach– Uhum. Great. Anything else from this side? The rational side?

Abrielle– No, I don't think so.

Coach– And from the emotional side now, what would the emotional side say?

Abrielle– I don't even know that it says very much, but it *feels* sober. Maybe it says: look, this is the reality of the situation. There is this community here that is going to be impossible for you to help. The reality of it is, there is a reason these problems have stuck around for so long. Who are you to think you can fix things? And that maybe the academics are right: the situation is too complex and no intervention will be good enough. And also, why bother trying to work here, when you could do something much simpler *(laughing)*? Just go interview some people like everybody else does and write it up and get your dissertation! *(pause)* And also, I have this feeling that I should be

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[41] As mentioned in a previous footnote, the Deep Democracy argument takes place between two sides or two positions. In this case both positions are within myself and I am going to speak from one, then the other. Once all the arguments from each side have been spoken, I will reflect on what insights emerge.

emotionally together at this point in my life, not just for my own sake but also for the baby (*voice shaking*). I should not be throwing myself into these much bigger issues. I want to withdraw from the complicated stuff and make sure my son is safe.

Coach– Anything else from this side?

Abrielle– *(Sighing)* Something is also coming up about my friend Xenia here. I feel that if I withdraw from this project and not bother doing this work, then she can go back to doing the day-to-day administrative work of her job and then she will be more comfortable. She can tune out, and just put her head down and work. She doesn't have to face the despair of the situation with me.

Coach– Anything else from either side?

Abrielle– *(Sighing)* One more thing from the rational side: this is *exactly* how I want to raise this baby, actually. To expose him to the realities of the world and to give him the message that things can change and he can be part of change. More than any other time in my life I want to be in a place of feeling hopeful, because now that I have a child it's not okay that the world is so fucked up– things *have to* change ... for him *(weeping)*.

Coach– (*After a pause)* So now, if you think back at what the two sides said, what struck you or surprised you? What are the grains of truth?

Abrielle– *(Pause)* What strikes me also is that I have an overwhelming feeling that the rational side wins that argument! *(laughing)*

Coach– Uhum, and what's the biggest realization that comes from arguing the rational side?

Abrielle–I think it's something about not wanting to recreate academic systems or mindsets that are limiting. I really want to see myself as not playing into that. I am pretty clear about that– I want to be part of some kind of magic.

Coach– So the grain is "I don't want to be part of this almost critical fatalistic view that nothing can be done, I want to have a view of hope that something can be done". (*Abrielle nodding).* And how are you feeling now?

Abrielle– I feel more clear. I think I am where I am meant to be.

Coach– And what does your grain tell you in terms of how you have to be if you're going to do this work?

Abrielle– That I need to keep connected with the other people, the people I look up to who are working from a place of hope. Because those are the nourishing connections that are going to make it possible for me to go on.

Coach– Uhum. And I want to add something here and if it doesn't fit please throw it out the window. But in terms of the lesson that this group has taught you, it was that they are going to learn, but that their style and their method of learning is not going to be the way that you predicted them to be. And I think you will discover that the way they see things is actually going to be an eye opener for you: you cannot have a rigid expectation when you come into a community like this, with a different culture and history. You meant to teach them some tools, and maybe they didn't learn it in the way you expected,

but they experienced something and they got something from it. And maybe you need to be open minded about what it means to give something here, to be helpful in this community.

Abrielle– Yeah, that fits really well.

Coach– And how does it feel now, does it feel complete?

Abrielle– Yeah, I think so.

Coach– Well, I am going to suggest that we leave it here and know that this feeling that you're feeling now will allow you to be more empathic and compassionate to this group. And to go into your next session with this feeling, plus what you originally wanted to do I think will be very helpful.

Abrielle– Yeah, it will.

Coach– Please know that I am proud of you and I think you're learning a lot in the process. And I'll speak with you again at our next scheduled time unless you need me before that.

Abrielle– Thanks, Myrna[42].

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[42] As I proceeded with my fieldwork, I decided to work with the teenagers separately from the adults. My discomfort around silence and lack of participation eventually lessened and meeting became more engaging and successful. I continued to struggle with my tendency for despair and hopelessness as you will see in upcoming stories.

The idea of a youth council, which had excited us so much during the session, never got off the ground – apparently because the "kid champion" left the community. But the dreams for the community hall and the basketball courts became a reality. The process of renovating the hall was highly participatory, as we had envisioned it together in our session.

Some interesting things happened in the realm of governance too. The band manager put in place some changes into the council meeting procedures that increased its effectiveness significantly. A new band council, voted in earlier in 2012, is seen as being more accountable to the community. Meanwhile, the community members seem to have become more engaged, and less blaming of the leadership. During one of my last trips I witnessed community members waiting for up to six hours for quorum at an all-band meeting to vote on proposals to spend the band's money on culture and youth recreation. (Both proposals passed).

DEEP DEMOCRACY WORKSHOPS

By Aftab Erfan & Jessie Hemphill

During the first week of November, approximately 20 members of our community, including Band Office staff and a group of students from the Eke Me-xi School, had a chance to learn about working better with groups. The trainings were on Deep Democracy, a facilitation method from South Africa that focuses on making decisions together and honouring the wisdom of each person. They were held at the Elders' Centre and led by Aftab Erfan, a graduate student from the University of British Columbia, who is helping us implement some of the CCP action items.

Here is a taste of the ideas covered in the workshops and the discussions we had:

Whenever a group (a family, a class, a business, a community, a society) comes together, often one or a few people make decisions on behalf of everybody else without consulting them. We may call these people "leaders" at first, but when they get too far removed from the rest of the group they begin to be more like "kings". Inevitably, when there is a "king" making all the decisions, others who don't have a voice begin to feel left out and upset. They may start to go against the king's orders – first quietly (through jokes, gossip etc) and then more loudly (through strikes, attacks etc). A wise king, or an effective leader, is one who recognizes the wisdom that every individual in the group has and tries to include that wisdom in the decision making. **When everybody feels like they have a voice, then they work with the leader instead of working against the leader.**

During one workshop, we talked about leadership in the G&N community. Most participants felt that it's important to improve communications between the leaders and community members, so that we avoid having the "king ruling over his subjects".

Most participants also agreed that as community members we need to hold our leaders accountable and step up to take part in conversations about how the community is run. **Part of holding ourselves accountable as community members is to be more thoughtful and engaged when we elect our leaders: we need to elect people whom we know and trust, but also people who are qualified and competent and have leadership qualities.** (Think about this as you go to the polls for the Band Council by-election in a couple of weeks!)

[Continued next page]

9

Illustration 5: GN Nations Yo! News (11/09/2010)
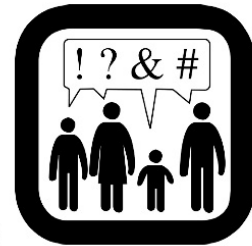
One of the best things about the workshop was having a mix of youth and adults together. The young people struggled at times to participate in the political conversation and were feeling left out and bored. But half-way through the workshop we used democracy to vote on how we should proceed. Using the wisdom of the entire group we voted to start talking about our hopes and dreams, and to bring the conversation to a level that could engage everyone.

This shifted the dynamics of the group. Some people had to leave, but those who stayed became much more enthusiastically engaged in the conversation.

As we talked about our hopes and dreams for the future several themes emerged. **One idea that several people shared was to put some basketball hoops in the Commu-nity Hall so that young people can reach their dreams of becoming excep-tional basketball players.** We talked about how we might go about doing a simple project like this without playing "king" and leaving out parts of the community. (After all, we all know that when people feel excluded and resentful they are capable of ripping up the new flooring in the Hall!) Here are some ideas that emerged, most of which the students are able to take on:
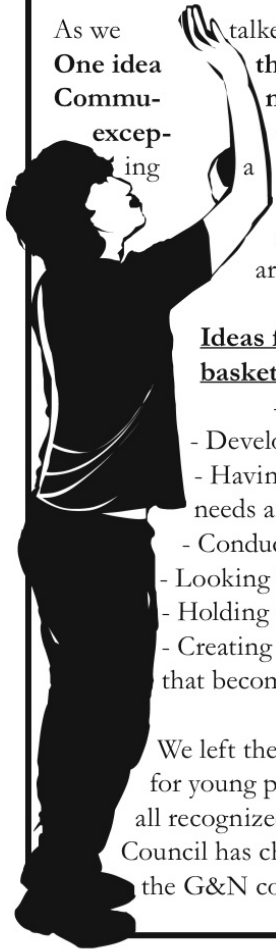
Ideas for achieving our dream of putting basketball hoops in the Hall:
- Writing a letter requesting support from the Band Office
- Developing a Hall policy that reflects everyone's needs
- Having individual conversations with community (including youth) about their needs and use of the Hall
- Conducting a door-to-door survey
- Looking into past initiatives: what has been done already
- Holding Chief and Council responsible for making decisions
- Creating a Youth Council that helps advocate for the interests of young people and that become a model for good governance

We left the workshop energized by the idea of a Youth Council, and the potential for young people to become leaders. In light of what we learned in this workshop, we all recognized that collaboration is important and it is difficult. The emerging Youth Council has challenges to meet, but it also has the possibility to make a better future for the G&N community: one little basketball hoop dream at a time!

82

2.5. Something is resonating

[Act 1, Scene 1]

(Abrielle, Ravenna, Hanane and Xenia at the dinner table eating fish and mashed potatoes.)

Abrielle– Hey, do you want me to take my baby back? I'm almost done my meal.

Ravenna *(bouncing Ocean up and down on her knee)*– No dude, we're good buddies now.

Abrielle *(smiling)*– Thank you so much for staying with him so I could run the workshop.

Ravenna– Of course! It was a pleasure. But I won't lie, I also feel like I missed out on some juicy stuff.

Hanane– It's true, you kind of did! It was a fascinating session.

Xenia– It *was* very interesting. It was a tough session – which it *always* is with community members! And the more I think about it the more I appreciate some of what you did Abrielle... I know that you have already debriefed it to death, but I have a couple of questions about your facilitation, if you don't mind going back into that.

Abrielle– Oh sure, yes, tell me!

Xenia– Ummm, well, what I thought was cool was that you seemed to have all these tools and techniques and exercises – and you would kind of decide on the spot what you were going to use. I haven't really seen that before – cause usually I see facilitators come in and they have a set of activities designed for the session and they have an agenda printed up that says "this is what we are going to do for the next 3 hours", broken down for every 15 minutes, you know? You didn't seem to be working that way.

Abrielle – Well, I did have an idea for how the session was going to go, like a basic program design that we talked about before hand…

Xenia– Right, right, but you seemed to abandon it almost immediately!

Hanane – Based on what we found in the room and the actual dynamics of what unfolded.

Abrielle– Yes, sure.

Ravenna– I would guess that what you probably saw, which is quite characteristic of Deep Democracy practitioners and quite rare to see in other facilitator types, is the display of neutrality.

Xenia– Tell me more about that – "neutrality".

Ravenna– Well, it's actually quite a controversial concept in the facilitation, mediation field (Kolb and associates, 1997). Basically, to be neutral means that you as facilitator don't have a bias towards any specific ideas or truths (that's called content-neutrality), or towards any specific meeting procedures or outcomes (that's called process-

neutrality). Now, There are many people who think that it's not appropriate – because they think facilitators should actively work towards something, like agreement or justice or whatever (e.g. Susskind cited in Kolb and Associates, 1997, p.310). And there are many others who think it's not feasible –because they say, no matter how hard you try to deny your biases you will always have them (e.g. Rogers cited in LeBaron 2002, p. 302). In Deep Democracy we take a very particular view on neutrality, which is that neutrality is not so much a letting-go of one's identity or bias or even one's larger agenda (like justice, or peace-making), but as *a temporary and complete suspension of judgment*, so that we can make a different kind of conversation, and different kinds of solutions to problems possible. So we intentionally let go of any attachment to both outcomes and process design, and instead take our cues for what to do entirely from the group involved in the conversation.

 Xenia– Sounds hard!

Hanane– It's hard! And in reality, we all lose our neutrality when we are working, and then we try really hard to get it back, and then we lose it again and then try really hard to get it back again.

Xenia– Okay, fair enough. But what I am still wondering, I guess, is how you make your decisions from that neutral place. Like, how do you figure out when to adjust or abandon the exercise, and what dynamics to pick up on and what exactly to say? Cause it looks almost like magic! I mean, you seemed to do it intuitively Abrielle. And you're obviously very intuitive… Is that what's needed to be able to facilitate this way?

Abrielle *(thinking for a while, others watching)* – Hmmm. It's interesting to me that you call it intuition. Cause I really don't see it as intuition.

Xenia– No?

Abrielle– No, not really. I see it more as "I've learned the ropes" and when I am neutral and not getting in my own way, I can just see quite clearly what needs to be done… It kind of reminds me actually, of when I first had Ocean. *(She looks over at the small boy who is happily pumping his legs and making little sounds in Ravenna's arms.)* For the first few months I felt like shit because I kept thinking that I should have this intuitive way of knowing what to do with him– and I just didn't. I felt like I didn't have the mothers' instinct that I was supposed to have. And I was totally in despair about it… and then, somewhere around three or four months into it, I suddenly began to feel like my motherly instincts "turned on" like a switch. I would suddenly get a sense of what was going on with him and I would know what to do about it. It wasn't that I suddenly became intuitive, it was that I learned to read the subtle signals in Ocean's behaviour, in his facial expressions, in how he moves his body, the kinds of cries he makes. The signals were subtle and invisible to everybody else who hadn't been staring at my baby for four months! But to me they were obvious.

Hanane– Like, you had learned enough about him to recognize a signal when you saw it, and know what it meant.

Abrielle– Yeah, exactly. I don't think there is some kind of magical intuitive power that you get born with. I think you just learn it like a skill.

Xenia– Interesting.

Ravenna– Well, and I would say that what you describe is one definition of intuition, which is intuition as a form of acquired knowledge, the way Aristotle talked about it *(the others nod)*.

Abrielle– Yeah. I wonder how other facilitators think about this?

Ravenna– It's pretty rare that facilitators talk or write specifically about intuition. I can think of one, Linda Colburn, who says that working intuitively means reading the nonverbal, psychological and spiritual cues and acting on them (cited in LeBaron, 2002 and in Kolb and Associates, 1997), which is inline with what you're describing, right?

Abrielle– Yes. I see it as the reading of nonverbal cues: participants' body language, tone of voice, my own emotional signals, my own body symptoms etc. And also I see it as reading the verbal cues that others don't always pay attention to: ideas that cycle in the group and keep being repeated, statements that stand out and make us uncomfortable, things that we stay silent on. I'm reading these cues and I am literally learning from them about how I should be adjusting what I do.

Xenia– Uhum *(nodding)*.

Hanane– So, if we take this conversation back to what you did in the workshop, what were you reading, what were you learning and how were you adjusting?

Abrielle– Well, right at the very start, the fact that the teenagers didn't check in was a signal. I right away began to suspect that having a voice and not having a voice is a tension. So the first thing I did was slow down the pace to see if that would help bring quiet voices out. It didn't and I got more cues about disengagement from the body language of the teenagers –sleeping in their chairs and lying on the floor. So then I changed techniques and tried the Soft Shoe Shuffle to see if I could get them engaged. Again, I couldn't...

Hanane– And that was obvious again from the body language and the way the teenagers were standing on the outside...

Abrielle – Yes. So I was learning that the voicelessness and disengagement cannot be addressed superficially – they are not about how fast the meeting is going or about whether we are sitting in chairs or not, they are about something more fundamental. So I changed techniques again and tried the decision-making process, and I think that finally shifted things, because finally the teenagers (and others) were given a voice in whether or not they wanted to be there in the first place, which was a more fundamental question. Once we got over that, then they got a lot more engaged.

Xenia– Uhum. So you're basically looking and listening for the cues, you're learning from them, you're making little adjustments like changing the pace, or you're trying a new form or technique – and then you keep looking and listening to see if it's working or if you need to adjust again.

Abrielle– Yeah, its something like that. That's how you follow the energy of the group.

(Abrielle now takes Ocean from Ravenna who has been rocking and keeping him happy during the conversation. Xenia and Hanane clear off the table as Ravenna opens up her computer.)

Ravenna– Well, you should be glad to know that there is positive FaceBook gossip about your workshop.

Abrielle *(as she smiles and plays with Ocean)*– Really? What are people saying?

Ravenna – "I enjoyed the workshop held recently re: "Deep Democracy" and highly recommend it to others here in the community. We have a real opportunity here." With a link to the DD website.

Hanane– That's nice!

Ravenna – Then someone comments "Thank you for posting this website, very interesting, and neat that Port Hardy is listed as a location for courses!"

Abrielle– Sweet!

Ravenna– Hmmm, this is interesting. Someone else comments on the link: "This is great stuff. Reminiscent of the principles within Potlatch Law and Kwakwaka'wakw culture." … What do you think that means, Xenia?

Xenia– I'm not sure exactly. *(Looks at the computer screen)* Hmmm. The comment is made by one of our community members who lives out in Vancouver, I think.

Ravenna– …principles within Potlatch Law and Kwakwaka'wakw culture…

Xenia– … maybe he just means that it is very participatory. That everyone has a voice and everyone is seen to have wisdom.

Ravenna– This who thing is really interesting to me, actually. I mean, you know the workshop was what it was, and in some ways it worked and in some ways it didn't work – but my general impression is that Deep Democracy is really resonating in this community. Would you agree?

Xenia– Yeah, I think it is landing.

Ravenna– Why do you think that is?

(A silence as they all think about it.)

Xenia– Well, I think that the approach to facilitation that we've just been talking about resonate very well here. Cause if there is one thing that community members can't stand it is outsiders who come here with a heavy-handed agenda and with goals and deliverables that they stick to at all costs – because they are required by some program or funding agency. We've just seen so much of that, and your approach is pretty well the opposite. And it sounds to me like Deep Democracy is really giving you a kind of model and platform to be in service of the community in a very natural and organic way. I think people could already sense that in the first hour of the workshop – even if they couldn't tell you it was called Deep Democracy.

(Nodding around the table and more thinking as Abrielle now walks around the room with Ocean trying to put him to sleep.)

Hanane– I tend to think that one important thing we have in our favour is the iceberg metaphor – and more generally, that the concepts of Deep Democracy have been translated into such clear and accessible metaphors. People just connect with the language we are speaking. I must say I wasn't really sure about the iceberg metaphor to describe the collective conscious and unconscious in the context of this community– because it's not like community members here have ever seen an iceberg, and hardly anybody would be familiar with the Freudian or Jungian use of that term. And I was remembering our DD colleagues in Kenya who had to start talking about an anthill instead of an iceberg because the African communities just have no concept of what an iceberg is! (Georgina Veldhorst and Fred Witteveen, Deep Democracy practitioners, pers. comm.) But for whatever reason it seemed to resonate here.

Xenia– Yeah, I think the concept of water level is very familiar to people here, and especially the metaphor of the fish under the waterline made a lot of sense. In the break people were joking that we've got so many fish under the water in this community that we've got to go get the gillnets to catch them all! I felt like they were resonating so strongly with the content of the workshop that they were even making the metaphors their own.

Hanane– Even the story of the king and the peasants who eventually become terrorists seemed to resonate a lot, especially with the teenagers. Imagine if we had tried to talk about authority figures and authority-resisters without using that metaphor – or a metaphor like it. I just don't think we would have got the same response. I think the central concept of Deep Democracy are very well packaged in these metaphors and that's a real strength of what we're working with.

(More nodding around the room.)

Ravenna– The other thing that I have always appreciated about Deep Democracy is that it has these… what can I call them? "Accelerators" and "decelerators"? What I mean is, there is an appreciation for the value of diving under the waterline, for accelerating the process of saying the things we don't typically say, and there are specific tools for cutting deep into the issues we're talking about – the argument and amplification being the most obvious ones… But at the same time there is a real respect for whether and/or how and/or how quickly people want to go there. So, even as we are about to go into a deeper conversation about something, we slow down and do a lot of work with the group to see if it is ready to go there and what every individual needs to be able to go there safely. There is no "throwing the people in the deep end", no making people dive without their permission. Instead there is a lot of respect for wisdom of the edges and of edge behaviour.

Abrielle– That's true. It's quite a different approach from a lot of 'therapeutic' or 'self development' or 'conscious raising' workshops I have taken when you are literally thrown into this powerful processes, whether you want to go there or not. And if you resist you're made to feel like you're a wuss or something!

Ravenna– Or into artistic processes, right? Like, you suddenly find yourself uncovering something really serious through movement or sound or imagery that you really weren't ready for, and that can be more traumatizing in itself.

Hanane– Yes, I think without that respect for safety, and without those "decelerators" that you're talking about, facilitators can do violence to people they work with. And Deep Democracy has the most explicit decelerators I have seen in any methodology.

Xenia– And those are particularly important here because there is so much trauma and so much pain, and people are sensitive to that kind of tendency for violence and re-traumatization. So yes, the fact that you're consciously creating that safe space and respecting whether people want to dive or not is probably really important.

(They all consider this. Abrielle now covers a sleeping Ocean in a blanket and lays him down on the couch.)

Abrielle– I think you guys have probably nailed it – and I have another thought which may be a bit of a stretch... but I keep wondering if Deep Democracy actually resonates at a philosophical level with Indigenous worldviews more than most other facilitation techniques.

Hanane– How do you mean?

Abrielle– Well, to put it most simply, Deep Democracy is influenced by the Eastern religions. Mindell drew extensively from Taoism, and Myrna too is quite inspired by Buddhism– and I wonder if these worldviews are actually quite close to the Indigenous worldviews.

Hanane– Hmmm. You remind me... I think there is a theory that North America's native people actually came from Asia at some point and brought the Asian worldview to their nomadic life here... (Ross, 1974, p.xxxi) Isn't that true?

Ravenna– Yeah, that is the thinking. It's an interesting idea you've got there Abrielle – although it's hard to see how the philosophical underpinnings of the methodology would be responsible for the connection here, because the philosophical underpinnings are implicit in the way we practice Deep Democracy, but we don't explicitly talk about them in an introductory workshop.

Abrielle– Yes, yes. That's why I am saying this may be a bit of a stretch...

Ravenna– But maybe you're right, maybe people just pick up on the similarities at a subtle, even unconscious level. Maybe that's why this guy on FaceBook is comparing DD to ancient Kwakwaka'wakw principles...

Hanane– So wait, what are you talking about when you say philosophical underpinnings?

Abrielle– I was thinking, for example, about the idea of the collective unconscious, which is central to DD. It comes from Jung but has never been 100% accepted in the mainstream Western view of psychology – it has remained on the margins. But that belief in the collective unconscious is not so far away from the Indigenous belief in a kind of metaphysical realm that surfaces through dreams and prayers and visions and ceremonial rituals (Cardinal 2001 and Ermine 1999 both cited in Kovach, 2009, p.57), which are exactly the channels Jung was using to access the collective unconscious. Another example would be the idea of the Tao, and the idea of following the Tao as the most central concept in Mindell's process work and also in DD (Mindell, 1985). And in

some ways Tao is very close to the concept of a sacred but invisible energy source that is talked about in Indigenous cultures (Cajete, 1999; Cardinal and Hildebrandt, 2000; Little Bear, 2000 all cited in Kovach, 2009, p.57). Another similarity might be a basic belief in a "yin and yang" model – the belief that the world is made up of opposites forces that are to be embraced. Indigenous stories are often about that: how winter gives summer its definition, how darkness is important for appreciating the light, how evil is necessary in the world, how opposition is essential to understanding wisdom, love, respect, bravery, honesty (Borrows, 2010). The opposites are there to engage with, to help us make our decisions, not to scare us away – exactly the way we think of them in Deep Democracy. And I mean, I don't know a lot about these things but from my rudimentary readings, there appear to be some central parallels.

Ravenna – Yes, I think you might be onto something. At the very least I think people in a community like this are less likely to resist Deep Democracy because it doesn't have the Western worldview stench that Indigenous people can instinctively smell from a mile away!

(The silently consider all this for a few minutes.)

Hanane– Whatever the reason, I am so relieved our stuff is resonating here.

Abrielle and Ravenna *(simultaneously)*– Me too!

Abrielle– I just don't know how I would survive if this wasn't the case.

Xenia *(laughing)* – You guys are funny. I want to say, "I told you so!", but I won't! Let's just eat more crabapple jelly...

2.6. Illusions of helpless heroines

[Abrielle's story][43]

I've always been told, about working in remote Aboriginal communities, that one day you arrive on location, your schedule of activities in hand, and there has been a death in the community, and everything is shut down, and you might as well throw your entire schedule out the window, knowing you probably will get nothing done.

This is that day.

I fly in with Ocean, make it in despite the stormy skies and several planes stuck in even stormier locations. The darkness above our heads appropriately matches the solemn air on the ground among community members. The person who has died, I soon gather, was a young man with a history of substance abuse. This time he did not survive the overdose. While he was in the hospital, his sixteen-year-old sister was also brought in for alcohol poisoning. She had her stomach pumped, then crawled in next to him, and he made her promise she would never drink again, before he died.

I never met the young man, but the sixteen-year-old is one of the girls I am working with. She is clever and confident, speaks in a matter-of-fact kind of way, and carries my baby around on her hip with more skill than I do. I meet with her and her friends in the bubble of their classroom to talk about life and their thoughts for their future, but what is there to talk about?! *This* is her reality: She lives in a place where death is in many ways more prominent than life itself. She has lost too many family members and friends to suicide, addiction, disease, house fires... And she is constantly at risk herself. Thinking about her today sends a shiver up my spine. Next to her I know nothing of death. Sure, I have lived through the passing of grandparents and great-grandparents, but their passing happened at a ripe old age and in far away places. I didn't even travel for their funerals. I wouldn't know what it is like to lose someone who is not supposed to die yet. My academic training tells me that I have rank and status compared to this

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[43] Based on a supervision call with Myrna Lewis, Oct 2011. Both Abrielle's and Ravenna's metaphors emerged as part of the same session for me. I have separated them out here for further exploration.

young girl – because of my skin colour, education, class, age… Still, I feel completely out-ranked by her. I am naïve and clueless next to her. She has amassed more psychological rank by nature of what she has lived through, than I can ever hope for through my attempts at psychic growth and spiritual development[44].

As I think about my work here I fill up with fear. If I lose one of the young people half way through the project, I don't know what I will do. How can I go on with my 'research', knowing we were in the middle of a conversation that could have saved a person's life but didn't (if I had thought of the right thing to say, if I had pushed harder for a confession, or if I hadn't pushed so hard)? How will I ever know if I was responsible for someone taking their own life? How do I work with a whole community of people who are "at risk"? And how could I *not* work with them, having witnessed what I have already seen?

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The seriousness of the situation clearly asks for my concentration and careful consideration. Yet my powers of concentration and careful consideration are nearly impossible to access. I barely have enough mental space to quickly jot down these notes, while my son is momentarily busy with a piece of dried apple.
I am here with a six-months-old infant, which means I haven't had a good sleep in over six months. It's been particularly bad recently, since Ocean started waking up every hour at night. Sometimes it takes an hour of nursing and rocking and soothing to comfort him back to sleep. Other times he falls back asleep right away, but I get bogged down in worrisome thoughts or bothered by a sore shoulder or bad back, so I've been averaging about four hours of sleep per night. Nights, which used to be reserved for rest and rejuvenation, are now experienced as a regular obstacle-course, a mental exercise of dealing with whatever hurdles come my way. I dread going to bed. I didn't even know people could survive for this long on so little sleep.

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[44] For a great discussion on rank please see Mindell, 1997, chapters 3, 4 and 5

Ocean's neediness continues throughout the day. Now that he can crawl I do a lot of consoling after a bad fall, and rescuing from stairs or dogs or some other danger. It feels like I can't take my eyes off him, and often I literally cannot put him down. He's stuck to me like an appendage, usually attached at my neck, shoulder, or breast. Oh yes, there is also the constant nursing: every three hours, plus whenever I can't find another effective method of making everything all right. I nurse so often that I am 20 pounds underweight, and struggling to eat enough to stabilize at that. My reserves are literally and figuratively exhausted, and so I get sick regularly, and in particular, every time I travel.

I have chosen to come here, far from my family, so that I can do this work. Despite everybody's offers of holding my baby and entertaining him here and there, I feel essentially alone. I alone am "mom". Nobody can do enough to help! There is no helping the situation. I have no respite from this. I am ultimately helpless.

■■■

[Ravenna's metaphor]

I watch Abrielle struggle and I listen to her stories, or her feelings of helplessness. She asks me if I feel it too and of course in a way I do, not because of an infant who constantly needs me, but because we have walked into a situation in this community that is – if we're totally honest– in many ways "helpless" – too difficult to do anything about. Abrielle asks me to sink into that feeling, look around in my imagination and describe what I see. As I do, the feeling of helplessness becomes overwhelming, then numbing and a little absurd. Then suddenly an image comes to me: "It feels like I am an idiot trying to do something completely impossible! I'm Don Quixote, fighting windmills!"

Abrielle laughs. The image of Don Quixote surprises us both and grabs our attention at the same time. Why do I recall this half-mad horse-riding knight-errant who captured my imagination briefly as a teen bookworm, but not since? I am initially annoyed to

realize I am imagining myself as a knight, and therefore my task as a kind of crusade or war – completely aware of the overuse of that metaphor in our language, and in our society. Couldn't I imagine myself as a journey-woman or some other peaceful, hippy, 70s cliché!? I decide to stay with the warrior metaphor for a minute, noticing that whether I like it or not, for me it is very alive: it is a metaphor I live by (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). I also quickly remember recent dreams, in which I am charged with commanding a small army, usually in some ridiculous battle that resembles a synchronized dance routine more than modern warfare. (My "men" and I quickly lose heart in the dream, when it turns out that we're going up against the team from the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics…)

But back to Don Quixote:

My identification with him first strikes me as containing important warnings. Several disconcerting aspects of this madman's story resonate with mine:

- o How did Don Quixote go mad? Well, he was reading too many medieval chivalric romance novels, to the extent that their reality started to seep into his and he could no longer distinguish between what he saw in front of his eyes, and what he imagined seeing. It is possible that my vision is similarly compromised by all the literature I've been reading?! After all, pretty well all I did in the first two years of my PhD, immediately before I came here, was reading. I've read studies on all the "problems" here, and I've read lots about what can be done. How much do I let that reading shape what I am actually looking at? How do I keep my "expertise" in check and prevent it from blinding me?

- o At the centre of Don Quixote's insanity, is his talent for exaggeration. There is his overblown sense of his own importance and competence – he thought he was a famous knight on a mission to save the world from injustice. He elevated his peasant friend to a gentleman, his skinny horse to a majestic stallion, and a neighbouring farm girl who he barely knew to his great "lady love". And of course, he famously took windmills to be ferocious giants, inns to be enormous castles, chariots to be traps for captive ladies, prostitutes to be princesses… Do

I similarly have a tendency for narcissism, grandiosity, and romanticization? I know I do! Certainly my proposal for the work here is ridiculously ambitious. How do I ensure that I don't become delusional and lose my sense of perspective, given these tendencies?

- o Don Quixote is repeatedly beaten up during his adventures, not during his imaginary battles necessarily, but because he often fiercely interferes in things that are none of his business. Certainly my situation here is different in that I have been invited to come into this community and bring what I have with me, but it is certainly also true that what I am doing may be seen as meddling by different parts of the community. Perhaps realistically my "welcome" needs to be continuously negotiated and renewed, particularly with every new step and in every new group. How do I make sure that I don't assume I am wanted, and graciously accept when I am not?

These is also something amazing about the insanity of my knight-errant friend that resonates strongly and helps me articulate something about my purpose in being here:

- o I love that Don Quixote has access to his imagination. In some way, the imaginary world that he sees is perhaps more "true" than what the rest of us are looking at. At a symbolic level, windmills *were* the giants of Europe's industrial age, putting so many people out of work. And for all we know, rich ladies *were* miserable captives, and prostitutes the true queens! Don Quixote could see that when no one else could. I know I am seeing apparently odd things in this community too: I see the bitterest Band Council critics as holding the most important pieces of wisdom, and the shy teenage mothers on the margins of the community as its most promising leaders. Could my naive and unusual ways of seeing create new spaces of possibility in this place?
- o Don Quixote is an idealist if there ever was one. To the rest of society, his quest for justice is laughable, but when we see so much that is wrong isn't fighting back the only noble course of action? There is something inspiring in this foolishness. Perhaps the same is true of my foolish, lofty and overly ambitious plans for what I might do in this community. Maybe it's silly to think I can

actually make a difference here, that I can enable some kind of movement in the direction of healing. Nonetheless, could my initiative inspire unexpected and otherwise impossible developments?

o And finally, Don Quixote seems to be holding up a mirror for me to see something in myself that I have not yet come to understand. He goes up against the impossible – this resonates strongly. That's me! I like the challenge. I am attracted in believing in and trying to do impossible things. I am attracted to this project because logically it is next to impossible to change historical patterns in a community. That's what makes it worthwhile. I wouldn't bother to do it, if it was straightforward! That would be no fun. And yet, I have not come to find peace with my role in an impossible situation. I have not yet learned how to be with the possibility that I might actually fail in this challenge, or that I might come out with nothing to show for my work. What would I gain if I was able to be at home with my own powerlessness?

■■■

[Abrielle's metaphor]

As I listen to Ravenna's musings and stay in touch with my own helplessness a new image begins to emerge for me:

I am not a knight and I have no shiny armor. Instead I am a woman in a plain dress, tied down with a baby, sitting at a deathbed, accompanying somebody who is about to die. I lean forward and search for the dying person's eyes, at this moment when we both know his death is imminent. I come face to face with my sense of impotence. There is simply nothing I can do to shift the situation. It is out of my control. Suddenly all my knowledge, all my talents and cleverness is of no use. But I feel oddly calm. I don't have any need to panic. I don't need to say anything or try to make anything happen. There is nothing for me to do.

Instead, it's the dying person who says a few words in the spaciousness of my silence. Maybe he remembers some meaningful time in his life, a moment of transformation or regret or pure joy. Maybe he tells me about his first love and heartbreak, or the moment he held his child for the first time, or how jealous he has been of his younger brother. Maybe he makes sense of his life or submits to its meaninglessness. Maybe he experiences some kind of connection with the human experience of being born, living through life, and dying. I don't have to respond. I don't have to give advice or commiserate. All I can do is be present to him. Whatever I can give this moment, I can give in my full presence.

It's not that the community I am working with is dying. I don't believe that for a minute. But the truth is that many people within it are in such a state of despair that they choose to escape, or are forced to quit. And when people are in that much despair, it is easy to see why any expertise, any wise solution, or any intellectual answers to the questions of life are going to be meaningless. There is no crusader that can save them. Perhaps the best way for me to be is to be there with my powerlessness, with my lack of answers, my own exhausted and helpless state of being– similar to how I would be at a deathbed. After all, I do absolutely connect with this community at the level of the quintessential human experience, even if my circumstances have been very different in life. The toughness of my parenting situation is an ally: it makes me anything but alone in this community. Sleeplessness, exhaustion, constantly-needing-to-give, having-no-way-out : these are the quintessential experiences of being a parent with young children. And in this community, most people have more than one young child, and more than only young children to worry about. The people I am working with here also have no respite from the hardship of their lives. They literally cannot put their lives down, come to a workshop and talk about nice things, and then return home. They will bring their children with them to meetings, like appendages. They will bring the fresh and the old wounds and the helplessness with them. My helplessness is a small window into their experience. We can meet here, at the common denominator of the human path. We can meet as equals in our incredible helplessness.

Illustration 6: Here Be Giants to Fight

2.7. What ethics are we on?

[Act 1, Scene 2]

(Hanane and Abrielle cooking, Ocean roaming around on the floor as Ravenna arrives.)

Ravenna – Smells good in here.

Hanane– Oh, hey Ravenna.

Ravenna– Wow, look at this, you guys made a feast.

Hanane *(sounding disappointed)* – Well you know, we figured we might as well cook since we had nothing else we could do all day.

Ravenna– I know, everything is kind of up in the air, isn't it? Is Xenia at the memorial service?

Hanane – No. She had to stay at the office and redo a bunch of work since the Community Fund Meeting is being postponed to next week.

Ravenna – You're kidding! The Community Fund Meeting isn't happening this week?

Hanane *(bitterly, going into the pantry)* – Nope!

Abrielle *(picking up Ocean who is getting fussy)* – Yeah, it kind of sucks for us. *(Whispering to Ravenna, gesturing in the direction of the pantry)* She's super disappointed, because we timed this trip to be here specifically for the Fund Meeting and now it's not happening. Also, she was supposed to go do visual recording at the Fund leadership meeting, but was un-invited at the last minute cause the Chair remembered it was an in-camera meeting!

(Ravenna shakes her head and helps set the table. Ocean continues to be fussy and Abrielle sits at the table nursing him as Xenia enters.)

Xenia– Hey girls.

Hanane– You're just in time to eat.

Xenia *(kissing Ocean's head, then sighing as she collapses in a chair at the table)* – Ahhhh, what a day!

Abrielle – Was it rough?

Xenia– Well, I am just kind of frustrated cause… I mean, I feel bad saying it because somebody has died and it's obviously a very hard time for so many people… but we put so much into organizing and advertising these community events and they often get cancelled. Sometimes it feels like we can't get anything done. It's also just extra frustrating because last year Council passed this motion that we *wouldn't* shut down the Band Office, and the whole community, every time there was a death. That we would *only* shut down if an Elder passed, in honour of the Elder and their family… And in this case, it's clearly *not* an Elder who has passed, but somehow nobody seems to remember that Council decision! It's like our Council members go into the trouble to make these policies, but then they themselves don't honour them. It's frustrating, right?

Abrielle – Totally.

Xenia– Sorry, I am ranting. *(Then looking at Hanane)* Hey, I am so sorry you didn't get into the Community Fund leadership meeting. The Chair was all excited about having you when I mentioned it yesterday, but I guess he changed his mind about that.

Hanane– It's okay. I totally understand.

Xenia– I guess you guys will miss the large meeting now too. Shoot.

Hanane – Well, yeah, we should talk about whether we should stay some extra days or go home as planned... But let's eat first. I'm at the end of my energy.

Xenia– This food looks amazing. Thank you.

(They serve themselves and start to eat.)

Ravenna– Hey look, I'm gonna teach Ocean how to use a fork!

(Several failed attempts, but Ocean finally picks up a piece of potato with a fork and carefully puts it in his mouth, to everybody's excitement. Then spits it out, to everyone's laughter.)

Xenia– Potato rejected!

Ravenna – *(Trying to keep it light)* Hey, speaking of rejections: I got an email from the Ethics Review Board today, and our application has once again been turned down.

Abrielle *(surprised)*– Again!?

Hanane *(laughs out loud and rubs her eyes)* – Oh boy. This is getting absurd.

Abrielle– What is it, the third time we get rejected?

Ravenna – *Fourth* time, baby! It's got to be a record! We should get a medal for it.

Xenia– This is the ethics application for doing research here?

Ravenna– Yup. We keep getting rejected.

Xenia– What's the problem?

Ravenna– Well, it's actually very interesting, if I am allowed to call it that. At the heart of it, the whole idea behind the ethical review is to "minimize the researchers' impact on the research subjects". Which makes sense, if you're doing, like, medical research – you want to make sure your research isn't harmful to the people who are taking the trial pills or whatever. So the Board keeps asking us how we're going to leave the community the same way we found it. The trouble is, the whole idea behind our research is to *maximize* our impact on the community! Like, we're here to make an impact, to change things, to affect people. In a positive way, obviously. But, we just don't make a lot of sense to the Ethics Review Board!

Xenia– Hmmm. So the review process is really meant for a different idea of research than what you guys are doing.

Hanane– Yeah, it's not really built for action research.

Ravenna– Exactly. The other problem – and the other reason we don't make a lot of sense to them– is that the Ethics Review Board wants us to put in place and follow all these procedures; like, we're supposed to have a bunch of different consent forms for the different kinds of audiences and different kinds of meeting we will be holding here. And there is a kind of formula for the consent forms. They are supposed to be written very precisely to communicate exactly what the research is about, who are the people involved, what the risks are to the participants, what they can do if they feel negatively impacted by the research– and basically by signing the consent form the participants are supposed to take on the risks and absolve us and the university of responsibility if something goes wrong.

Xenia *(nods)* – Uhum.

Ravenna– Now, we keep getting turned down on the basis of not getting the consent forms quite right. But there is good reason why we don't seem to be able to get it right: First of all, consent forms aren't really culturally appropriate for our research. We're in an oral culture and people are wary of forms they have to fill out. The academic language and format that is required by the consent forms is totally alienating. So we try to be brief in our documents and "flex" the format and the language to be more community-friendly. And on paper the Board says that it supports making the process culturally appropriate, but in reality... They keep asking us to say more in our forms, and to include all these standard disclaimers and elements that we excluded on purpose so we don't scare our audience here!

Secondly, we don't know exactly what the research is about and what we're going to be doing! It's all emerging as we go, which is the nature of doing community-based action research. So how do we make the "correct" consent forms? How do we clearly communicate the purpose of the project and our research design when it is changing all the time!? How do we predict the type of meetings and audiences we will have ahead of time? We don't know this stuff ahead of time, and it's not very realistic to make changes to the application every week as the project changes. I mean, that would be a part time job in itself!

Hanane – But let's be honest, I think most fundamentally, we keep failing to make a solid application because we don't believe in it, because the formal approach of consent forms etc is the antithesis of what we're trying to do here. The way I see it, we're trying to build relationships and move forward on the basis of trust – a very personal kind of trust, the kind that exists between real people who get to know each other. And when you bring an institution like the university into the mix through these formal research protocols you just confuse things. Like, if we start a meeting with "okay guys, let's all read and sign these long forms" we're totally shooting ourselves in the foot, because we set a tone that's impersonal and institutional. And really, in a human-to-human relationship, especially in a friendship or true partnership, you negotiate and share risks and responsibilities together. When you're making a new friend you don't sign a contract that divides the risks and the benefits and says "here is what's yours and here is what's mine". You only really do that when you're getting a divorce! I would say we are in a kind of courtship with the community here, and these contracts smell like divorce.

Ravenna – *(giggling at this).* Yeah, that's a good way of putting it.

Xenia *(after a short pause)*– Hmmm, it's interesting what you're saying, but I have to confess I don't really understand what all this stuff has to do with ethics.

Hanane *(chewing and nodding)*– Honestly, it beats me too.

Ravenna *(thinking out loud)* Well, there is a classic way of thinking about ethics, which goes all the way back to people like Immanuel Kant. Kant essentially says that the only way to act ethically is to observe a more-or-less universal moral code, which in a good society is spelled out in laws and procedures and is *not* tainted by utilitarian motives, or by feelings, or by the specifics of any given situation. So in this view of ethics, if you're acting out of compassion or affection or kindness, well that may be nice, but it's not necessarily ethical. Whereas if you have no caring for anyone, but you are entirely committed to following the moral laws, then your actions are genuinely ethical. I think this is the basis of things like the university ethics review process: as long as you think carefully about and follow the procedures very closely you're okay. Instead what we're maybe implicitly subscribing to is something like a "situational ethics"(Fletcher, 1966) which is way more fluid. It says that what is moral or ethical is defined by the specifics of any given social structure. You can't have a formulaic, universal approach, and you certainly can't have standard forms and protocols that apply across the board. So in some way I think the contradiction between these different schools of thought is what we're coming across.

(Hanane and Xenia nod as they continue to eat.)

Abrielle *(feeding Ocean and thinking out loud)*– But now I think we're getting into something pretty interesting and important. Because if we're saying that the university's ethical review process is not really appropriate to our work here – which I totally agree with– then we should think carefully about what kind of ethical approach *is* appropriate here. You know, what is our situational ethics here? Because I certainly worry about that.

Ravenna– You worry about being ethical?

Abrielle– Yes, definitely. I mean, just to take the other side for a minute, we are coming here with our education and our backgrounds and our sets of beliefs, and we are bringing some potentially powerful tools into this community, which could be unsettling for people. For example, the artistic approaches we've talked about using – those can hit some deep chords that can be potentially devastating. Deep Democracy itself… I mean, it's *powerful* medicine. I am usually freaked out whenever we're about to use it, cause I know I have felt devastated in some of those really hard group processes as a participant, and it only really turned out okay because of the skill of the people holding the space – or maybe we just got lucky or whatever. So yeah, the reality is, we *could* do damage here and we *should* be concerned. Others who have intervened in difficult situations with powerful tools have later wondered if they may have done damage (e.g. Thompson, 2009). How do we make sure that we have a positive impact and not a negative impact? What are our ethical grounds?

(Everyone pauses and nods thoughtfully.)

Ravenna– These are good questions. *(She swallows then offers, a little hesitantly)* I guess I go back to what I was saying a minute ago: that we subscribe to a kind of "ethics of care", the way that feminists talked about it. Remember Carol Gilligan (1982) and all those folks? *(Hanane and Abrielle nod. Ravenna speaks in Xenia's direction.)* The basic idea there is that relationships are at the centre of ethics. There is no universal code for morality, but developing qualities like empathy and compassion help us stay on the right path.

Xenia – Uhum. That sounds about right. It also really reminds me of the Indigenous concept of "all my relations" – that we are all related. And, really, in the centre of an Indigenous way of life is a deep caring for all these relations. So that fits well with what those feminists said.

Ravenna – Yeah, and I guess this is one place where there is good alignment between feminist methodologies and what we might call "Indigenous methodologies" to the degree that *that* has been formalized as a set of principles. I mean I am now thinking of Margaret Kovach's book on Indigenous methodologies (2009). She has a chapter in there, which is basically on ethics, but she calls it "doing research in a good way".

Hanane– I have been really curious about that phrase. Cause people here use it a lot, hey? "We want to do this in a good way", or whatever was done was "not done in a good way". It seems to mean something specific, or at least clear to people.

Xenia– It's true, that is a very Indigenous way of saying it. I think that "in a good way" generally means "with good intention".

(Ravenna has been looking through a pile of books in the corner of the room and now returns with a copy of Indigenous Methodologies.)

Ravenna – So here is what Margaret Kovach has to say about it. Page 36. Quote.

> "Relational research is concerned with doing research in a good way. Indigenous scholar Marie Battiste (2007) suggests that one of the most critical aspects of Indigenous research is the ethical responsibility to ensure that Indigenous knowledges and people are not exploited. Research is about collective responsibility: 'we can only go so far before we see a face – our Elder cleaning fish, our sister living on the edge in East Vancouver... – and hear a voice whispering, "Are you helping us?" (Kovach, 2005: 31)."

Abrielle– Right. So that's almost exactly what we were talking about. It sounds like it has to do with intention, and also with an ongoing accountability to all those relations. But I still wonder, how do you do that in practice?

Ravenna – Well let me read more, from that chapter on ethics *(she flips through the book)* Here it is. Page 48. Quote.

> "Indigenous research, flowing from tribal paradigms, shows general agreement on the following broad ethical considerations: (a) that the research methodology is in line with Indigenous values; (b) that there is some form of community accountability; (c) that the research gives back and

> benefits the community in some manner; and (d) that the researcher is an ally and will not do harm."

Hanane – Hmmm, I like that list. It really breaks it down. So if we look at what we're doing... I find it hard to say if we're doing (a), because what exactly is meant by "Indigenous values"?

Xenia – And it's hard to say what that is across the board too, because I don't know how many values we share among different nations and bands....but I think at its core it has something to do with that animistic view of the world: the relationship with all parts of nature.

Ravenna – I agree. And I think we are staying sensitive to that in our work because of the centrality of relationship, which we just talked about.

Hanane– Okay, right. So then there is (b) and (c), accountability to community and benefiting the community. I feel good about those. We were invited to come here and we are in a real close partnership with Xenia and others in the Band Office who make sure we are accountable, and also we are delivering workshops and planning on creating materials that are appropriate for this community that we're leaving behind. So I really feel like we've hit those nails with the design of our project.

Ravenna and Xenia – Yeah, I agree.

Hanane– And then (d) is about being an ally and doing no harm. I feel that we are doing that, but what does it mean to "be an ally"?

Xenia– To me it means being a friend. Which is really how you guys have come here. Out of this growing friendship, first with me and then with other members of the community.

Ravenna – And to me this is actually the political piece. To be an ally means to subscribe to a decolonizing agenda: always being aware of things like power and privilege, and consciously working *not* to reproduce the colonial systems of domination that have historically existed.

Abrielle– Right. And how do you think we do that? What's our tool?

Ravenna– Well, I'll tell you what Margaret Kovach says *(she flips through the book some more)*. She says that our tool is reflexivity. Page 32.

> "Reflexivity is the term often utilized within a variety of qualitative research approaches to reference the relational. Reflexivity is the researcher's own self-reflection in the meaning making process... In anti-oppressive approaches, self-reflection is described as 'critical reflexivity', which purposefully gives space for the political examination of location and privilege (Herising, 2005: 136). In line with these research approaches, decolonizing methodologies demand a critical reflexive lens that acknowledges the politics of representation within Indigenous research."

Hanane – I like that. So, our internal processes, the journaling, the coaching calls, the conversations we have between us, the constant reflection on action/in action, these are the things that keep us on our toes to ensure we don't become oppressors!

Ravenna – yeah.

Hanane *(thinking more)* – I *really* like that because it kind of highlights that this is an ongoing process. Like, we don't just sit here at the beginning and say, "okay, we're not going to be acting like colonizers and this is how!" We kind of think about it in the context of every action, every session that we lead, every major decision that we make – because that's really where it shows up.

Ravenna– Right. So there we go, we meet the four principles of doing research in a good way! Now we just need to tattoo these things to our foreheads so we don't forget.

(Everyone laughs.)

Hanane– Are you satisfied with this Abrielle?

Abrielle *(getting up with a cranky Ocean in her arms)* – Well, I think we did some good thinking. It gives me more confidence than the Ethics Review anyway! Ultimately I think I'm most concerned with this notion of "not doing harm". And yes, maybe reflexivity is the best tool we have to protect us from doing harm. And at the same time, the truth is we're not really going to know if we've done harm or not because we're not going to be around long enough to find that out.

Ravenna– Yes, that's the limitation of doing a relatively short-term research. A year of fieldwork is not nearly enough to become aware of our full impact.

Abrielle– I supposed we just have to live with that, ha?

Ravenna– There is no way around it. We can't commit to sticking around for 10 years. It's just not feasible. But I think the project is still worth doing.

Abrielle– Yeah, I think it is worth doing too. *And* we just have to be as careful as we can…But I'm too exhausted to think about this now and I gotta put this guy to bed.

Hanane– Yes, you really should go and rest.

Ravenna and Xenia – Good night little Ocean.

Ravenna– You coming back for a drink Abrielle?

Abrielle– No I think I'm going to climb into my cocoon. I can only take an hour of socializing at a time.

Xenia– Have a good night then too, little Abrielle!

(Ocean waves and sends kisses as he is carried upstairs.)[45]

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[45] The proposal for this research *was* approved by the Board in its 5th round of submissions, after I complied with the Borad's direction as diligently as I could, adding what I was being asked to add to the consent forms even as I felt the additions were irrelevant and in some cases inappropriate for use in the community. Some of these feelings were confirmed later in the fieldwork (see Section 3.2.) but that seemed like the price I had to pay to get through the university's requirements for getting to do this work.

2.8. Should I stay or should I go now?

[Hanane and Xenia's argument][46]

Hanane– Do you have a strong feeling that I should stay or that I shouldn't? Can you just tell me what to do!?

Xenia– Nice try! But no, not really.

Hanane– Ah, too bad! Okay, let's look at it; cause this shouldn't be such a hard decision for me, but to be honest I think it is triggering something deeper that's not just about should I go or should I stay this time but about "what is my operating principle" and "how do I make these decisions?" So maybe I should argue both sides and see what comes up. Would you add whatever you can think of?

Xenia– Yes, I would love to.

Hanane– Anything we need to make it safe?

Xenia– I don't have anything.

Hanane– Me neither. So let's see… which side first?

The Case for Going Home as Originally Planned

Hanane– Part of me feels like I should just stick with my plans the way I had them and go home tomorrow, because …

 Well, for one thing, the reality is that I am here part of my time, and I am in Vancouver the other part, and I have commitments in both places. So let's say that on Tuesday I have two meetings in Vancouver – which I do– and they came up based on the plans to be back there by then and I said yes to them. So if I now reverse those decisions what does that mean? I feel like if I go down that path of second-guessing my Vancouver commitments I can't really continue to make them. And in a way it's the same with my commitments here – I can't really make solid plans. I'll have to say "I'll be here, *unless* something better comes up!" which isn't really cool.

Right now my planning of my time is happening on a kind of a first-come-first-serve basis, you know!? If I committed to being there for a certain day and put it in my calendar then I know I can't be here; and if I committed to being here and put it in my calendar then it is booked I know I can't be there. In fact I have already said no to things in Vancouver – even some things that could potentially make me a lot of money, things that could be important in other ways–, because I had booked my time to be spent here this week. So, that first-come-first-serve order feels like a fair principle. But if I start on a case-by-case basis tinkering with that, then I get into this grey area of, like, "okay, so what is the basis for my prioritizing one thing over another?" I would lose my ground completely.

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[46] Based largely on the transcript of a Deep Democracy argument involving Jessie Hemphill and I, from October 2011. Names and specifics have been changed or deleted to protect anonymity.

And then, secondly, I also feel my commitment to my family and being home with people I care about. I am sure that everyone is fine and they would say "don't worry about us, do what you need to do", but I honestly miss my family and friends! And even for my own sake, I want to go home and sleep in my own bed and get a deep rest! It's funny, I often find that when I come up here I get quite homesick. It's silly but I miss my kitchen table and my walk in the park and my favourite coffee shop! And I think it's not just my own homesickness, but I am picking up on something that is in the air here, which is part of the history of this community: a people who have been separated from their land. There is a kind of constant homesickness in the collective psyche of this community. And it resonates so profoundly with me, because I am an immigrant and the constant homesickness is part of my psyche too... So anyway, all of that makes me really value home and the importance of creating time to be home – which happens to be Vancouver right now.

And part of me also fears this: what if I change my flight and I stay and then something else comes up next week, like there is no quorum or the meeting doesn't happen or I am uninvited or some other crazy thing! Who knows!? But that would kind of suck, if I went into the trouble of changing flights and canceling my meetings back home, and then the meeting that is the reason I want to stay didn't even happen, or didn't even include me.

Xenia – I think you should probably stick to your original plan. I think the meeting, *if* it happens, will be intense and very charged and I think it will be upsetting for you to be there. And especially if you're choosing it over other things in Vancouver, and then it's this uncomfortable, alienating space, I think that would be really hard. I mean, I think if the meeting had gone ahead as scheduled, it would have been good to have you there because there would be a cushion of time on both sides, so we could get together afterwards and talk about it, to debrief together, make sure you're feeling okay. But to have you leave right after the meeting feels a little unsafe.

It's not going to be a pretty meeting! I have to tell you, I'm dreading it a little bit myself! I'm dreading the meeting. And I think that you should conserve your energy, your Port Hardy energy for more intimate, potentially more rewarding interactions with people, rather than this meeting that can be kind of unwieldy.

Hanane– So help me understand that a little better. Why do you think it could be an ugly meeting? Cause the decision on the table is about building a house for somebody, right? Is that what's going to be contentious?

Xenia – Well, there are several things that can be contentious. First of all, there is going to be a lot of angry people in the community, complaining that they didn't know the date of the meeting had changed and all that. We always get a lot of that. So right off the bat there could be some tension.

Then, there is going to be a report on how the last few thousands of dollars, the money left over in last year's Community Fund budget, how that money was spent. And, I don't know for sure, but I think there is uncertainty around those spendings. Nobody has really been able to account for what happened to that money. It was probably spent on a totally legitimate thing – like somebody's cousin needed to be sent to the city for an

emergency operation or something– but there is no record of it. So most likely what is going to happen is that staff are going to get blamed for not communicating clearly what has been going on. It's not really our fault because the money is *not* in our hands and the information is not in our hands, and we are not getting the information from the Fund leadership that we need to keep the community in the loop. But staff are going to come under attack cause we are an easy target.

Hanane– Right, so essentially the Fund allocation process is not transparent, and the staff's job is to be the channel for transparency, so when people find themselves in the dark the staff could be the scapegoat.

Xenia– Yeah. So that's frightening.

But of course the housing decision is the main contentious issue because it is precedent setting… The issue there is that the Fund has proposed putting, I think it's $68,000, towards building a house for one of the Elders, and they need community members to approve the decision through a vote at the meeting. I'm not saying whether this would be a good thing or a bad thing if the proposal was approved, but it raises the question of "why her and why not anybody else?" If the Fund starts giving this person money to build her house, is it going to do the same for *anybody* who asks? That will be controversial for sure.

And this is the problem with Council members also being on the Community Fund committee. Because the person who wants the house built, she has been putting pressure on Council to help her with this for ages. And the Council members who feel this pressure are the same people who are in charge of allocating the Fund money. But the Fund allocations are not supposed to be politically motivated. The two should be completely unrelated. I don't know how many people understand that, but there may be some heat around that.

Hanane– Hmmm. And that makes me think that given the nature of these debates and how political the processes have been, I have to question if it is even my place to be there for the meeting.

Xenia– Yeah.

Hanane– It sounds like there is some dirty laundry, and it's better if it's all aired out, and I don't want to be in the way of that. I don't want people to feel that they have to censor themselves because I am there, and especially because I am there visually recording what they are saying! This is another one of my own deeply seated psychological issues: I have this constant fear of being somewhere where I am not actually wanted; where people maybe tolerate me but they don't really want me. I find that feeling unbearable.

But there is something else that's becoming clear to me and now I am really beginning to understand why I feel paralyzed with my own decision-making. Maybe the reason that this decision about staying or going home feels so heavy for me is that I am stuck in a fractal pattern of the community's issues. I am having an internal struggle that is about my own operating principles, what they are and whether or not I should stick to them… And now I can see that the same uncertainty about principles and rules also

exists in the community. So, like you were saying at dinner, people are questioning *why* the Community Fund meeting was postponed in the first place and *why* the Band Office and everything has been closed down, even though there is a Council decision on file that says: we shut down *only* if an Elder has passed, and in this case it's *not* an Elder who has passed and yet everything has been shut down... So there is definitely a case of "not sticking to what we say we are going to do".

Xenia– And definitely within the Fund that's also a theme – the whole issue of accountability. Every dollar that is given out is supposed to be accounted for, but in reality that's not happening. In fact I would say that's the biggest theme. Which is ironic because the whole reason we got the Fund was because the federal government didn't do what they said they were going to do when they located our people here to the reserve 50 years ago! They didn't live up to their promises to give us housing and basic infrastructure, which is the source of a lot of trauma for our community. So in compensation they gave us money, so that we could, retroactively, do all the things they said they were going to do and didn't. And now we are not doing the things that we say we're going to do!

Hanane– Bingo! That's the pattern.

Xenia– Yeah. *(Long pause).* It's so interesting. That's the pattern in everything. That's the pattern in parenting too.

Hanane– Knowing what the right thing is to do, but not doing it?

Xenia– Yeah. Often parents know what's good for their children, but instead they choose to do the easy thing – like let them watch too much TV or eat junk food for supper, or leave them and go get drunk. Or they say one thing, but they do another thing. They tell their children never to do drugs, but then mom and dad are always doing drugs themselves!

And you know, everybody always finds a way to justify what they are doing. Like, our leaders are constantly making decisions on things that they think are good: they are going to give this woman this money and they think they are doing a good thing by building her a house. So they justify it by saying, even if it is not aligned with what they said they were going to do, it's a good thing so it doesn't matter, that it's worth it. But they don't take the larger picture into account. So whenever a specific situation comes up they go ahead and overlook their own policies that they made. There is no consistency. And eventually all the policies and principles become meaningless because they have been ignored so many times.

(Long pause)

Hanane–So I feel like this side is now totally clear for me. Can we argue the other side?

Xenia– Yeah

The Case for Changing Plans and Staying

Hanane– So on a personal level... I think I need to stop exaggerating the emotional cost to me of staying an extra two days! I mean we are talking about staying an extra two days! It's not going to make that much of a difference. I can see my family and my own bed two days later and I'm sure I'll be fine. I shouldn't let myself fall into this exaggerated homesickness. It's not really mine to fall into so deeply.

I think, there is definitely something that I value about being flexible, and being able to roll with the punches and see what comes up and be able to adapt to it. That's what make this kind of work possible: adaptability. Actually, if there is any core principle that I subscribe to above all else, it has got to be adaptability!

And not that this meeting is the end-all and be-all, but I think it actually contains exactly the messiness that I need to be exposed to. As much as I like to shelter myself from it and look at the nicer stuff - and as much as you want to protect me!–, *that*'s the core of what's happening here. Things are tough and messy and there is a lot of conflict. And these messy patterns are going to be everywhere else in other forms. So there is no escaping them, in a way. They will come up no matter what I end up doing next. And maybe it is better that I see them explicitly, expressed loudly, with anger, and with this kind of clarity.

Xenia– Another element is that it would be good for everybody to see you doing something that's still easily recognizable. To have a picture of you. Even though the graphic recording is not all of what Hanane is about, it would be a perfect point of recognition for community members, which could make the other work a lot easier. Instead of always having to explain who you are and introduce yourself in abstract terms as a researcher or whatever, they will remember you as the lady who did that awesome drawing at the Community Fund meeting!

And I guess from a selfish point of view having you at the meeting would be professionally good cause I'm the person who has brought you there to do all this cool stuff! And emotionally good too because I'll have my little support.

Hanane– Right. Realistically, I probably wouldn't leave right after the meeting, so we would have some time to debrief together. That would be good for you as much as for me, to just gently come off that cliff. And then I can leave that next morning or something.

And to be honest, I need to get my professional priorities straight. Because, really, from a financial perspective or even from a career perspective, doing this PhD doesn't make any sense *anyway*! I would make a lot more money doing something else! But it's a commitment, and it's a decision that I have made. And it's the most intriguing thing that I am doing because I am in charge of my own learning and my own project. So I do think it is only right that my fieldwork here takes front seat to everything else that I can be doing. It's a long term investment into whoever it is that I am becoming, both from the perspective of being able to actually do something within the complexity of a situation like this and also from the perspective of getting the piece of paper and letters next to my name that is my license to be able to do more. So it's not unfair to prioritize things here. It's actually the right thing. And really I can probably do my other meetings by

phone, I won't even have to postpone them. I can give those things less priority but still make them sort of work.

(Long silence)

Hanane– Do we have anything else to add?

Xenia– Well, I don't know which of the two sides I am speaking from now, but I think the biggest thing for me is that I care a lot about you and so I want you to like this place, and I want you to come back and not feel anxiety associated with Port Hardy. I don't want to try and convince you to do something that ends up not being great and then feel responsible for having convinced you to do it. So I want to free myself of that responsibility!

Hanane– That's fair enough. And I have to say I also totally feel like all of this is my decision to make. I don't feel at all forced into doing anything. I don't want to say that I don't care what you have to say, but I take what you say as just your opinion! So it's one factor in informing my decision, but don't worry I won't let you make the decision for me! And yes I also want this to be… not necessarily a pleasant experience, but to stay attractive and stimulating, so that I come back.

Xenia– Right. It needs to be challenging but not frustrating. I don't want you to burn out yet.

Hanane– Yeah. I'm glad you bring that up because it's a serious issue. There is only so many times you can try to fit a square peg into a round hole and just do any kind of frustrating task without feeling like you're progressing. Eventually that energy runs out. So yeah, it's definitely something to watch for.

Xenia– Port Hardy is pretty sweet in general, you know. Not the work stuff but the Port Hardy stuff. It's beautiful and it's peaceful, and it's possible to be very happy here, and I want that to be your experience.

Hanane– I really appreciate it Xenia. I feel very well cared for here.

(The two smile.)

Hanane– I feel like I am just on the verge of being able to make my decision. I just have to ask you this: Do you think I will get into the meeting if I stay?

Xenia– Yes. Yeah, I do. Especially because I think there will be people who have seen you do this kind of work before and they will be excited to see it again. Cause your visual work is so good for our community: it gives us a different picture of ourselves in our head. I know you got uninvited to that other meeting –the in-camera meeting– but I honestly think that's because the Community Fund chair really didn't understand what you would be doing, and we can do a better job of explaining it to him. And anyway, this upcoming meeting is an all-band meeting so it's a different kind of thing. It's a lot more open.

Hanane– And another question: do you think the meeting will actually go ahead? Will they get quorum?

Xenia– Well, they should. Although…

Hanane– Maybe not, because of the change in the date?

Xenia– Well no, that doesn't really matter because people know what's going on, but there is a tendency when there is a sticky situation for people not to come.

Hanane– Right. Although, it's an anonymous decision, right? The ballot is secret?

Xenia– Yes. But for the same reasons that we're having anxieties about this meeting other people might feel nervous too and they may just not come.

Hanane–Yeah, and this is the thing about this situation: it is the uncertainty. And I have to make a decision in spite of that uncertainty.

Xenia– You know, even though we can't remove the uncertainty completely, I wonder if we can do some things to reduce it. I can put a poll on FaceBook asking people if they are going to go to the meeting. Of course it doesn't actually mean that if they say they'll go they are going to go, but it could give us an indication of which way people are leaning... I'll do that later today.

Decision Making

Hanane– Okay so before I make the decision and we get into action planning, let's see if we got any insights from doing that argument. Is there anything that surprised you or stood out for you? Is there any insights?

(Pause)

Xenia– I think I was really reassured to hear you say that part of your reason for being here is to see the messiness. That was very reassuring for me to hear. I feel less of a pressure on myself to protect you against stuff that might be tough. So that feels really great for me.

Hanane– Hmmm. And I think for me there were really two things that stood out. The first was that whole fractal structure around the pattern of "not keeping our word", or "not keeping our promise". That was very illuminating for me. I realized I was stuck in that pattern and I was carrying more of its weight than is rightfully mine. And as soon as I noticed that, the situation lost its hold on me. I don't feel so caught in my decision any more. It's not as big a deal, in some way.

The second thing that stood out most was this realization about "adaptability" as the highest principle. And understanding that right now I am in a position where I don't have to have a strict policy to stick to – because I am not a public figure, I am a grad student! In a way it would be safer and easier to have the solid ground of a policy that I always stick to, but really I have the tools. I need to make these messy decisions on a case-by-case basis without losing my head. I mean I am doing it right now! And I can feel good about doing things this way. It gives me maximum flexibility and it probably leads to better decisions, ultimately.

Xenia– Cool.

Hanane– Okay, so if we take those grains back to the decision... I would say that I am leaning towards changing my ticket and staying. And I also like the idea of doing

whatever we can to reduce the uncertainty: You could do a little probing and questioning to see if we can find out anything about numbers that might show up, and I can try and connect with the Community Fund chair tomorrow to make sure he understands about visual recording, and to get a better read on whether or not he actually is okay with me being there.

Xenia – That's a great idea.

Hanane– Okay, well maybe then I won't change anything tonight, cause it's $75 for me to change my ticket whether I do it today or tomorrow. So I'll wait until we do our investigating tomorrow and if everything looks promising then I will stay.

Xenia– I like the decision!

Hanane– Me too! Thanks, Xenia[47].

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[47] Following this argument, we did conduct a poll on Facebook and a conversation with the "Community Fund" chair, and based on those pieces of information decided that I should *not* extend my stay in the community after all. After my departure, the community meeting did happen, the decisions on the table were contentious, there was a lot of discussion on the need for adequate housing for every one of the band members, and the discussions eventually became a seed for the formation of a housing committee. I do no regret having missed the meeting as it seemed the "Community Fund" chair's hesitations about my involvement as visual recorder were wise.

2.9. Powerlessness of words

[Abrielle's poem][48]

For a girl who much prefers quiet
It's ironic that I have found
A vocation so verbose.

Meeting after meeting,
Verbal intervention after verbal intervention,
Invitation to speak after invitation to speak,
We believe fiercely in talking
Even as we are humbled by
The power of choosing silence.

We are wanted here
To help make impossible conversations possible,
Based on some notion
That expression
Can open some door to healing.

But I wonder about this
More and more these days
And particularly as I listen from the kitchen
To Charlie Spruce
Whispering stories to Hanane
As they both tend the fire in the living room.

"I couldn't sit with my back to the door
Until five years ago.
You are triggered by fear.
You don't trust people."
He says.

"My own healing started with changing my life
Quitting alcohol and drugs.
My skin started to improve
But my mind was tired.
I stopped the alcohol
But I wasn't healed.
I took some kids to a healing workshop
And I just slept the whole time."

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[48] The poem draws heavily on two versions of the personal story of Gerry Oleman, told to me in March 2012 and to Leonie Sandercock in 2007, in an interview for the film *Finding Our Way.*

"But at the end of that workshop
I happened to go see the resident healer."
He goes on,
His memory of the events animated in the space between them.
"As soon as that healer saw me
She said:
'You've been sexually abused as a child.'
I didn't want to look at her,
Didn't want anybody to know about it,
Didn't want to acknowledge it.
But then she went on:
'Not by one man, but by two.'"
He recalls her motions, raising two fingers.

"And I couldn't deny it any longer.
She told me I had to cast those men away.
'When you see them', she said,
'When they are coming towards you,
You just push them away!'
And I did.
I put my hands up like this,
And – *whoosh*,
I threw them away."

"And I hollered
And I wept
And it was a casting off.
No talk therapy.
No need to recall details and describe them.
Just – *whoosh*.
After I finished crying I was all right.
The men weren't with me any more."

Tears run down Hanane's face now,
Glittering against the fire
And I marvel at the power of words
To move somebody to tears
Even as they tell a story
About the powerlessness of words.

2.10. The trouble with talking about healing

[Act 1 Scene 3]

(Ravenna drops into her chair at the table.)

Ravenna– Okay. Let's talk about what we are doing here!

Hanane (*taken back by the sudden question)*– You mean what we are doing here sitting at the table drinking tea!?

Ravenna – Yes! No. I mean our project. Seriously. I'm kind of losing my mind about it. We've been here for months and I still don't feel like we have a project.

Xenia – Well I could give you a rundown of what you've done if that makes you feel better. Let's see… You've helped me run meetings, you've done those amazing visual recordings, you've been at a number of community gatherings, you ran the introduction to Deep Democracy Workshops, you made visuals for the Community Fund meeting…

Hanane– We have read everything in the Band Office drawers, including all the documents covered in cobwebs…

Xenia– You've had meetings with, like, twenty community members…

Hanane– We've made friends with, like, two hundred kids!

Ravenna– Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know the list and I appreciate you trying to make me feel better guys. But I mean, *what is the project*? It's all very nice that we've done a bunch of different things but when I get on the phone with my grandmother I don't seem to be able to tell her what we are doing up here. Is this only me? Is anybody else concerned?

Abrielle (*nursing Ocean on the couch, raising one hand up in the air)* – Yup, I hear you. I'm kind of losing my mind about it too.

Ravenna – Oh good. Will you say more please?

Abrielle– *(sighs first)* Well, what I had understood – and the reason that I came up here – was that when Xenia looked at all the meeting notes and surveys and comment sheets from the CCP process, she found this underlying theme of trauma. It is spelled out in one of the early chapters of the CCP: community members are saying that trauma is the big elephant in the room, and it is getting in the way of everything else, from education to economic development. And what I had understood was that we're coming up here to do something about that trauma, and that we would be good people to try to do this because of our skills with Deep Democracy and running meetings. But now… *(she unlatches Ocean and puts him on the other breast)…* now I am not so sure about that.

Ravenna– Exactly. I am not so sure about it either.

Hanane– So, why is that? Cause what you have described still sounds compelling to me.

Abrielle – Yeah it sounds compelling, but I am not sure it's working for us.

(Ravenna nods, rather enthusiastically.)

Hanane– What are your concerns?

(*Ravenna and Abrielle exchange a look.)*

Ravenna– You go first.

Abrielle– Okay, well, what I have been doing is looking a lot into the literature about trauma and healing and reconciliation, and especially the literature coming out of the Healing Foundation, which is specific to helping Aboriginal communities through trauma. And I suppose I am feeling less and less certain that we have anything to offer here.

Hanane– You mean because we're not from here?

Abrielle– Well, partly because of that. I still don't know how much people here will trust us, or if we'll find a way into their hearts – I guess that remains to be seen… But more fundamentally, I feel that our skills are in conducting meetings and getting people to talk, and I am not sure if those skills are that relevant here. What I am seeing in the literature is a huge emphasis on ceremony, ritual, traditional ways of life, cultural art forms, family gatherings… (McCormick, 1994). Not so much on *talking* about what has happened, not even so much on therapy. In fact there is a kind of negative reaction to therapeutic approaches to Aboriginal healing (Ross, 1992, p.145 and Thira, 2005) and there is even a kind of resistance to the word "healing" itself.

Hanane – Because it suggests that there is something wrong with Aboriginal people and they need to be fixed, right?

Abrielle – Yeah. And I am even thinking of the story that Charlie was telling you the other night. He basically said that he was healed when he symbolically pushed the spirits of his tormentors and abusers away. That one motion was what was needed. He didn't go through any kind of talk therapy. He was healed through what was in some ways a spiritual act – and if that's what's needed… that's just not our game.

Hanane– Okay. I see what you're saying but I think you missed part of Charlie's story.

Abrielle– Hmm, that is possible. *(She smiles)* I was eavesdropping after all! What did I miss?

Hanane– There were actually three stages to Charlie's healing process. *(She counts on her fingers as she speaks.)* The first was that he had to become sober. The second was the symbolic act of casting away the ghosts. And the third was having to un-learn all the bad habits he had developed to cope with his trauma, and basically finding a new way of being with himself and within the community.

Abrielle *(nods)*– Uhum.

Hanane– And I would guess that the first and the third stage of that process had a large communicative focus, because how are you going to make new relationships with yourself and with others without communicating? It reminds me of Rupert Ross. He analysed the success of residential addiction treatment programs and found that their real impact came from native people teaching other native people how to communicate

about what was bothering them, how to express their emotions and ask for assistance (Ross, 1992, p. 152). Whatever they learned about the dangers of alcohol abuse was secondary to what they learned about communication.

Xenia – Right. I agree with Hanane. I think there is definitely a role for communication and for talking to each other. Actually, that's the other underlying theme that came out in the CCP: that our people have lost some of the capacity, or some of the channels to communicate effectively. So I think that every time you guys bring people together to talk about anything – it doesn't even matter what the topic is or what they end up talking about – I think that's a positive step.

Abrielle (*now bouncing and patting a cranky Ocean on the back, and addressing Xenia*) – And would you say that this community is at that third stage of healing –if we use Charlie's example as a kind of rough model for now– would you say that community members are at the stage when this kind of dialogic intervention is appropriate?

Xenia – Well, I think different community members are at different stages. Some are definitely there and need to rebuild their connections to each other and themselves so they can move into a new kind of life. Others are not even at stage one – they are deep into their addictions and it is going to be very hard to engage them in any community processes at all, though if they did come out it would probably be beneficial for them... And others are probably still in need of that spiritual process before they are ready to talk. But I don't think you guys should worry about that. I mean, you don't have to do everything! And you don't have to help everybody. There are lots of other people doing lots of other work here. There are local people organizing ceremonies and language revivals programs and cultural art programs and trips to the traditional territories... And those things are effective at what we are now calling stage two. You don't *have* to play in that space cause others already are.

Abrielle *(walking around to help Ocean calm down)*– Okay. And where do you stand on this Ravenna?

Ravenna– Oh, I definitely think there is a place for communicative, language-based approaches. In fact, if anything, I am in that extreme camp that says *all transformation is linguistic* (Erhard, cited in Block, 2008, p.34). And I guess I feel confident that if we follow good Deep Democracy principles and stay neutral, then the people we work with will create the kind of process that is most appropriate to them. It doesn't have to involve talking. It can become art making, or movement, or going into nature, or just sitting in silence. We don't have to impose any specific therapeutic models here we just have to get a conversation started. I don't think we run the risk that therapists typically run when they come into a place like this.

Hanane– Okay, then what is *your* concern Ravenna? Why are you losing your mind?

Ravenna– My concern is way more practical. I am concerned because I have actually tried to have conversations about trauma with members of this community – and they keep slamming the door in my face.

Hanane– Slamming the door in your face? You mean they are not letting you in?

Ravenna – Yes. They don't want to talk about it. Every time I bring up the trauma everyone goes quiet, like this heavy dark cloud has just descended upon us. And I actually feel like people are starting to avoid me cause I keep going around trying to set up appointments to talk about this stuff, and I am getting this reaction of "oh god, just leave me alone!"

Abrielle– Could it be because you're seen as an outsider?

Ravenna– That's what I thought at first, but then I asked Xenia to bring up the topic with community members, and I also tried to get one of the local women to act as a research assistant and make the invitations and set up interviews – but it doesn't seem to make a difference, right Xenia? (*Xenia nods quietly.)* I feel like it's the topic itself that people are resisting– not so much who asks about it.

Hanane– I don't understand, cause it was so clear in the CCP meetings that this an important topic. It's not like we've made this up! It came from the community.

Ravenna– Well yes, that's true. And that's the irony of the situation. Everyone says it is important to talk about the underlying trauma, that unless we do there is no way for the community to move forward. Every leader, every Elder, every thoughtful community person agrees that this is important – but when it comes down to it nobody wants to walk the walk, nobody wants to engage. People will not show up for interviews and they will not sign up for workshops.

Hanane– Could it be a question of framing? Could it be that we should be talking about healing instead of trauma?

Ravenna– I thought about that too. Because Xenia said to me, "well you know, it makes people sad to talk about this stuff" – and I totally understand that, it's devastating to talk about these deep wounds and all this suffering. The whole appreciative inquiry and ABCD philosophies would tell us to change the conversation: focus on the gifts, not the deficiencies (Kretzmann and Mcknight, 1993). But people aren't dumb, you know!? They read through my words. I tried to frame it in positive terms, saying, "Let's talk about what would help this community to heal and what can we each bring to that?" But no one was biting.

Hanane– Hah. This is so puzzling to me…

Xenia– Well, it's not that puzzling. I mean, I am a little surprised at how difficult this has been also, but I do understand it. It is even very challenging for me, or for any local research assistant, to make the invitations for interviews or workshops on healing.

Hanane– Why is that? Can you explain it to me?

Xenia– Well, look, let's say you were working on something like… um, say, community events. I could phone up someone from the community and say "hey, how's it going, how are you today, blah- blah-blah" and then I could ask "are you able to come to this interview or focus group next week with the UBC researchers?" And they go, "Oh, what it is for?" And I could say, "Well, remember that time you organized the Christmas dinner? They want to talk about how you did that, or what steps you took?"… Even that is getting to be too abstract and too formal. It needs to be something very concrete and

tangible and relatable. People could be like "oh yeah, I can talk about the Christmas dinner". But then: intergenerational trauma! I mean, how do you call someone and go "you know all that shit you went through in Residential School and through the relocation stuff, we just want to talk about how you can get over that!" (*Xenia laughs an uncomfortable laugh.*)

Hanane– But what about saying "we want to talk about healing in the community?"...

Xenia– It's still way too wishy-washy even with the positive spin. Even doing something like community visioning as part of the CCP was really quite hard. I would say, "Hey, let's get together and talk about the future of our community!" People would say "Ah, been there done that! These things never go anywhere". I think you really need more concrete things to draw people in.

Abrielle– At some point we had talked about governance as a framing for the conversation. But even governance is too abstract of a concept, isn't it? In some ways we got the band staff to talk about that in the DD Introduction workshop kind of by accident, but the teenagers found it an alienating conversation and I think others in the community would as well.

Xenia– Yeah, I don't think most people know what we're talking about when we talk about governance or even leadership. Say instead you could say "We're going to have a meeting to talk about a tourist company that's going to start up in the traditional territories and who wants to be involved in *that*?" It would be a lot easier to get people involved cause you can phone people and go "Hey, you got a boat, right? Why don't you come to this meeting and talk about how we might use your boat for this new company? Or how we can get you involved as a guide or an operator?" That's what I mean by tangible.

(*Abrielle nods. There is a pause around the table. Ocean continues to whine; Abrielle keeps trying to entertain him while staying in the conversation.*)

Ravenna– This is quite interesting what you're saying. Because I had thought... I had suspected that maybe people in this community are just not ready to talk about healing. Maybe just mentioning trauma as a topic in the CCP meetings is as far as they are ready to go... But what you're suggesting now is that they can't quite grasp what it is to talk about it.

Hanane– It's the terminology. The words we are using are too abstract...

Xenia– I don't think it is *just* terminology. I think it's more fundamental than that. It's more that the kinds of things people are concerned about – their day-to-day survival and basic well-being – are very concrete and those things take up all of a person's mental energy and leave no space for the more abstract – and equally important– issues with longer term implications.

Ravenna– Yeah I see that. It presents a pretty big challenge for long term planning. And also for any kind of academic work – because what we have been taught as good community-based action researchers is to take our cues from the local people and mirror the language they are using, and in this case we are absolutely doing that: we are

literally speaking in the same terms that made it to the CCP and that people are throwing around. But that's not enough to put us on the same page.

Abrielle– It's almost like we don't have the same frame or way of understanding. Even the concepts of "concrete" and "abstract" seem not to mean the same thing in the two cultures.

Ravenna– Yes, exactly. So we might have something in mind that we think is really concrete – like creating a healing program or improving the governance structures– but it's still quite nebulous in the minds of the local people.

(More pause as everybody nods and considers this. Ocean who has crawled under the table bangs his head and this time begins to really cry. Everyone pulls the chairs out so Abrielle can reach for Ocean.)

Abrielle– Oh baby! I'm not taking good care of you… Let me see… little bump. It'll be okay.

Ravenna *(suddenly, energetically)* – Hey, while we have all the chairs out, let's try something here. Listen, listen, listen! Don't sit down yet. Everybody turn your chair around and sit backwards like this *(she demonstrates, facing the back of the chair and sitting down).* Common guys, it'll be fun and it'll make Ocean feel better.

(Everyone follows)

Abrielle *(positioning Ocean in front of her)* like this?

Ravenna– Yes! Good, good, good. Now let's pretend we're riding horses.

(Everyone starts rocking back and forth on the chairs, giggling. The chair legs make loud rattling noises hitting the wooden floor. Ocean is amused and starts giggling too, sitting on his mother's lap, holding onto the back of the chair.)

Hanane *(getting into it)*– Hee haw!

Ravenna – Yeah! Riding the horse backwards, girls!

(Ravenna now chases Hanane around the table, each riding their chairs noisily. They hit the table, fall off their chairs and goof off for a while, to wild laughter.)

Hanane – Hey, "riding the horse backwards", what does it mean?

Ravenna– Keep riding and I'll tell you… There is a character called Heyoka in the legends and ceremonies of the Lakota people – who are the Indigenous people from the prairies and the Great Plains (Wilson, 1996 and Lame Deer and Erdoes, 1972). Heyoka is a sacred clown, a kind of magical fool with huge powers. He is the spirit of thunder and lightening. He is also famous for being the contrarian, for doing everything backwards. So when he is happy Heyoka cries, and when he is sad he laughs. When it is hot he wraps himself in shawls and hats and blankets *(she acts this out)*, and when it's below freezing he goes around naked complaining about the heat! Of course, he rides his horse backward, just like we are right now. And he wears his clothes inside out, just like this *(Ravenna pulls her shirt off in one quick motion and wrestles to put it on inside-*

out while she continues the story. Other follows, giggling.) And he talks in backward languages, he asks backward questions… you see the pattern here! [50]

Abrielle– I'm loving this guy. What are we going to do with him?

Ravenna– Well, the whole point of Heyoka, the way I understand it, is to turn the world upside down and inside out, so we can see more of it – so we can get a fresh perspective, you know? When he appears in ceremonies he gets away with asking difficult questions, and saying things others are too afraid to say by fooling around– so that others are able to think about things not usually thought about, or to look at things in a different way. He also is encouragement that we don't take ourselves too damn seriously, because god knows we get stuck when we do!

Hanane– Hallelujah Heyoka!

Ravenna– Okay, so, now that we've all got into Heyoka's skin, let's see if he can help us figure out our project. Keep riding, my ridiculously dressed friends!

(They ride silently for a while as Ravenna begins to articulate the questions.)

Ravenna *(thoughtfully)*– So, what if we look at our project backwards? What if we try to come at it in the opposite way? What would that mean?

(A short pause.)

Abrielle– It seems like right now our central question is: "We would like to do something about trauma and healing – but how do we make it concrete and tangible?" The opposite of that would be… umm…

Hanane – The opposite of that would be… "We would like to do something concrete and tangible – how do we relate it to trauma and healing?"

Ravenna– Yes, I like this. Keep going.

Hanane – Maybe let's start with, "What would be something concrete and tangible that we like to do"?

Ravenna– Yes, good! Okay, Xenia, you're our main woman here! Think about this: there are three girls and one baby, and they have arrived here in your community and they would do *anything* you ask them to do! *(Everyone laughs again.)* Let's say that they didn't have any academic requirements and it didn't matter what they said in their proposals and ethical review applications! Let's say they were your genies in the lamp and they would grant you any one of three hundred wishes you made! *(Hanane grabs the teapot from the table and presents it to Xenia who ceremonially rubs her hands on the metaphorical lamp. Abrielle, Hanane and Ravenna now all pose as genies having emerged from the teapot. Ocean is still enjoying this. Ravenna says in an exaggerated low voice)* What would you like my master!?

Xenia *(throwing her head back, laughing)* – Wow, I've never had so much power. Let's see… *(with a twinkle in her eyes)* I'd like you to push back the boundaries of the reserve so we can make new lots for housing… I'd like you to snap your fingers and give me a list of Band houses that need renovation and exactly what needs to be done… I'd like you to start a day-care so kids have something to do and their parents can get a break or get a job or do community work… I'd like you to make us sidewalks… I'd like you to

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[50] For other great discussions of the role of the sacred clown in Indigenous cultures see Daughters of Copper Woman by Anne Cameron, 1981, and The Hopi Ritual Clown: Life As It Should Not Be by Hieb Louis Albert, 1972

do a full human capital survey so figure out what training our band members need to get employed... I'd like you to teach everybody how to use Microsoft Word and Excel... I'd like you to describe our treaty process in a song that everybody can understand, a jingle everyone can sing along to... I'd like you to make an illustrated version of the handbook of 40 developmental assets that parents can be excited to open and follow... I'd like you to teach all the teenagers how to make film so they can tell their stories...
(Everyone is silent for a moment as Xenia finishes.)
Ravenna– Oh, I wish I had taken notes. That is a good list.
Xenia– But these have no academic or planning aspect for you guys to work on.
Ravenna– Are you kidding me? These are *all* planning research projects! Or at least I can think of a million ways to spin them that way.
Abrielle– Well, almost all of them are "community development" projects, which falls comfortably under the planning umbrella.
Hanane– Yeah, these are great project ideas. I love the idea of doing something this tangible, this useful. And maybe we can incorporate some kind of collaborative planning process around whichever one we choose to do.
Abrielle– I think some of them are pretty workable and very exciting. I am also wondering: is there some connection with healing of traumas potentially hidden in one of these ideas? Cause you know, as soon as I said these are community development projects, I remembered reading something about the non-Aboriginal notion of community development is pretty close to the Aboriginal concept of healing (Krawll, 1994).
Xenia – Well, this is the interesting thing... because as I begin to think about any of these projects and how you would go about doing them, yes all of them are about benefitting the community, but also most of them will need community input or at least engaging some sector of the community population... And so you're going to have to convene people and people are going to have to talk... And as soon as people talk I am willing to bet that they will talk about trauma.
Ravenna– Just like they did during the CCP meetings, right? Regardless of what the topic was.
Xenia– Yeah. Jamaine and I were just talking about this last night cause he got funding in the sports budget to get the floor and the walls of the Community Hall painted –cause the kids really want to make those basketball courts, right? And because the Hall is such a contested space they are being careful to engage community members in the decision-making process. And he was saying – you know in this community you can be talking about what colour to paint the walls and before you know it people are talking about Residential Schools!
Ravenna– That was his actual experience?
Xenia– Yes, cause you know, one wall reminds people of another wall they used to know! And when the trauma is so alive, when it is so close to the surface, *anything* can be an entry point: a colour, a shape, a sound, a word. You really don't have to search very long for it.
Ravenna– In fact if anything it sounds like we will have to sensitively navigate it like a minefield.
Xenia– Probably. And you've already experienced that, the presence of despair and ongoing suffering, in the workshops you have facilitated and meetings you've been to.

Abrielle– Totally.

Ravenna– This is exciting! So what you're saying is, we don't have to go search for a battleground: the minefields are already here, everywhere! I know I'm sounding insensitive by getting so excited about this, but seriously, I think we just cracked something.

Hanane– I think so too. So should we decide which of the tangible projects on Xenia's list we should tackle? Is there an obvious one?

(There is a pause as they all think about it.)

Ravenna– Hmmm. I'm hearing our friend Heyoka say: don't decide right now. Go sleep on it, let it come to you in a wacky dream.

Hanane– Amen Heyoka.

2.11. Three dreams

[Hanane and Abrielle's conversation]

Late at night, Hanane hands over Ocean to his mother.

Abrielle– Is he sleeping?

Hanane– Yeah. Finally.

Abrielle– Thank you so much Hanane. I don't know what I would do without you. These midnight fits are too much on me.

Hanane– Oh I know, I know. I am happy to take a turn. You're doing so much for your little boy.

Abrielle– Look at him. I guess this is what they mean when they say "sleeping like a baby": that once they fall asleep they sleep so peacefully – until they wake up again in an hour.

Hanane– I have a new appreciation for that expression! It's hard to believe that one minute he can be so worked up and the next minute he can seem so content in his sleep. It's like he's smiling at the world. Do you think they dream at this age?

Abrielle– I am not sure. I often wonder about it though, cause his sleeping expression changes and he seems to be watching something unfold intently.

Hanane– Hmmm. I'd love to know what's going on in his little head.

Abrielle– Are *you* dreaming much these days Hanane?

Hanane– Um. Yeah, actually. Quite a lot.

Abrielle– What are you dreaming about?

Hanane– Lots of things. Home. School. The community here… Actually, I've had a series of dreams about Charlie Spruce.

Abrielle– Really? That's pretty cool. He's kind of magical, hey?

Hanane– Yeah, he is. I think I have some kind of crush on him.

Abrielle– I don't blame you.

Hanane– Not a crush, exactly. I mean, not a normal kind of crush. More like a respectful and all-encompassing fascination, plus a feeling of mutual understanding and acceptance, even though we come from such different places, and even though there is 30 years of age difference between us. I feel so touched by what he is sharing with me, and how he is supporting me. He just seems like a genius to me and I am totally mesmerized by him. I guess it is *love*, in one of its most pleasant incarnations!

Abrielle– I think that's awesome. Will you tell me about the dreams?

Hanane– As long as you won't think I'm weird.

Abrielle– I already *know* you're weird! I don't need to judge you by your dreams.

Hanane– *(laughing)* Okay, fair enough!

> **First Dream: I'm sitting on a log by the ocean with Charlie Spruce, or some kind of ghost-like figure that looks a lot like him. We're having this intimate conversation, learning about each other. And at some point he is looking across the water and he says, "You know, back in the homelands it was considered very attractive to be quite fat!" I say, " Really?" And he says, "Of course: being overweight used to be an evolutionary advantage in a place where winters were cold and long, and as hunter-gatherer people you might go without food for days at a time. So having a body that could effectively store food and support you through the winter was essential to survival and came to be considered a sign of beauty." He says, "My first wife was totally crazy about me because I am so nice and chubby!" His explanation seems totally reasonable and interesting to me, and all of a sudden I am looking at him and finding him just gorgeous.**

Abrielle– Hahaha. Oh my goodness Hanane. That's a hilarious dream!

Hanane– Yeah! I mean, he's not even that fat so I don't know how I came up with this!

Abrielle– What do you think it means?

Hanane– Well, you know, I think that even though I don't see myself as someone who cares about appearance, that deep down I basically hold negative connotation for being overweight – like, it's a sign of laziness or something, and it's definitely not attractive… All the usual stuff that you believe if you live long enough in an urban culture where there are skinny people on every magazine cover and anorexia is considered the height of beauty. And in a way I also hold other forms of prejudice against native people– not intentionally but at an unconscious level. It's not exactly my fault – it's a product of the racist society I live in! But now, now that I am getting to know people here at a personal level, those unconscious biases are coming to the surface and they are getting transformed. Does that make sense?

Abrielle– Totally. It also makes me think that you're becoming able to look at the world through an alternative worldview: from a modern perspective maybe being overweight doesn't serve a purpose, but when he points out its usefulness in evolutionary terms in connection to a traditionally hunter-gatherer society, suddenly it makes perfect sense.

Hanane– Right. So I like to think that's what it means: I am becoming more open minded about other cultures, specifically this one right here.

Abrielle– This is awesome. Tell me another dream.

Hanane– Okay, this one is a little more bizarre, and a bit more sad.

> **Second Dream: I'm at Charlie's house, it's dark in there and he is sitting on the floor, crying crying crying. Tears falling off his cheeks**

125

and splattering on the floor. He is telling me about the loss of his culture, the loss of the community's culture. He says old people are dying every day and he is finding that he is getting so old that he can't access or articulate the memories and teachings he grew up with any more. He says, "Everything will be lost as my generation dies out, our language, our ceremonies, our manners, everything." Then he wipes his eyes and says, "You know, a long time ago there was a Farsi-speaking surveyor and ethnographer who came to the coast and spent time with our people. She wrote books about all the different aspects of our lives and our oral history and that's the only written record we have of our culture." Then he starts sobbing again saying, "But even that information is now being lost because Farsi is becoming extinct as a language."

Abrielle– Hmmmm. Farsi, isn't really becoming extinct, is it?

Hanane– No. Again I don't know how I came up with it. What do you think this one means?

Abrielle– Well maybe most obviously, the Farsi-speaking ethnographer sounds like it's *you* doing work here – cause I'm pretty sure Franz Boas didn't speak any Farsi! *(They both giggle.)* And it's kind of cool because it sounds like your effort is appreciated – even though it's not as good as the actual oral history and cultural ways of passing down traditions, it is valuable. I'm not sure what the part about Farsi going extinct could mean… what do you figure?

Hanane– I think that's the most interesting and important part for me… I think what the dream is showing me is that my own history and culture and my own issues are becoming tangled up with the issues of this community. There is a kind of co-dependence developing, where if one culture is threatened, so is the other. It's just fascinating to me because I never saw any links between my own cultural struggles and the cultural struggles here – and of course the example from the dream is totally made–up and crazy, but I think I'm beginning to see links and parallels.

Abrielle– Say more about that.

Hanane– Well, I am seeing a kind of parallel between the loss and the desire for revival of Indigenous cultural traditions here– and the loss and yearning for cultural traditions among immigrants who come to Canada. Of course my ancestral culture is in some ways more "safe", because there is a place half way around the world where it is continuing to be practiced by millions of people. And there isn't a western dominant way trying to erase it all the time. (Although, arguably, my ancestral culture is also being "erased" in some ways under the influence of a fundamentalist Islamic government, but let's just leave that aside for now.) But when I came to North America, my access to that world was in many ways cut off, so there is definitely a feeling of profound loss associated with immigration. And I think there is a part of me that really deeply sympathizes with the pain of the cultural loss here, because it is so familiar to me, from my own experiences.

Abrielle– You were saying the other day that the way people are "homesick" for their homelands here keeps reminding you of how you are homesick for where you come from.

Hanane– Exactly. I find myself getting surprisingly nostalgic for my childhood and my life back home whenever I come here, and I think that's because this kind of nostalgia has such a big role in this field and the parallels are so strong – this setting brings out the homesick part of me.

Abrielle– Right.

Hanane– I would say that I have already also learned some incredible things from the people here about how one relates to one's culture and where one comes from. You know, I love the way that Xenia *practices* her native heritage. *Not* through traditional songs and dances and what we typically think of as forms of cultural expression – but through living close to the land – berry picking, fishing, hunting–, which she sees as being central to that Indigenous identity. She's interested in the values and the deep meaning at the heart of her culture, not so much the cultural forms which are much more superficial. And I just think Indigenous people are so far ahead of immigrant populations in this kind of thinking. We are still caught up in putting on festivals where we showcase our flashy costumes and exotic dances and unusual food – which I often find frustrating because the whole thing just feels like a production, not authentic, and not *to the point*! We haven't even had the conversation about what underlies all of those forms and which are the essential elements of culture that we want to hold onto as a community. So yeah, we have a lot to learn from native communities.

Abrielle– Right…On a bit of a tangent: It's so cool how intercultural work makes you engage more meaningfully with your own culture. I love that about it.

Hanane– I do too… So yeah, anyway, I think that's what this dream is about: I am seeing my own culture more clearly in light of getting to know another culture, and I am seeing the two become intertwined in a way that helps me connect more deeply with what is present here.

Abrielle– Will you tell me one more?

Hanane– Okay, but then we have to go to sleep.

Abrielle– A very good idea!

Hanane– I just had this dream, so it feels very vivid and it's very beautiful… and I don't want to pull it apart or analyse it too much. I will just tell you upfront that it is about me feeling accepted here. And also loved. We won't discuss it beyond that, okay? *(Abrielle nods.)*

> **Third Dream: Charlie has taken me fishing. We are on a boat with a group of fishermen. He has been sitting back in the sun for most of the trip, in the middle of the hustle and bustle. Then at some point he grabs a double hook, fixes it to the end of the line, and tell me he is going to catch a two-headed fish. We both know that this is a powerful, mythical creature and**

Charlie has just declared a very bold ambition. I say "Okay, if you catch the two-headed fish it's yours, whatever else you catch is mine!" He laughs and agrees. There is tugging on the line almost as soon as he throws it in. He tugs back and the double hook flies up in the air, a string of red, glittering *something* caught on each end of it. It's not the two-headed fish. At first I think he has caught a pair of goldfish, but then I see that they are sea jewels: two silver hairpins, with a series of brilliant red rocks mounted on each. The rubies shine and reflect the whole scene: the sky, the ocean, the faces of the fishermen. They are nicest pieces of jewelry I've ever seen. The dream ends as Charlie gifts them to me. He brushes my hair back with his hand and fixes them in between my curls.

Abrielle– Hanane, that's gorgeous. *(Pauses, then kisses Hanane on the cheek.)* I hope you have more beautiful dreams tonight.

Hanane– Good night Abrielle.

Abrielle– Good night Hanane.

...and that is how she came to wear a fish in her hair...

Illustration 7: It's Okay to Wear a Fish in Your Hair

Illustration 8: Middle Title Page (photo by Jessie Hemphill)

3.0. Middle

3.1. Parenting or the governance of the household

[Ravenna's explanation]

"What about parenting?" Abrielle said over breakfast. We have been looking for a tangible topic to lead us into conversations about trauma and healing with community members here. We all paused over our pieces of toast to consider this –we all liked it. When I thought about it more, I realized that it was actually brilliant. Here are my reasons why:

- o Parenting is not only the textbook example of a "complex problem" (Westley, Zimmerman and Patton, 2006)[51], it is also a topic that concerns virtually every household in the community and is a natural and easy topic to engage people around. An aspiration to build "strong families" comes straight out of the band's CCP. The plan's section on Social Issues articulates this, specifically as a wish to be "a community that treasures our children and supports and acknowledges parents and those who raise children" and "a community that raises happy, healthy children and passes good parenting skills to future generations." The two work plans relating to this issue include running Parenting Skills Trainings and producing a Handbook on '40 Development Assets'[52]. I don't imagine that we can deliver either of these work plans in quite the way they have been expressed – we are not qualified to train people in parenting skills, and 40 Developmental Assets sound like too many to be useful… But I think we can do better: we can design a

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[51] According to this definition, complex systems are based on relationships, and their properties of self-organization, interconnectedness and evolution. Unlike simple and complicated systems, complex problems cannot be understood and resolved by following a set of instructions or relying on past experiences.

[52] The Developmental Assets® are 40 common sense, positive experiences, relationships, opportunities and personal qualities that young people need to avoid risks and thrive in life. Since its creation in 1990 by the Search Institute, the Developmental Assets framework –which organizes assets by stages of childhood and adolescence development- has become the most widely used approach to positive youth development in the United States – and in much of Canada.

participatory process that engages parents, grandparents and youth[53] in generating appropriate local knowledge about parenting practices that speak to the needs and opportunities in this specific place at this specific time.

o In the larger picture: The need for developing parenting skills is one of the most commonly cited social needs in Canadian native communities, repeatedly making it to the top of the list in surveys of on-reserve and off-reserve adults (Ross, 1992, p.124). Research shows that the need is particularly pronounced among Residential School survivors who report being at a loss when it comes to raising their children because they have no known nurturing family model to follow. Those who were dislocated from their traditional territories are at a greater loss still, since they find themselves suddenly removed from cultural life-styles and livelihoods, in which the family traditionally had a central and unambiguous role. These survivors may end up reproducing the pseudo-military and often-abusive experience of their own boarding schools, or else absent themselves from the parenting role –either physically by leaving their children behind (or in foster care) or figuratively through drug and alcohol addiction that makes them emotionally unavailable. Ross has observed that many parents of this generation switch back and forth between the two extremes (overbearing and laissez-faire parenting), confusing their children, reducing the likelihood of secure parent-child attachments, and leaving their families feeling torn in the process. As a result, the children of that generation, many of whom are now parents and grandparents themselves, find themselves in a similar situation: without positive role models in their families of origin, and thus without a reliable source of knowledge on how to raise their own children. This is commonly known to be a main mechanism for intergenerational

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[53] A decision to divide our workshop audiences by age group came from earlier insights about the challenges of running an intergenerational workshop in this community, and the idea that we could increase the level of safety by having different meetings with youth, Elders and "the middle generation" (as one local 30-something year old called her own cohort). In practice there was more mixing than we expected: as the word about the workshops got out community members came out to any sessions they could or felt like, so that we usually had a couple of teenager in the parents group, some younger parents in the grandparents groups etc.

transmission of violence and associated trauma (Ross, 2009, p.12). As such the topic of parenting seems to offer a particularly straight path to the heart of these communities' underlying challenges and from there to the therapeutic or healing agenda.

o In the even larger picture: The struggle over parenting dilemmas are a microcosm of the type of dilemmas that Aboriginal communities face in nearly every aspect of life – the tension between the past and the future, tradition and modernity. There is a large movement within Indigenous communities worldwide to reclaim the past and to return to traditional wisdoms. At the same time, there is a general acknowledgement that the old days are not fully restorable, or even fully desirable– in fact there is no "back-to-the-trapline movement", no yearning to return to the survival existence of pre-contact times (Ross, 1992, p.98 and Porter 2004). Indigenous scholars recognize a central preoccupation for Native people: "making decisions about which traditional commandments should be carried into the future with full force, which should be modified (and in what ways), and which should be discarded altogether." (Ross, 1992, p.44). This is relevant in most areas of life. Indigenous legal scholars, for example, see the creation of an "inter-societal" legal system that takes account of both aboriginal perspectives and and the perspective of the common law (Borrows, 2010p.69). The creation of any such hybrid system is in many ways an uncomfortable and contentious process. Anthropologists would call it *liminality*: a state of ambiguity and disorientation we find ourselves in when one structure of meaning has fallen apart but has not yet been replaced by another (Thomassen, 2009 and Horvath, Thomassen, and Wydra, 2009). In the Deep Democracy community we have had experiences of working with this tension whenever we have

worked within Indigenous communities[54]. From a field theory perspective, working with this tension as it presents itself around parenting issues could effectively help to work on multiple, larger dynamics within the community we are engaged with: if we create a shift in the microcosm perhaps we can create a shift in the macrocosm and in the fractal patterns that display in the larger system.

o When we first arrived on Tsulquate, the topic that was most top-of-mind for many community members including community leaders was the topic of governance. In practice, we found it difficult to engage the community around this topic, perhaps because it is too abstract of a concept or too difficult to engage with at this point in time. But it is very easy to see the tensions within governance as a fractal pattern of what we will be working on by focusing on parenting[55]. In fact, the two topics seem more related the more I think about them: parenting is quite literally the governance of the household. Many of the same questions are alive in the two parallel realms: who should "lead", according to which principles, with what level of authority and with what attitude? How much [and how] should "followers" participate in decision-making, with what level of influence and what attitude? How do various parts of the system sustain themselves and support each other? Perhaps we have come up with a clever way of working on governance issues after all… Or perhaps we will have time to turn our

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[54] In a particularly vivid example (Sera Thompson and Arthur Bull, pers. comm..), an intergenerational group of Míkmaq community members in Nova Scotia had a Deep Democracy argument when they noticed an underlying tension was preventing them from working together around natural resources decisions. One side of the argument –articulated particularly by community Elders- talked about the history of past injustices and the resulting pain and suffering that dominated the Nation's imagination, arguing for a need to honour that suffering, to stay with it, and to fight to restore the past that was stolen. The other side of the argument – articulated passionately by the youth- held that it was "time to move on", that there was no point dwelling in the past and that the community needed to "get on with it" and look for opportunities to thrive in the modern world. Both sides expressed their truth clearly and convincingly. Having heard each others the community members had many insights for how they may each adjust their attitudes and relationships in order to be able to work effectively together, regardless of which side of the argument they more strongly identified with.
[55] Within the realm of governance we would be looking at a contentious negotiation between tradition and modernity too: [how] can aspects of the hereditary leadership systems co-exist alongside the current western-style democratic, electoral-based governance model used by the Band?

attention to those issues more specifically once we have further established ourselves in the community through the parenting workshops.

o   While it won't be exactly what the CCP work plan calls for, we do plan to create a handbook on parenting practices based on what comes out of the participatory processes with community members. This can speak to Xenia's dream for an illustrated guide that will be accessible and exciting for parents to open and pay attention to. I am imagining it as a comic book – aligned with an exciting growing trend of using the comic and cartoon form to speak to the issues of Aboriginal communities on the one hand (Sean Muir, Executive Director, Healthy Aboriginal Network, pers. comm.), and share the stories of Aboriginal communities with non-Aboriginal audiences on the other hand (Yahgulanaas , 2008 and 2010). The beauty of it is that the comic book satisfies the need for a 'tangible' outcome for our project. It feels good to think that we will literally leave something behind that will be specifically for this community. On a personal level, I am also just thrilled about the possibility of bringing our artistic talents into the project and offering something creative, unique and aesthetically engaging. Selfishly, I am looking forward to hours and hours of sketching and inking! What could be better than that?!

o   And last but not least, the focus on parenting allows us to capitalize on our largest asset: a little boy named Ocean. He is already the best relationship-builder among us. His presence, his connection with other parents, grandparents, teenager and kids will literally pave the way for us into this topic. Having Ocean with us also puts us – especially Abrielle– on equal grounds with other young parents and care-givers who are just trying to figure out how to best raise their children from one day to the next, who are struggling with the complexities of that task, who are in the thick of it so to speak. We have a genuine interest in the topic beyond an academic curiosity. And hopefully the project will teach us something about how to be more

effective adult figures in Ocean's life and in the lives of other children in our own families and circles of friends.
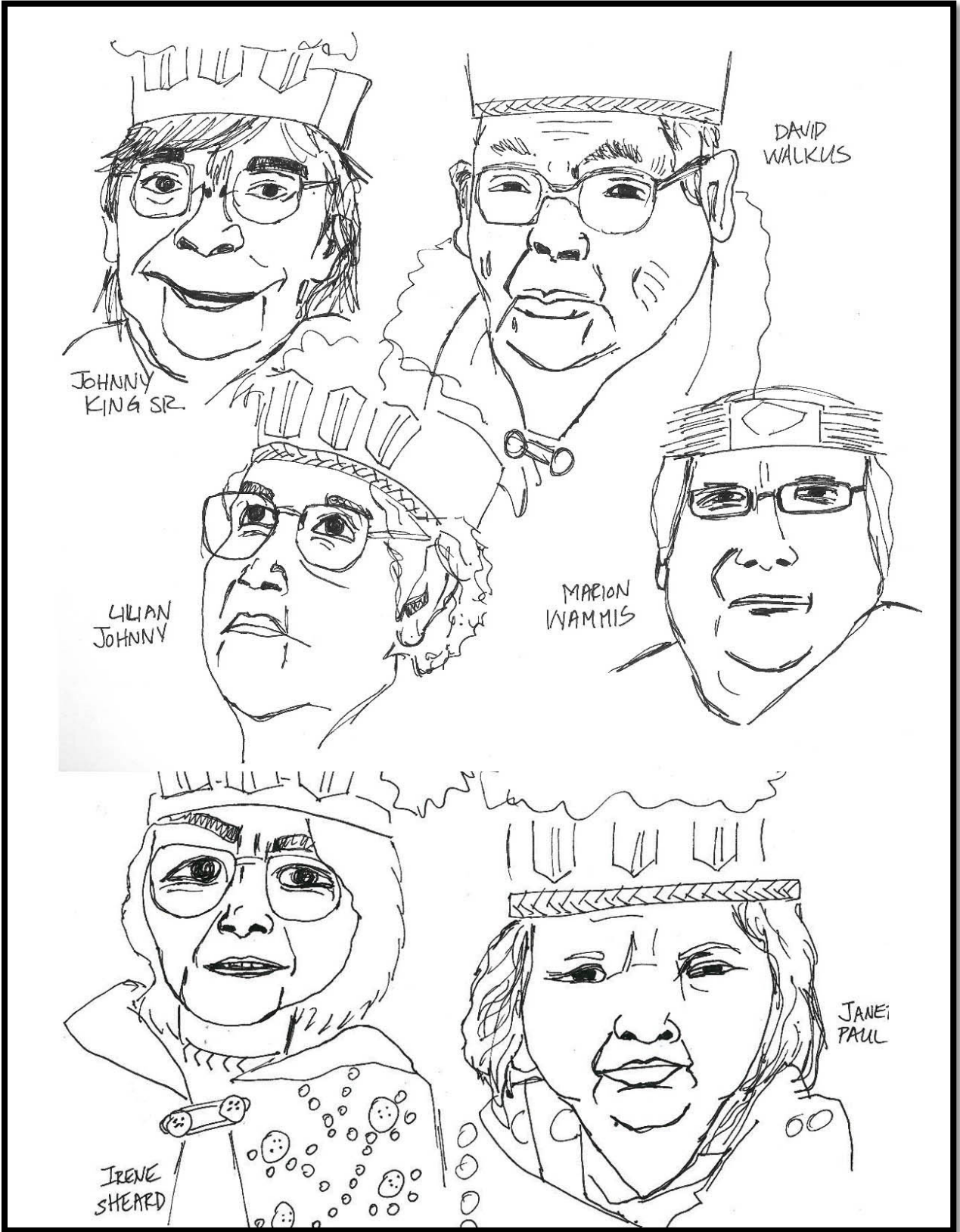
Illustration 9: Faces of GN Elders

3.2. In the hot seat

[Hanane's story] [56]

> *The first session with grandparents. I walk in a little frazzled after running around organizing the logistics of the meeting– but rather confidently, excited to start this process, feeling like it is finally getting real.*
>
> *I am determined to put my best foot forward by giving a good, clear framing of the session and coming across as authentically as I possibly can. Right before the session begins I am hit by an overwhelming feeling that what we are doing is somewhat incredible. I am filled with deep gratitude for the small group of community members who have come to make our project possible. I decide to start speaking from that place of gratitude…*

Hanane– So let's get started and others may join us… Before anything else, I want to thank you for being here, and for being here voluntarily – because you could be anywhere right now and you chose to come here. And I just think your presence is very important especially for a topic like parenting, because parenting is one of those things that we can easily take for granted. So by the fact that we have come and recognized it as a topic worth talking about, I think we are doing something big. Thank you for being here.

> *That was well articulated, although I hope it wasn't patronizing… I go on.*

Hanane– So, my name is Hanane. I live most of the time in Vancouver although I have been around here a lot lately and I have seen most of you around. And I have been working, mostly with Xenia out of the Band Office, first on the creation of the Comprehensive Community Plan, and more recently in trying to implement some of its components. One of the things that Xenia asked me to work on was a handbook for parents – because as part of the CCP many people said that developing parenting skills is very important. She asked me if I would do a handbook and do it with images, maybe as a comic book or a cartoon so that it would be easy to read, that it wouldn't be pages and pages of text, cause who wants to read that, right? So that's kind of the purpose of these series of conversations, because I thought I would love to do a handbook but I would first like to talk to some of the parents and grandparents in the community to really understand what parenting looks like here and what are the issues and opportunities. Cause you know, there are a lot of guidelines and principles that are recognized internationally and by governments and all of this stuff, but what really matters is what is happening here, what parenting practices work and don't work in this specific context. So that's why we are having these conversations about parenting and that's how we've come to be here.

> *I feel like I have nailed it. That was as clear and concise – or was it?*

Hanane– Is that clear? Is there any questions about that?

Joe – Yes.

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[56] Based largely on the transcript of a workshop on Oct 18th, 2011.

Hanane– Please, go ahead.

Joe *(respectfully)* – In regards to your cartoon handbook, is that an idea that came from our community members? Or is that your idea, is that your thought on what would be in our best interest for getting the information that you will share with us with regards to parenting?

> *I am a little confused by the question, feeling that it is more formal than it needs to be – but I take it as an opportunity to give more background and try to establish myself a little bit better.*

Hanane– Yeah, so the way this came about is that when I first came into the community a couple of years ago I was doing some drawings as part of the CCP process. Some of you would remember it, it's called visual recording. And it's just a simple technique of taking what is happening in meetings and making it visual. And that really seemed to speak to community members and some of those images are still on the website and in the CCP. So after that, Xenia thought that this can be a successful way of communicating some of the concepts around parenting.... But I don't want to impose any of the content or material... My idea is that.... Or my *feeling* is that it would be best if the content was developed entirely by the community. And even the cartooning we could do collaboratively with the community *(I am now thinking out loud, making some of this stuff up)*: ideas about characters, the storyline, whether it is a good idea to do this at all... all of that is up for talking about together. So I am hoping that it will be very collaborative. Does that make sense?

> *There is a pause and I get just a little nervous as he clears his throat and goes on.*

Joe– What I was getting at...what I was getting at is... is it in your best interest to tell us... are you trying to teach us the ways of our own community? Or is the cartoon a way to communicate with us what you're sharing with your community?

> *I am struck by the use of the terms "best interest" which he has now used twice and I begin to suspect that my intentions are under question here. There is a slight feeling that I am being attacked, but I don't let this faze me and instead think of it as more of an opportunity to explain myself. Clearly the idea that I am not bringing in information but rather hoping to get them to generate the information is not landing. Let me try saying it again:*

Hanane– So, actually, I am not coming in to share information per se. I guess I am coming in on the belief that this community actually has all the knowledge about parenting that it needs: it's just in bits and pieces sitting within different people. If people bring their own experiences and knowledge into these conversations, then all the information actually comes from the community... So as we have these meetings, you will hear from each other and share your own information, and I will try and capture that and put it into this cartoon handbook *(I check my neutrality, suspecting that the idea of a cartoon book is also on trial here and add) if* that feels like an appropriate format or a useful thing to do. So the handbook will be almost like a mirror of what you have said. Is that more clear?

To my relief he nods and says yes, but then someone else picks up the ball.

Marlene *(rather aggressively)*– I thought that this was, that this was just going to be an information session. *("But who told you that!?" I am screaming in my head!)* I didn't know you were coming to gather information.

> *Now I feel like I am fucked. I lose my ground for a second and wonder if I am going to cry. What did our local research assistant tell these people they were coming to do when she called to invite them? I am cursing myself for not monitoring those conversations more closely. And I want to kick myself for the stupid consent forms I left on the chairs before the meeting – which clearly give me away as a "researcher", having come here to "steal" more of this community's knowledge... I've fallen into the trap... I re-centre quickly and gather up all my neutrality, let go of all my agendas for the meeting and try this:*

Hanane– Right. So I think that is probably my fault for not having been clear enough in the invitations and in the advertising of the workshop. But you know, the other thing is that this is *our* workshop now and we can make it whatever we want it to be. My sense was that it would be good just to have a discussion about parenting. If you prefer I could *not* gather any of the information – we can just have an informal conversation and see what, if anything, we want to do with it later. We can just have a chat and then go home. We can just go home right now. I don't feel strongly about driving any specific agenda. But I also would say that I haven't come here with a lot of material – I am not qualified to do any kind of teaching or information sharing. I am not a parenting expert. I am really just an excuse to have these conversations, *if* you guys choose to have them.

> *I feel a little easier now about where I stand, completely unsure of what will happen next, but okay with that. Another participant goes on.*

Sarah– Cause I remember in the CCP workshops our young people talked about needing to learn more parenting skills and that's what I thought this was for.

> *As I become curious about the repetition here, I realize that this is what this community is used to: they are used to experts of various kinds coming in to give workshops. This collaborative information generation model is unfamiliar to them – and maybe it is not appropriate. There is a tension here between the two models.*

Hanane– Right, and that has been my experience too: I have talked to a lot of the young parents and we are having a session with them in the next week – and as you say there is a very clear expression of need for learning parenting skills. So yes, you're absolutely right. And so I am planning on opening a conversation with them next week just as I am doing with you to see what those needs are and what we can do around them – and also to see what they each have to contribute to the conversation because even the least experienced parents will have some knowledge and wisdom to offer... OR, they may want me to do some research and bring in something to teach them which is also fine.

> *I feel a slight pull on my neutrality: I am more than a little attached to the collaborative model, aren't I? Instead of going into a defensive mode I try to*

steer the process gently, encouraging the group to take it where it needs to go.

Hanane– Anyway, I would personally love it if we could jump in and talk about our different views and practices on parenting – but as I said I don't want to be the driver of the process here. We can chat for a few minutes and then decide if that's the end of it, if we want to have more meetings, if the information should be captured or not, if I should do research and bring in some expertise from the outside, if someone else should lead these sessions, if we should abandon the whole thing…. It's entirely up to you where you want to take it.

I now have to wait and see what direction they will take the conversation. What emerges next is the last thing I suspect.

Joe– So, are you here on behalf of the CCP?

What does it mean to be here "on behalf of the CCP"? I wonder.

Joe– Are you here for future planning of our CCP in regards to our treaty process?

Well, now the big guns are coming out. I am momentarily speechless and feel my face getting hot. The treaty is explosive stuff and I am suspected of being associated with it. I say sheepishly:

Hanane– Um, in regards to the…?

Joe *(repeating himself slowly for me, almost as if he is an interrogator)*– Are you here on behalf of the CCP, in regards to our treaty?

I don't want to get into this, but I have no choice but to be as honest as I can about where I stand and what I understand. I give out a sigh and try my best:

Hanane– I'm definitely not here to talk about the treaty process. I have nothing to do with the treaty at all. And I don't think that the CCP does either.

I know this is my most controversial statement yet. I know the CCP is suspicious because of a perceived connection with the treaty process (they both come out of the Band Office after all!). I watch the face of my questioner squeeze into a frown – for a second I am sure he is going to explode but by some miracle he swallows whatever it is he was going to say and lets me go on.

Hanane– My understanding is that the CCP is meant to be for the community, regardless of what happens with the treaty process, and that's just my understanding. I would say that I have been in a relationship, in a friendship with Xenia for a long time and I am really here to help her with implementing some of what came out of the CCP – so if that's what you mean by being here "on behalf of the CCP" then I guess I am. But I am not interested in the political processes that are going on and I don't have an opinion on the treaty one way or another – it's not my business.

He seems to be buying this enough that he doesn't attack me again.

Hanane– And I should add that Xenia would have liked to be here to explain all of this to you in her own terms. Unfortunately she is out of town right now, she is helping another community with their own CCP process ...

> *Another participant interrupts me.*

Tommy *(sharply)*– Xenia should have cancelled whatever she is doing, or you should have changed the date of this meeting. She really should have been here!

> *I am frustrated. I feel like defending her and myself but I decide against it. I quickly find part of me that agrees with the last speaker: it would have been so much better if Xenia was here to save me! I now face the fact that the session I am convening may be entirely about criticizing me and the CCP and Xenia: maybe that is what needs to take place. Who am I to know!? I want to make it okay for the participants to say anything, absolutely anything – including harsh words towards me/us. I say genuinely:*

Hanane– Yes, you are right, that would have been a lot better if she was here.

> *Then, as I give in to my fate –whatever that may be– a small old grandmother begins to speak. She goes into a long monologue about the state of children on the reserve, talking about all the challenges they face, and all the challenges she faces with her own grandchildren. She speaks quietly and under her breath. I try my best to be present to her but I can barely understand anything she is saying and I struggle to follow her speech patterns. At the same time I get a definite feeling that she is saving me in this moment. She is changing the nature of the meeting from attacks on me to a kind of sharing circle. Somewhere in her speech she covers everything from her experiences in Residential School to her memories of the relocation. She ends on some long-winded comment about how much the young parents need to learn, and she says she has come to the meeting because she wants to help the young parents. I am relieved and almost tearing up at the thought that at least one person wants to be here and seems to understand what I am inviting! I say to her appreciatively:*

Hanane– That's is exactly the kind of conversation I imagined having as part of these meetings. I definitely get the feeling from the young parents that they need to build their skills, and whatever resources are provided they will appreciate them, as you are saying.

> *Then suddenly it becomes clear to me what the sessions are about – the grandparents –even in their own brokenness and dysfunctional state– are the experts: they know something about parenting that the young parents don't know – merely by the length of their own experiences. Their knowledge at least gives us a place to start talking. If I can get them to take up the expert role I am off the hook.*

Hanane– As you were speaking, it was very obvious to me that the Elders of this community have the most relevant information to convey to the younger folks about how to parent. You have some great tips and approaches for how to bring up children –

even despite every hardship that you have gone through, you have kept some of that knowledge alive.

> *The old grandmother now continues into another monologue, this time describing more painful details about the intergenerational trauma that is dominating the community and about the resilience of her people in spite of all the hardship, and the ways in which they have managed to keep elements of their culture. To my surprise, my most critical questioner seems to soften up and respond to the grandmother:*

Joe– Auntie, you're absolutely right on that. There is not one member of this community that has not been affected by the Residential School experience… *(Then speaking to me:)* She just hit the nail on the head…

> *And with that the tone of the conversation changes completely. The floodgates suddenly open. The people who were suspicious of me and of the meeting suddenly begin to speak with remarkable openness about their experiences of pain, about the state of the community and about their families, about their own role in cycles of abuse. I say very little now, I just gently ask if others share those experiences or have something else to add. The conversation eventually turns away from describing the pain and suffering and instead focuses on the role of families in "breaking the cycle". I gently encourage them to articulate what this "breaking the cycle" might look like in the context of parenting, and before I know it we are talking about parenting practices. It all seems so simple now. I feel like we have hit a gold mine. Stories of the old times seem to flow effortlessly from the lips of these Elders: the ways that the old people used to be together, the ways families passed down traditions to their children, the ways that both loving-kindness and kind-strictness were part of the parenting package… Their expertise in the subject matter far surpasses my wildest imagination. They talk for three hours before they stop, then we all go home.*

3.3. Grandparents debriefed

[Act 2, Scene 1]

(Ravenna, Hanane and Abrielle having a drink after supper. Ocean is already in bed.)

Ravenna– Okay Hanane, glass of wine or single malt scotch?! You deserve whatever you want to drink tonight.

Hanane *(smiling)* – I'll go for the wine, thanks Ravenna.

Ravenna *(pouring wine for Hanane and scotch for herself)* – You totally rocked out there today girl. Cheers to that.

Abrielle *(raising, then lowering her glass of water)*– And how are you feeling now?

Hanane– I feel totally exhausted. And I feel very relieved that I don't have to do that again for a few days now! The first fifteen minutes of that meeting were... well, I don't think I ever sweat so much before in my life.

Ravenna– You had one tough crowd. These Elders are so hard to crack!

Hanane– Yeah, I had no idea it would be that rough. If I had, I would have never dared stand up and run that meeting... Cheers to ignorance!

Ravenna– Cheers!

Abrielle – But once you got through that rough beginning it was pretty amazing what came out... You feel like debriefing it a little bit?

Hanane– Yes please, that would be good. Otherwise I will be up all night re–running the meeting in my head.

Ravenna– There is so many things we could say about that first part, but here's my quick take: you walked into the room and you were expected to play this expert-leader role – this person who is in charge of the process and is going to teach something or share some kind of information. You didn't ask for the expert role– but that was what you got. And in that role you were almost set up to fail from the beginning. They started to attack you right away – the way they are used to attacking leaders in this community very often.

Hanane– Yeah, nobody can ever do anything right...

Ravenna– Yeah. And what I saw you do was to recognize how you were being set up and decide not to play into that. Instead you kept speaking from the non–expert role: you agreed with them about what you'd done wrong...

Hanane– Not advertising the workshop right, not bringing Xenia, not serving the right food...

Ravenna –And you openly admitted you didn't have the knowledge to teach them about parenting, and on top of that you didn't even know how the meeting should necessarily go!

Abrielle– I loved how you said "I'm just an excuse for you guys to meet".

Ravenna– Me too. And I liked your very genuine thing about "I don't have a strong need to drive this meeting". You kept giving some minimal suggestions to steer the meeting but there was a feeling that you were willing to throw the agenda out of the window completely and do whatever they wanted.

Hanane– Well, I was. I was totally willing to do that. Actually, I had no choice! I was out of my depth. I literally didn't have the ability to be a heavy-handed, expert kind of leader in that setting– I only had the ability to be a minimalist, collaborative kind of leader.

Ravenna– That was so brilliant...

Hanane– Was it?

Ravenna– Yes!

Hanane– I tend to disagree. Cause I was aware of a kind of tension within me – a slight loss of neutrality, a feeling that I am biased toward the collaborative model and I dismiss the expert model as being less valid or less good. I mean, it's a professional bias and all that... but really, I am totally underdeveloped as an expert-leader, there is a kind of hole in my abilities and education– and who knows how I am getting in the way of groups because of that.

Ravenna– And I think you should probably look at that in yourself if it is pulling on your neutrality – but what I saw happen was that, eventually, in your repeated refusal to take up that expert-leader role, you got the participants to take up that role instead. You took on the non-expert role that members of Indigenous communities so often find themselves stuck in– given the history of colonialism and the continuing patronizing attitude of the Ministry and all of that... You set up a different dynamics and you created a turning point (Lederach, 2005). There was this amazing role fluidity[57], and suddenly the people in the room began to act as the teachers and leaders that they so clearly have the ability to be.

Hanane– Well, yeah, I agree that happened to some extent.

Abrielle– And in connection with that, you did this beautiful reframing of the purpose of the workshop from "you're just here to talk about parenting" to "you Elders are the experts in this topic and you are here to give advice that younger parents are hungry for", which was very appropriate and very well aligned with cultural practices here as well.

Hanane– Yes that idea for the reframing eventually came to me, and I think it turned out to be my most effective move. I just thought I would try it, and it seemed to catch on.

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[57] Role Fluidity is a central concept in Deep Democracy. It expresses that groups functions best when roles (including positions, ideas, emotions etc) are shared by different people in the group instead of getting stuck to certain individuals. The entire point of Deep Democracy is to allow each person to find the roles within themselves that they don't typically take on. This could mean, for example that someone who is usually a follower in group will find a little bit of his or her own leadership ability, or that someone who sees him or herself as completely open-minded will own a little big of his or her own prejudice or close-mindedness. This is how learning and transformation happen in individuals and between individuals. The role of the facilitator is to encourage role fluidity.

Ravenna– I was very impressed at that too. And I must say, it would have never occurred to me to do that.

Hanane– Why is that?

Ravenna– *(pauses to consider this)* I think I may have too much knowledge about native communities… I've read too much. And what you did goes against the literature.

Hanane– What does the literature say?

Ravenna– Well, I'm thinking particularly of Clare Brant and Rosalie Wax's work (cited in Ross, 1992, p.13) – a psychologist and an anthropologist– who talk about this very strong "ethics of non-interference" that dominates native communities. And this ethics says that you should never give advice to people, that it is rude to tell others what to do. Now, obviously Elders *do* give advice in appropriate cultural circumstances– but in a workshop setting with an outsider? I wouldn't have believed it was possible! I mean, Rupert Ross himself found that when he was in Indigenous communities – and he spent a *lot of time* in these communities, he didn't just fly in and out– and he was asking for advice or recommendations people would give him these blank looks. So eventually he developed this other way of speaking which was that he would just start talking out loud about the various factors in whatever it was he wanted to engage people about, as if he was reviewing them for his own benefit! He didn't ask for opinions or even pose questions directly – but he found that this way of speaking changed everything. People suddenly started to share their own opinions.

Hanane– So the strategy of asking directly for advice is not supposed to work?

Ravenna– Nope! Not according to the literature.

Hanane– Hmmm. Thank goodness I didn't know that!

Ravenna– Yes, exactly. I mean, obviously there are many reasons why it *did* work in this specific setting – but I think your not-knowing that it wasn't supposed to work really allowed you to be open to what was possible here.

Abrielle– It made it easier to be neutral.

Hanane– Right. *(pause)* That's interesting. And it's true – because I don't have a ton of knowledge. I depend almost entirely on what is alive in the group at any moment. That's the only thing I have to hold onto. And I think that works in my favour.

Abrielle– Ravenna, did you notice anything else that went against your expectations or against what's in the literature?

Ravenna– Yeah, definitely. There were surprises for me in what the grandparents ended up talking about for the major part of the session. For one thing I didn't expect them to be so open and to express so much emotion. I mean, as traumatized people they were supposed to be unable to differentiate and express emotions, and, again, especially in this setting with a person they barely knew (Ross, 2009)! Good thing you didn't know that either, Hanane.

Hanane– Good thing. Otherwise I might have freaked out and shut them down!

Ravenna– *(laughs and continues)* And the other surprise for me was that I was expecting them to talk about that ethics of non-interference in relation to parenting. Because what the literature says is that the traditional ways of Indigenous parenting involve being quite hands-off and letting your kids figure things out on their own. You sit back and let them make a lot of mistakes and they eventually learn what's good for them and what's not. But the grandparents didn't talk about this at all. In fact they kind of did the opposite: they had that long conversation about rule setting, and about discipline, and about passing on values, and teaching the kids what's right and what's wrong. I was surprised by that.

Abrielle– It kind of makes sense though, doesn't it? I mean, the hands–off ways of parenting probably worked really well in the old days when the risks of the environment were familiar to parents – the worst thing that could happen was your kids would eat a poisonous mushroom and you probably knew what natural antidote you had to give them to save their lives! But now, living close to the town and being digitally connected to every part of the world, the kids can get into much more complicated problems that would totally baffle their parents' minds. So I feel like parents have to be a lot stricter about boundaries nowadays.

Ravenna– Yes, absolutely. That makes total sense. And of course the grandparents' generation has also been hugely influenced by the Residential School disciplinary system, which was very strict – and maybe they now believe *that* to be the right way.... But I was just assuming that the grandparents would *at least* acknowledge how parenting used to be far less of an "involved" process – and they didn't, that's all.

Abrielle– Right.

Ravenna– What they *did* talk about that was consistent with the literature was that the traditional ways of parenting were largely focused on modeling the ways of life parents wanted to impart on their kids. A lot of showing and telling, taking kids along into various activities, demonstrating how you skin a deer multiple times instead of sitting down and explaining it to your kids or having them read a manual.

Hanane– Right. The transmission of oral culture. What I gathered from the conversation was that the Elders still see a large role for that in today's society. Maybe that's one of the aspects of culture that it makes sense to restore.

(Ravenna nods and pours more drinks.)

Hanane– Did anything surprise you or stand out for you, Abrielle?

Abrielle *(thinking)*– Besides what we have talked about, there was a moment in the conversation that really stood out for me. It was the story that auntie Irene told. And it stood out because it was so grounded and so tangible – almost vulnerable in its simplicity compared to everything else that was talked about.

Ravenna– Which story was that?

Abrielle– Everyone was talking about imparting values and life-skills on children in these moralistic terms – and then auntie Irene's story was: I was sitting with my grandmother, days before she died. I was at her bedside. And she took my hands and

she rubbed moisturizing cream on my hands, and she said "always moisturize your hands!", and that's what my grandmother taught me.

Hanane– *(smiling)* Hmmm. Such a sweet story.

Abrielle– Isn't it just touching? I just thought it was remarkable that she said that because it brings out a lesson on parenting that is not often included in parenting handbooks, and especially in a community like this where the situation is so dire and life is so tough... The lesson is: you've got to take care of yourself, you've got to be good to your body, you've got to be nurturing to your delicate hands– if you're going to be able to be nurturing to your children and to other people.

Hanane– The self-care lesson.

Abrielle– Yeah. I think that's very important. And very easily forgotten as a parent.

Hanane– Nice.

(They sit silently for a while, sipping drinks and being good to themselves.)

Abrielle– I was also almost paralyzed by the pain in some of Irene's stories. When she started to cry I found myself tearing up involuntarily. I felt like I had to run over and comfort her – but then to my complete relief somebody else did that.

Ravenna– Yes, the young father who walked over and started to rub her shoulders...

Hanane– It was beautiful.

Ravenna – And it was another indication of role fluidity in that session: we didn't have to be the comforters. Community members were taking care of each other, being leaders in that way too.

Abrielle– You did comfort Irene afterwards though, didn't you?

Hanane– Yes, she stayed behind and we chatted for another 45 minutes after the session. She told more stories and cried more. She said she just wanted to get it off her chest and she appreciated that somebody would listen. She seemed okay at the end but I'll drop in on her again tomorrow just to make sure.

Abrielle– And the grandfather who sat there and didn't say anything?

Hanane– I'll drop in on him too. I ran into his daughter and she said he wanted to tell me his stories but couldn't do it in the session. You don't worry Abrielle, I'll make sure he's okay.

(Abrielle and Ravenna nod approvingly. They finish their drinks.)

Hanane– So, we'll have another session with the grandparents, right? And I think what I like to do is email my brother–in–law, who is an early childhood specialist, and actually get some recent, well-researched parenting resources sent to me... because there is all this research done on childhood development and there is a lot of wisdom in that too...

Ravenna– That may be just the subject expertise you need!

Hanane– Yeah, hopefully! And I think I like to put the grandparents' input next to the early-childhood development information – and create some kind of hybrid list of "good

parenting practices" – which would be based primarily on the grandparents advice, but sort of fleshed out with the modern wisdom...

Ravenna– That would be great. And at some point we can take that kind of list into the meetings with the parents and the teenagers and flesh them out some more.

Hanane– Yeah. I don't want to restrict those meetings to this list, but I am thinking that the parents and teenagers can really debate these topics as much as they want. They can say, "well this is useful and speaks to our reality" or "this other thing seems outdated and irrelevant". And based on whatever conversation they have, we can kind of refine the list. And then we can do the cartoon handbook based on that list... if we still think the cartoon handbook is the way to go.

Ravenna– Sounds good. I am excited to step in and facilitate with the parents next. I just have to forget everything I have ever read and I should be good to go...

Hanane– That third glass of scotch will probably help you with that![58]

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[58] In actual fact this was to be the one and only meeting with the elders. Subsequent meetings were scheduled but not attended. I complemented the parenting information that came from this session by interviewing some of the elders individually, then proceeded to create a "hybrid" list of parenting practices and take them to meetings with parents as described above.

3.4. Putting on the showgirl

[Ravenna's poem][59]

I've rehearsed the session in my mind for days,
Considered it from every angle
Consulted
  Designed
    Scrapped
      Redesigned
       Let go of design.
I have what it takes to do it
I know how to run this meeting; it's not my first.
But as the hour approaches I am nevertheless uneasy
Panicking
Tossing restlessly in bed.

The session has been hyped up,
Only partly through any fault of my own:
I'm the lady from the city who says she's got something to offer
I feel the weight of expectations
People looking to me to "wow" them with my supposed skills
       – or worse, my charming personality!?–
I am supposed to be helpful, yes
But at this point
I am most concerned about being entertaining enough
Captivating their attention
Enchanting them:
Performing

I search half-unconsciously for the image of an alter-ego
who can accompany me to the session
I go with the first person who comes to mind:
Marilyn Monroe!!!
Lovely image
Sweet *and* sultry
  Charming beyond reason
  Delicious and delightful
   A true enchantress, if there ever was one!
She walks with poise to the middle of the room
Takes a quick breath
And puts on a show.
What I like most about her:
The confident air

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[59] Based on a supervision call with Myrna Lewis, Oct 2010.

Radiating from her unmistakable femininity
And at once
A touching softness,
  A devastating vulnerability
   The possibility that she will break into tears
     Right in the middle of that seductive big laugh.
She'd wear her heart on her sleeve
If she wasn't wearing a sleeveless, shimmering dress.

We walk into the room,
Marilyn and I.

Ten minutes in, I know we're performing.
I feel comfortable in my own skin
  The gazes coming towards me warm up the skin on my arms and back
    The smiles and chuckles tell me my jokes are landing
      I'm just outrageous enough to be interesting– but not too outrageous
I am holding my audience in the palm of my hand

Now that I've got my groove
I am getting on with the agenda:
I want to invite them to open up
To say a few things that are typically too hard for them to say
  Lower the waterline
    Dive below the surface
      Go for a little swim in the safety of the shallow-end of the meeting room
I'd like them to leave
having learned a few somethings
about each other and themselves
I'd like to give them a feeling
Of their connections to each other through their stories

What I know tells me that the invitation will only work
If I go first.
To become open about myself
To model something of what I am hoping they step into.

A minute later,
I slip into my slick act:
I recount
A silly story about a petty fight with my boyfriend over salt
The shame of that time I yelled at my sister because she was depressed
The guilty pleasure of knowing I was a teacher's favourite
The reoccurring dreams about the twins never quite born into my family…

Suddenly I panic.

Did I have to divulge that much?
I barely know anybody in the room
But they now know my most troubling stories!

I look over at Marilyn:
She is standing tall
And fully naked

Her bareness overtakes me
I feel the blood rush into my cheeks and the back of my neck
They can see all of it now:
The body hair I am self-conscious about
  The stretch marks on my thighs from the time I was over-eating at 18
    The tattoo that is too small cause I wimped out half way through
      And the parts of me I like to reserve for very special relationships only.

My sin is small:
I simply overshot with intimacy.

Yet I have made a potentially fatal error:
The last thing I want
Is for everyone in the group to feel that they have to become naked
I know they have deeper wounds than I do
I am terrified to think I have pushed them to expose too much

Desperately and inwardly I shout:
"Marilyn!
  Pull something on for god's sake!"

She looks over at me
A bit absent-mindedly, I think
As if none of this is such a big deal
Then she turns around
–now we can all see her full, gorgeous figure–
And starts searching through her bags

What does she need to put on to be safe?
What is the appropriate attire for this stage of the meeting now?
She picks up a pink slip and winks in my direction playfully
I shake my head
        "It's no time for seduction,
        totally wrong tone Marilyn!"
Instead I point towards a full body armor
        "That should protect you nice and well."
But she laughs at my foolishness
Totally wrong tone, too.

She could put on a business suit for formality
  Or a carnival dress with feathers for extra show…
But finally she settles on a short cotton dress with green floral pattern

I recognize it immediately
I bought it at a street sale in Ottawa
The summer I fell in love
Then wore it everywhere:
Shopping
  Biking
    Partying
      Picnicking:
My all-purpose summer dress

It looks good on Marilyn
It covers just enough
Still exposing her beautiful collarbone
  Her long arms covered in light brown hair
    Her softly muscular legs

My audience has suddenly reappeared in my awareness
I take a breath
Pull my own cardigan off the back of my chair
And admit in a slightly exaggerated tone for comic effect:
        "I gotta make a confession
        I feel like I just totally embarrassed myself
        by confessing so much on our first date!"
To some giggling I add:
        "Is it just me or did it
        Suddenly get very cold in here?" putting on my extra layer.
"It's just you!" one of the women helps me out
  Generating even more easy laughter in the room.
 I join in.
"May I suggest that if you choose to share anything in this meeting,
You go as slowly as feels good to you
And try and keep your shirt on!"

And so we go on
My friend Marilyn and I:
Dressed
But not over-dressed,
Some of our seams on display
But our soft spots well protected,
Comfortably strong
And touchingly vulnerable.
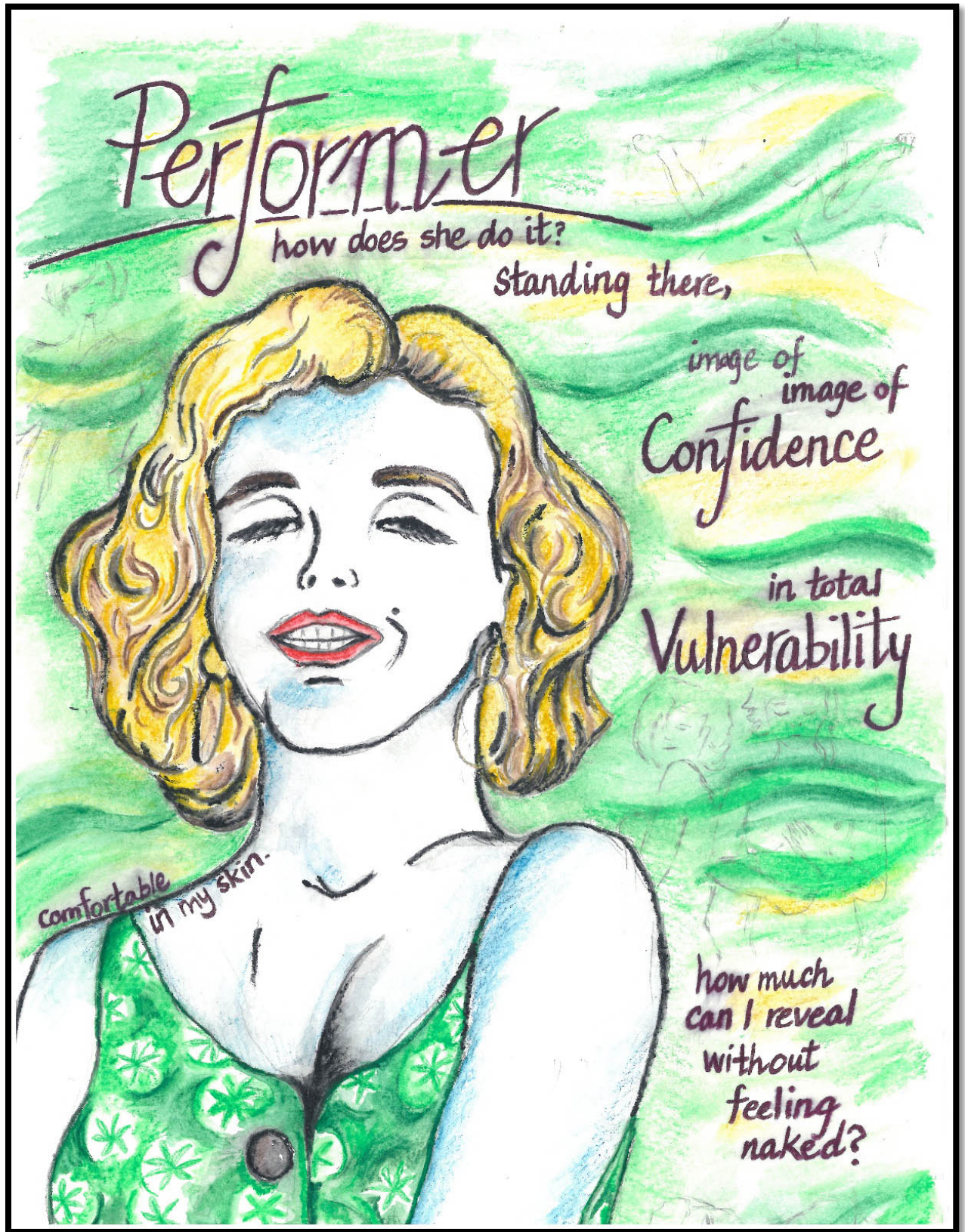
Illustration 10: Ravenna as Marilyn

3.5. The trouble with pencil crayons

[Ravenna's story]

As we get into the workshops, I am brimming with ideas about bringing visuals into my work with the parents. I have fantasized long and hard about the power of the arts and all the doors to healing that they will open– not to mention the possibilities for fun they will generate. "If they liked the visual recording, they are going to love what we are about to do next", I tell myself. In my elegant design I endow the arts with three functions:

a) As an alternative 'communicative planning' method that complements the talking we are going to be doing in workshops, giving us alternative language and ways of expressing what may be otherwise unspeakable;

b) As a mode of representation and dissemination, making the workshop results and findings accessible and attractive to their target audience (through the comic/cartoon handbook);

c) As a method of participatory evaluation for the project, inviting our research participants and research partners to give feedback on the work we have been doing in creative ways, no longer limited to the dry conventions of academia!

Once I feel like I have found my groove with the parents, I go into the next session carrying boxes of pencil crayons, colourful felt pens, oil pastels, funky paper, glitter and everything else. A few of the children who have come to the meeting with their parents get into the art box and manage to amuse themselves for a whole 12 minutes or so, each producing about 20 colourful, mixed-media masterpieces. Their parents are far less adventurous with their choice of drawing implements: most of them ask for black felts to fill out the unusual pre-workshop questionnaire I have distributed. They take their time with the questionnaire – which asks them to mark up various word clouds and places along various continuums with words and symbols of their choice, as ways of encouraging them to think about and express something about their own and their children's pre-workshop competencies and challenges. I allow an extra half hour for

this initial activity – which I had imagined would take 5 minutes, thinking to myself: "Yay, they are engaging!"

Later in the session, after we have done a check-in and had the familiar conversation about how badly parenting workshops are needed in this community, I distribute blank sheets of paper for the next activity I have designed. I ask the participants to draw a representation of their family and highlight their relationship to one of their children. There is a moment of silence as they look at me blankly. "I can't draw", I then hear, which doesn't surprise me. "Oh, it doesn't have to be artistic at all", I quickly assure them. "You could do stick figures, or even just a random shape for every person in your family." They don't seem convinced. Another woman requests an example. I scratch my head, then take a marker and put a few stick figures on the flip chart. "For example, this is Abrielle's family. There is Abrielle, and her partner Jeremy, and this is their son Ocean who is 9 months old." Then I add a few lines between my simple representations of Abrielle and Ocean: "He is at that age when he is super attached to mom. Abrielle loves the connection, but she also finds it exhausting to have to be so attentive all the time," I describe as I look over at Ocean sucking on a piece of dried apricot at Abrielle's feet. She gives me a slight encouraging smile.

"So, you want us to draw our families?", someone asks suspiciously. "You mean, ourselves and our kids?" Not wanting to restrict any creativity I respond, "I'd like you to draw *your family*, whatever you understand that term to mean." Several people chuckle at this and put their papers down on the floor in a symbolic act of *you-must-be-kidding-me*. "Oh no, you don't want to open that whole question!" one of the fathers warns me, laughing at my naïveté. "You don't want us to be here until midnight!" a young woman adds. "Okay, okay, let's just go with you and your kids", I say, backing off, somewhat disappointed at myself.

Then something surprising happens. A couple of the women get up from their chairs in the sharing circle where we have all been sitting and move to the back of the room, dragging their feet like teenagers heading to do something they really don't want to do.

156

They move some chairs to a table and sit down. It takes me a second to realize what they are doing: they are going to draw so they need to sit at a table! Of course. That's reasonable. Why did I assume they could draw from their chairs in the sharing circle, like in every other meeting I have ever facilitated!? Just about everyone else follows the two women. I observe how they arrange themselves – they sit in family groups, with their sisters and cousins. The two men who are present stay in their chairs in the circle, as do the two women who complained about feeling isolated during the check-in. I watch the three or four "family groups" in the back of the room: their members chat and laugh, not taking the drawing seriously, but looking like they are having a good time. They remind me of the cliques from my high school cafeteria, and I immediately feel awful for the few outliers who are sitting alone, heads bent over, diligently working on the task I have given them.

Again, the exercise takes about ten times longer than I had imagined it would take. I eventually feel the need to go over to the tables in the back and herd my participants back into the sharing circle. I try to be light and playful, but it's like herding cats. They come back slowly and reluctantly, while I begin to stress out about time. By the time they arrive back in the circle, it's not the same circle any more: I felt that we started as a fairly cohesive group about two hours ago, where people were sharing openly and speaking to each other– now it feels like they are a bunch of teenagers and they are glaring at me like I am the teacher, waiting to see what I will make them do next! I feel like I have fallen into a familiar trap: being set up as a kind of leader I least want to be. Hoping to get the discussion going again, I ask people if they will share what they drew. A few people reluctantly volunteer. They hold up their drawings and show us. Every single one of them has illustrated stick figures identical to my example on the flip chart, labeled them the exact same way with the names of people and the age of children, and every one of them has highlighted the same mother-child attachment relationship that I identified in my example! I can't believe it. There is virtually no variation on the theme. No one has even dared to use colour. They have all just copied me! I internally scratch my head: Is there really no room for creativity in this place!? I have planned another drawing exercise next but I am reluctant to go into it now. The story of David Mosse's

action research with rural Indian villagers, who were similarly mystified by art supplies (Mosse, 1994) flashes through my mind. I wonder if that story should have been a warning – but then how would I know that *this group* reacts like *that group* unless I experiment? I distribute more paper, thinking it is too early to give up.

"Now, this time, what I would like you to do is draw your family of origin", I suggest. There is a quick and sharp response from one of the participants this time: "I won't do that." I look up at her with my mouth open. "I can't go there." I recognize there must be a trauma and now feel puzzled by my own naïveté. "Oh, please don't go there if you don't want to", I reply quickly. Then I address the whole group and emphasize: "This is very important, I don't want anybody to do anything in this workshop that is not good for them. Remember we're going to keep our shirts on!" A few people smile at my joke. "Anybody else want to drop out of this exercise?" I go on. Most of them now drop their paper and pens into the middle of the room. I feel immediately relieved.

To my surprise, the woman who "can't go there" now opens up and says publicly: "I was abused by foster parents as a child. I have no interest in revisiting that". "That is totally fine," I say again in an assuring tone. There is silence, and then, by some miracle, I feel the spirit of the sharing circle return. The parents start talking about their own experiences with foster homes – mostly foster homes that their children have been in, or are currently in. Some of the stories are quite painful but they commiserate beautifully around them. Several people begin to say: "I will do anything to get my kids back, and that's why I am here, to learn how to be a better parent." Eventually I take them into a Soft Shoe Shuffle around what it means to be a good parent. They seem to like this. They are engaged and energized by the end of the session. I feel like I barely managed to hold that together.

The next week I come back with quite different drawing exercises, inspired by the grandparents stories about life in the traditional territories and the idea of raising children as a village. I hand out maps of the region and ask the participants to mark or colour in any parts of the traditional territories they or their children have visited. I

then also hand out close-up maps of the reserve and ask the parents to mark or colour the places where their kids hang out or play. I see the same patterns in the room as the last time I gave them pencil crayons: the cliques begin to form, the tables become central and the shape of the sharing circle is lost, the room looks like a classroom and I find myself falling into the teacher role, having to work hard to recover from it. I begin to understand this when I consider that the *only* previous experience that my participants have with drawing has been in the context of school. The minute they get paper and pencil crayons, they become school children and they start to act accordingly.

Eventually, I come to feel that I am shooting myself in the foot by conjuring up those connotations, because the last thing I want to set up is a fixed student-teacher or child-adult relationship. What I have understood about the thirst for parenting skills here is that, if anything, my participants are looking to become *less child-like, more adult-like.* The mapping exercises are the last set of drawing exercises I try. They go almost nowhere – most of my participants don't mark the maps but instead take them home (including the extra copies I offer them). I realize maps are too valuable here – most of these folks have never seen a map of their territories or their reserve before. In the one or two cases I get any marked up maps back the parents have simply put an X on two lots, one marked "Home" and the other "Grandparents' House". I wonder if the parents have no idea which roads, which river banks, which rocks, and which public spaces their children play in – or if they don't have the basic map reading skills or spatial context awareness to be able to relate a physical reality to a two-dimensional map– or if they don't want to put information down on paper.

I continue to wonder about the resistance to putting truthful information down on paper when I look at the pre-workshop questionnaires that everyone has filled out. I am struck by the differences between what the participants have written or drawn in these questionnaires, and what they have said during the sessions. In virtually all questionnaires, the parents mark their own parenting skills and competencies on the "excellent" end of the spectrum. Similarly, their questionnaire responses suggest that they see their children as "thriving" in every possible way. But when we are in the

159

sharing circle, they often say they don't know how to parent, that they feel like failures, that their children are struggling etc. When I think about it, it is rather obvious why I might see such a discrepancy: none of these parents want anything on record that might suggest any problems in parent-child relationships, because so many of them are struggling to keep their children in their own care or get them back from foster homes. Even though I have promised confidentiality, they must fear that any negative self-reflection could work against them if these pieces of paper fall into the hands of authorities. Perhaps the very act of filling in a questionnaire – even my very unusual questionnaire– conjures up filling out government forms, their *only* other common experience with forms. Again, I realize, I am setting up the wrong kind of relationship by handing out forms: I want a trusting relationship, not a relationship with authority. It is rather amazing to me that despite the forms, they do actually begin to trust me within the sessions, where honest and open conversations do take place. But so much for the idea of participatory evaluation…

At some point, when the series of sessions are over I decide to interview the participants about their experiences and about the next steps for our project. Virtually no one has anything much to say about the drawing exercises. It's almost like they don't remember them. They speak positively of the Soft Shoe Shuffle – which is consistent with my feeling that every time we get on our feet and move around something good seems to happen with this specific group. Perhaps it is movement, not visual arts that is the appropriate art form for this group. (Although I also have a hard time imagining them doing any movement more 'advanced' than taking a few steps in one direction or another as they are asked to do in the Soft Shoe Shuffle…) Finally, I bring up the idea of the comic book, and in almost every interview I am met with either indifference or rejection of the idea. One mother says, "A comic book? Why a comic book? We're not kids, you know!?" And again I realize that I will be doing us all a disfavor through that specific 'creative form' of communication. This community's *only* understanding of comic books is as something that teenagers love to read. And, if anything, my participants need to become *less teenager-like, more parent-like*. So much for the idea of a comic book as an innovative method of information dissemination…

3.6. Parents debriefed

[Act 2, Scene 2][60]

(Hanane, Ravenna, Xenia, Abrielle and Ocean at the dinner table.)

Hanane– Well, Ravenna, I personally think you're being too harsh on yourself. I mean, I know that things did not go as you planned, but to say that the use of the arts in the sessions "was a failure" doesn't sound right to me.

Ravenna– I'm saying it was a failure *not* just because it went differently than I expected, but because every time I tried to get the participants to draw it ended up creating the *opposite effect* to what I was intending. It basically ended up pushing them into the roles of children and dependents – and me into the role of teacher and authority figure. What I wanted was role fluidity, and a mutual, adult-to-adult relationship that could be the basis for collaborative learning. I feel kind of stupid now for not having foreseen what was going to happen…

Hanane– Okay, I see what you're saying, *but* the reality is that the dynamic you faced was very similar to the one I faced in the grandparents' session: I was expected to be a teacher, expert etc too. And I think that's just a fundamental underlying tension for working in this community: because of the patronizing, colonial history, people keep falling into the habitual adult-child dynamics. And that would have come up one way or another, whether you had used those artistic exercises or not.

Xenia– I think it is actually kind of beautiful how the drawing exercises highlighted and crystallized that tension. You could see it physically in how the circle transformed into a classroom. I don't think the exercises' were a waste of time at all. And I also feel that even when they "failed" they generated some interesting conversations – some very sensitive conversations about people's childhood experiences and the situation of kids in care. And maybe that's the point of the arts: to help generate important conversations.

Ravenna– I guess that can be part of the point. But that's not really enough for me. I expected the art exercises to release some kind of creative energy that could be freeing and transformative – and I didn't really see that happen. In fact I feel like I don't understand this community: is it possible that people have no imagination? No creativity? Is that how desperate the situation is? That scares me.

Abrielle– I tend to agree with you about that. It is quite sad and a little scary if people in fact have such little access to their creativity and imagination. The drawing exercises did not have the kind of creative impact I would have liked to see – and that was reflected in the interviews we did with the parents as well: none of them felt that those were powerful exercises… though I would say that even in the interviews, mentioning those exercises ended up generating good conversation, to Xenia's point. But I think what we're talking about is missing the point.

Hanane– What do you mean?

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[60] This discussion is actually a summation of events from four different meetings with the parents, and a series of interviews that followed the meetings.

161

Abrielle– I mean, we're talking about the use of this handful of drawing exercises, and maybe they failed or maybe they didn't. But what's more interesting to me is Ravenna's "artistic approach" to the meetings. And I think that was quite successful.

Ravenna– Say more.

Abrielle *(watching Ocean crawl on the floor and play)*– For one thing, you're performing beautifully in these sessions and you know that. You have such a good rapport and you're reading your audience. So you brought in these drawing exercises, but when you got the sense that they weren't working you switched, quite smoothly, into other exercises that *did* work. You had the participants walking around in the Soft Shoe Shuffle instead – which is maybe not quite *artistic,* but it's a way to get very gently into the body and into the physical space of the room, and I think that was exactly what the group needed. The way I see it, you displayed a kind of artistic neutrality: you switched medium when you needed to, instead of stubbornly sticking to your original design.

Hanane– *(nodding)* I don't know much about this, but my sister who is an expressive arts therapist says that knowing when to switch mediums to support the therapeutic process is one of the fundamental skills of her profession (McNiff, 1992 and Knill, Levine and Levine, 2005) – way more important than the "artistic skills" per se.

Abrielle– That makes sense. It's the importance of *intermodality,* right?

Ravenna – But in a way it's quite inconvenient, isn't it? I mean, it suddenly requires me, as a facilitator who is interested in bringing in the arts, to be conversant in multiple mediums and approaches. The fact that I am competent in the visual mediums is not enough – I also need to know how to be a dancer and a lounge singer and a romantic poet and a potter and a circus clown… just in case that's what the group calls for next. *(Hanane and Xenia giggle.)*

Xenia– Thankfully, you *are* most of those things already!

(Ravenna now chuckles too.)

Abrielle– I agree it is a bit of a challenge – and maybe that's why it's so nice to be able to have co-facilitators with different skills and backgrounds when you're doing this kind of work. But I don't think Xenia is joking: you have a lot of different abilities to bring in, and to some degree you already do. You don't have to be the ultimate master in everything – but you can just be playful in different mediums, and between different mediums.

Hanane– It's funny, as you're talking about this I am watching Ocean be playful over there in a parallel way… Did you see what he just did?

Ravenna– No, what did he do?

Hanane– He was playing this game of carrying that stack of books from the table to the couch, right? He was just picking them up one by one and taking them across the room to the couch – in a very serious way, of course. And then he carried that one heavy book and he dropped it. And as he dropped it the book landed on something so that it made an inclined plane. And at first he looked at it with frustration and considered picking it up again… but then he got kind of interested in the inclined plane, and now he's putting

his toys on top and watching them roll down over and over again! *(Everyone laughs watching Ocean, who now looks up, laughs and goes back to his toys.)* The game totally changed through that one happy accident, you know? He went from one game to a *better* game!

Abrielle– With total neutrality. No attachment to the original plan.

Hanane– Yeah! And I think that's the cool thing about your practice Ravenna: that you are playful in a similar, childlike way. I think your work is strongest when you are truly creative –instead of strictly artistic– because it opens up all these doors based on whatever accident is unfolding. You probably could own the different aspects of your creativity a little more fully, if you ask me, because they make you awesome.

Ravenna– *(smiling)* That's a sweet compliment. Thank you guys. *(after a while)* I do reserve the right, however, to be totally crushed about the death of the comic book. I was *so* looking forward to that.

Hanane– Ah, me too. I'm totally crushed that they don't want it. I understand why, but shit, that sucks.

Xenia– I am surprised about that. And I am sorry that I got you excited about the comic book thing – it was my idea… but really it's more important to do something that makes sense for the parents. Maybe we'll think of something else…

Ravenna– Maybe.

(The women start clearing the table and continue talking in the kitchen.)

Abrielle *(putting dishes in the dish-washer)*– I'm kind of interested in going back to the discussion of the dynamics of teacher/student or parent/child or authority/dependent or whatever we want to call it. Because I think those dynamics did shift throughout the multiple sessions with the parents – as they did with the grandparents. And I think that is important to track.

Ravenna *(putting left-overs in the fridge)*– Yes I agree. And I noticed several things that were quite encouraging to me about that. For one thing, even though the parents also asked me for "teaching" on parenting skills and then ended up being on the receiving end of the "teachings" that we brought in from the Elders sessions, they also did engage with the material in a knowledgeable way and they did share their own practices with each other, which I thought was awesome.

Xenia– I saw that especially in the Soft Shoe Shuffle in an early session, when they each talked about ways that they think children should be nurtured and the specific things they do to show their kids they love them. And then again in that very juicy discussion about how children should be disciplined, when they talked about their default reactions, what creative things they have tried and gave each other ideas. It was brilliant. I took some notes for my own future reference,

Hanane– And some people really started to tell a different story about themselves and their abilities as parents. One turning point moment that I'll never forget is when one single mother stood up at the end of a Soft Shoe Shuffle and said "You know what? I am actually a great mother! I should get a diploma for that!"

Ravenna *(smiles, nods and continues)*– Then the second layer I noticed was that by the second and third session the participants started taking over some of what was originally seen as our role as conveners. So for example, they started taking care of serving the food, someone brought plates from the kitchen, someone made coffee, someone unwrapped the veggie trays… They started helping with the kids when the child-minding fell through… One person actually offered to take notes on the flip-chart for me and did a great job – that was a visible turning point for me… And parallel to that, they also started talking about wanting to take leadership roles in the community. So as we got to the last session, there were one or two people who are seriously volunteering to help establish a more permanent parenting group.

Abrielle– And that came out even more strongly in the interviews. One woman talked about wanting to start a monthly potluck for the young mothers. Two people now want to come to Vancouver and do the facilitation training with us. One of the dads apparently wants to run for council in the next Band Council election. The mother who is volunteering to champion the ongoing parenting group is now saying, let's get our own funding so we don't have to depend on the current band institutions – and she is going to meet with Xenia next week to move that forward.

Xenia– She also started this FaceBook group, which is kind of amazing. It is called World Café First Nations – and she has started it as a place to openly discuss controversial ideas among band members. That takes some guts to do. And she is kind of lightly "facilitating" the discussion on there, letting different opinions come out. I am pretty excited about that.

Hanane– It's pretty awesome to see this kind of initiative, especially when we remember that the people we are talking about are single parents and others who are not typically seen as community leaders. It will be amazing if they emerge that way.

Xenia– And you know, some of the people we are talking about have been really critical of Band leadership in the past. They have basically been on the terrorist line for years. And if they do take up even small leadership roles that would be awesome because they can come off the terrorist line and become way more productive.

(Everyone nods. Xenia puts on tea as Abrielle and Ravenna wash the dishes and Hanane joins Ocean on the floor for the game he is playing now.)

Ravenna– So, these are good examples of role fluidity: how the community members found the teacher/expert/leader in themselves while we became the learners. And I was also thinking that if Bush and Folger (2004) were analyzing this in terms of their Transformative Mediation paradigm, that they would call all of these examples of "empowerment", "shifting from weakness to strength", which they see as one of the two pillars of transformation.

Abrielle– Yeah, empowerment is the right term for it.

Hanane– What is their second pillar?

Ravenna– It's "recognition", which means seeing and appreciating something in others – particularly in others you are in conflict with – that you didn't see before. They call it "shifting from self-absorption to responsiveness".

Hanane– And do we think that's also happening?

Abrielle– I think that is absolutely also happening. In fact I think that's one of the most obvious things that is happening in these sessions.

Hanane– Evidence?

Abrielle– Okay, let's see *(flipping through interview transcripts).* From one interview: "It was an honour to be in that meeting because I got to see a brother that I hadn't seen in a long time, someone I used to sit around and get high with – And to see him here trying to better himself and talk so passionately about his children… it gave me such a different picture. It was a step in the right direction."… And here's another one: "What stood out most for me was to be with the mothers who have their children in care. There is so much stigma against those mothers – that they are lazy, that they don't care or they don't want to do the work. But to see that they were there and they were talking, that was so neat."

Xenia– Cool.

Ravenna– Yes, that's what I was hearing too: recognition of the others and the breaking down of biases towards each other. And in connection with those things I heard a lot about how the sessions were helping to rebuild community relations, and how essential they are particularly for the parents who feel themselves most isolated.

Abrielle *(nodding and looking through more transcripts)* – Quite a few participants talked about our sessions as a "parents support group" – which wasn't the name we gave it, but I think that was in effect what it became for people. When I asked them in interviews what was the best or most memorable part of the sessions, the most common answer was that it was hearing and learning from other parents. One young mother said that learning about other parents' disciplining style helped her realize who was on the same page as her, and now she feels that she can trust them more around her kids. One person said, "I have moved past my addictions and I don't want to go to AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) – but I need *something,* some kind of support group that helps me in my everyday life".

Xenia– Interesting, hey? She's right on. There is usually support for people in extreme need, but as soon as you're healthy you're on your own. No wonder people fall back into the destructive cycles…

Ravenna – Somebody else said during a check-out: "I have talked a lot with my brothers and sisters, but we have *never* sat down like this to discuss things that really matter to us".

Abrielle– Other comments from interviews: "I learned that the community connections are much stronger than I thought they were" – she was particularly talking about the concern shown by Elders for both children and their parents. Another one: "What stood out was that we're different parents, but we're all here for the same reason. I felt better after that meeting knowing that we are doing something to be better parents for our children."

Xenia– These comments are so sweet

Ravenna– And I think they are quite important when we remember that the kind of transformation this community needs is a collective kind of transformation: it's a lot about rebuilding the webs of connections that have been lost (Waldram et al., 2008; Napoleon, 2005).

Abrielle– What's also sweet is that we have a little bit of evidence that the learning and connecting happening in the sessions is actually impacting parenting behaviour. I mean, these things are self-reported and who knows if people are being truthful or if they are a good judge of their own behaviours– so take this with a grain of salt, but none-the-less this is what I heard in the interviews: One mother said that she has started to listen better to her teenage daughters, that she realized her mind was often somewhere else when they spoke to her and now she has started noticing this and asking the girls to repeat themselves. Someone else said she was amazed how well her older children respond to the use of reason! One person said he has become better at managing his anger, that he and his partner don't argue in front of the kids anymore – and another father said the last time he yelled at his kid he then went for a walk with the dog and then came back and apologized to his son... I also really love this one: I interviewed this young couple together –both of whom had been to the sessions– and she said she hadn't noticed any changes in herself, but then he said: "I've noticed a change in her! We used to both yell at the kids, and she stopped, and then when I did it she said, you don't have to yell at them like that!" Then they discussed how they can be re-enforcing what they learned about good parenting practices in each other. That was the best interview.

Hanane *(now carrying Ocean back to the table, where the other women are sitting and pouring tea)*– So it sounds like we've got some potentially "transformative" stuff happening – by way of role fluidity, or empowerment/recognition, or community connection building, or even judging from self-reported behaviour change. Mostly it's like "a thousand tiny transformations" – but I think it's cool cause they seem to be happening at a personal, interpersonal and maybe also systemic level... Let's look at the other side for a second: is there some ways that the sessions are not working, or even being harmful?

(They consider this for a few seconds.)

Abrielle (*putting Ocean to her breast, where he quickly begins to doze off*)– So yes, one thing that comes up for me is that I don't think the sessions are truly safe. And why do I say that? Well, when we did the survey at the end of the last session one mother checked off "I can't really say what I want to say", and in the interview she told me that she felt judged by the other participants.

Hanane– What was the judgment about?

Abrielle– She said there is judgment towards the parents who have their children in foster care. She said the group felt safe to her when there were lots of others with children in care, but it didn't feel safe in the smaller sessions when she felt like she was the only one being judged.

Ravenna– That's interesting. And I think you said earlier on that some of that judgment and some of the stigma maybe shifted during the sessions...

Abrielle– Yes, it did for some people, AND I think it's also still very real and very alive. Some other people I interviewed really did seem to judge parents who don't have care of their kids. And there is a tension in the field, a polarity between the parents who have their children in their care and those who don't. At one point if you remember someone suggested that this "parents support group" should focus specifically on the fostering situation on the res, and there was a rejection of that idea and we voted and decided as a group not to go in that direction, but to keep this group as a more open group about parenting issues.

Ravenna– Yes I remember that. And the issue of fostering and where people stand on that seems to be very controversial anyway…

Hanane– So, how could we address that safety concern?

Ravenna– Well, I feel like if we're going to help establish an ongoing parent support group, which seems to be what people want, that we should pay a lot of attention to it's make-up and who is invited and how it is framed.

Xenia– One possibility is to have a support group specifically for parents with children in care. But I feel like the better possibility would be to have a general parenting group and make sure that there is good diversity –of both types of parents– in every session so nobody feels isolated.

(Everyone nods to this.)

Abrielle– Yes, and beyond that design decision, I think the safety will have to do a lot with the awareness and the metaskills of the facilitator. So if we were to facilitate any more of these sessions or if we were to do them again, I think we would do a better job by just having become aware of this kind of tension. But really it is a tough one. In a way I don't think we have enough skill to make it totally safe for everyone. Maybe we come across the limits of what we can do here.

(More nodding.)

Ravenna– The other thing that bothers me or concerns me is that the numbers dropped from the first session with the parents to the last session, quite dramatically. We started with, maybe 10 people, and at the end we have only 4, didn't we?

Hanane– That was a concern for me too. Kind of disappointing.

Xenia– And that's the constant challenge in this community – you always wonder if anyone is going to show up. I don't think you should put too much weight on this. It's *not* an indication of failure – it's just the way things are. The fact that you had 4 people at the end is actually pretty good.

Ravenna– Yes, but I wonder if we did enough to keep people interested. We did hire a local woman who called everyone and gave reminders before every session, so I don't think it was a matter of not knowing or not remembering sessions were happening…

Abrielle– I tried to ask about that in the interviews and most people just kind of said "Oh I got busy and I couldn't come to some sessions" or "people are just busy", you know? One person speculated that maybe some of the people who stopped coming

were triggered by some of what we talked about – like the trauma and the painful stories that people shared. But he insisted that we don't change the workshops because of that, because it is important for that trauma and pain to be expressed and whoever is ready to look at it will continue to come and that's just what is needed.

Xenia– It's a good argument.

Abrielle– And one woman told me that some people were just coming for the $10 honorarium – that their hearts were not really in it and so they stopped coming.

Ravenna– Even though we kept paying the $10 honorarium?

Abrielle– Yes... I don't know how much water this argument holds, because when I asked others about the honorarium they said it didn't really matter, that they weren't expecting it, that is was a nice thing to get but that's not why they came – and in fact in a couple of cases we forgot to hand out honorariums at the end of the session and nobody asked about it... But who knows? Again, self-reporting on this kind of thing is hard to go on...

Ravenna– Yeah, I have to say I really don't like this idea of giving honorariums. From all the international cases I have heard about it is pretty clear that once you start paying people to come to meetings that becomes the reason to come and you lose true participation.

Abrielle– Well yes, but in this specific context we're doing it because (a) we're doing this as research, and (b) we're trying to create a feeling that people are coming to the meetings to contribute something of their knowledge – and when people do that they should be paid for it.

Xenia– And it's pretty common in this community to pay people for going to meetings – I think that while most people aren't expecting it, you would probably lose some, especially the Elders, if you weren't paying honorarium.

Abrielle– And also people live in such poverty... one mother was saying to me that the $10 is enough for her to buy fruits for her kids for the week. When I think of it that way, it's like, okay we obviously should pay honorarium.

Ravenna– You know, one reason it makes me uncomfortable is that it's not really sustainable. It might make sense it terms of our research, but then we're going to leave the community, and the locals are going to try and set up similar sessions on their own, and if we have created some kind of expectation around honoraria it makes the whole thing that much harder for them.

Hanane– But at any rate, it sounds like even the honorarium is not motivating people to continue coming to the sessions, so this is a moot point, is it not?

Ravenna– Yeah, I guess.

Hanane– I see it as, the lack of participation is a huge role in this community. We knew it from our first engagements with it. That makes this a very hard place to do this kind of work. Cause I'll be honest, I was a lot happier when I was on a field-study abroad in the Philippines and the problem we had there was *too much participation*. People were

so keen, we couldn't keep up with the demands for interviews. It was hard also, but at least we felt wanted! It is easier to have too much than not enough. At least psychologically it's easier.

Ravenna– Also, in many places where Deep Democracy has really caught on it has been in contexts like that. I am thinking of the tribes in Kenya, where the social and political and cultural and economic challenges are just as big – but there is also so much demand for DD, and so much enthusiasm around it that our colleagues there can't keep up with it. People over there are hungry for ideas, and there is no competition between methodologies. So if you come in with something like DD it can catch on like wildfire and there can be a lot of opportunity to do cool things. I was hearing that people in Kenyan villages have renamed the DD tools and integrated them into their local tribal processes (Fred Witteveen, pers.comm.). Whereas here… well, it's just hard to maintain any kind of interest in anything.

Abrielle– I keep thinking that it's a function of the kind of depression that dominates here. Cause depression seems to really kill hunger. You don't have an appetite for anything when you're down like that – it almost doesn't matter what it is, it could be the most nutritious meal or the nicest dessert…. But yes, it's a very hard place to work because it can feel like people aren't really that actively interested in what we're offering – even though they give very positive feedback on the session they do attend. But I think at the end Xenia is right, we can't use attendance as an indicator of success or failure. We just need to think that whoever comes are the right people.

Xenia– Exactly. If you're connecting the community and growing a handful of emerging leaders, I think that's awesome. Let's go to bed and sleep with a sense of accomplishment!

3.7. Baby-making machines

[Act 2, Scene 3]

(Dinner has been consumed, Ocean has fallen asleep in Abrielle's lap at the end of a restless day, and the women are chatting over chocolates and a glass of wine.)

Ravenna – Hey Hanane, I hear uncle Charlie is trying to find you a husband here.

Hanane – Did he say that!?

Ravenna – Yup! *(the others giggle)*

Hanane – He likes to tease me. He says he wants me to stay here.

Abrielle – That's sweet!

Xenia– It's a really good sign, you know? When community members tease you like that it means they really like you.

Abrielle– Hey, speaking of friendly community members, you know what your auntie said to me today?

Xenia– Auntie Lillian?

Abrielle– Yeah. She was watching Ocean roll around on the floor at the Elders Centre, and he's sucking on his toes the way he has just learned to do. And auntie Lillian says to me, "In our culture we have a saying that when a baby starts sucking on his toes it means he's asking for a brother or sister!"

Xenia– *(laughing out loud)* What!?

Abrielle – Yeah yeah! Apparently, it's a sign that the baby is now independent enough that you can start thinking about making another baby. Auntie Lillian, of course, insisted I get to it right away!

Ravenna – That's hilariously awkward.

Hanane – Hey, you know what's even more hilarious? We have the same saying in my culture.

Abrielle – Really? *(Hanane nods.)*

Ravenna– Wow, then it must be true! I mean if it transcends more than one ancient culture, there must be something to it.

(There is a short pause as everyone smiles in amusement around the table, considering the possibility.)

Xenia – Are you actually thinking about it Abrielle?

Abrielle– What? Having another baby? *(Xenia nods.)* No, no, no.

Ravenna *(after a pause)*– That wasn't a very convincing "no"!

Abrielle *(embarrassed but smiling)*– Well, look, it's complicated. I mean, it's definitely too early, I know it's too early, I am barely able to handle Ocean on my own right now, it

would be irresponsible. And I want to concentrate on our work here. *(After a pause.)* But I have to say, there are moments when I become obsessed with the idea.

Ravenna – Like when?

Abrielle – Sometimes when I have had a long day of working with community members I lay down in bed, nursing Ocean, and I am thinking about everything, how hard life is for everybody… you know, how much pain and complicated shit these young parents are carrying on their shoulders… the suicides… the Elders and all of their trauma… How much we have accomplished and at the same time how impossible it is to make any big difference in the situation here, especially for me with all of my own limitations. I fall into this kind of despair, like, yeah, there is *nothing* I can do… And then all I can think of is "I should have another baby" *(another pause.)* Like somehow *that* would make my existence less meaningless! *(She pauses again before going on.)* Or maybe it is just a way to find an escape.

(She become pensive and quiet now, her eyes wetting a little bit. There is a pause as they all sit with Abrielle's confession.)

Ravenna – It's kind of a strange thought, isn't it?

Abrielle *(wiping her eyes quickly)* – I think it is *totally* strange. I mean I *know* intellectually that if I have another baby I will be *more* screwed, that everything will just get harder for me, but it's like I can't help thinking about it.

Ravenna – You know, it's especially interesting because you look at all these other women on the res who are having one baby after another, when they can't even keep the kids they already have in their care… kind of digging themselves deeper and deeper into their problems, and I wonder if they are doing the same thing.[61]

Abrielle – Totally! I've been thinking that too. Maybe I am just picking it up from the field. Maybe that's how you end up with seven kids here. You keep having them as a way to distract yourself from your current problems by giving yourself something meaningful to focus on. It's almost like, the environment is so bleak, there is so much death and depression, that the only way to find balance is to literally procreate, to make more life, over and over again.

Hanane – And you know, in a way it is part of how the larger Indigenous community is finding some form of healing. You remember when the census came out and it showed the fertility rates of Aboriginal women was, like, twice as high as other Canadian women?

Xenia – 2.7% annual population growth rate on our reserve, compared to 1.2% for all of Canada (2011 Census), mostly because of high fertility rates.

Hanane– Right. I remember hearing many Aboriginal people saying "this is great, look, the white people tried to kill us and instead we are taking over, we are growing faster

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[61] See Rupert Ross, 1992, on how motherhood, and particularly caring for young infants, is the only way that Aboriginal women continue to find a sense of value and self-worth.

than any of them". The women with seven children are *celebrated*, they are a source of pride for these communities.[62]

Ravenna – Not to mention that every child is seen as a blessing within Aboriginal cultures, regardless of what they are doing for the statistics.

Xenia – And even at a material level, the other thing we know is that these women who are having lots of kids are often actually doing pretty well in our communities. I mean, we have maybe twenty-some single mothers on the res, and they are *all* employed. 100% of them, in a community where unemployment rates is almost 40% (Jessie Hemphill, pers. comm.) The single mothers get up and they find things to do to make a life for their kids. In a place were most people don't feel motivated enough to get out of bed, that's really something.

Abrielle – Uhum, *(pauses as she thinks all of this over)* yeah. And I totally get that. I am not blaming these women, by any means, or trying to put them down. But at the same time I can't reconcile this with what I see, which is these bright young girls who get pregnant and drop out of school, and go to work or whatever, and by the time the kids are a few years old more than half of them are in care because they are not well provided for in their own families (Gloria Walkus, pers. comm.) I hear the young mothers talking about it in our sessions: they don't feel that they have parenting skills that are working for them. But honestly, when you have seven children it is hard to practice good parenting – even if you don't have all the cultural complexities, and the problems with poverty and addiction that the parents are facing here– because you literally don't have enough time to listen to all yours kids or show them affection or discipline them with love… you're just running around trying to get by. *(After a long exasperated sigh.)* Maybe this is just my own prejudice. At some level I have this western feminist idea of how women are supposed to be – more than just baby-making machines– and I find it hard not to judge people who have so many babies.

Ravenna – It's not just you. I totally have trouble reconciling those things too.

(The other two nod in agreement.)

Hanane– Abrielle, I may be wrong, but it sounds like you're also finding it hard not to judge *yourself* for wanting more babies. There is an internal struggle.

Abrielle *(pausing to think)*– Yes. That's true.

Hanane– Sounds like you're caught in the field, my dear.

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[62] See for example, the records of the hearing at the Truth and Reconciliation hearings in Fort Rupert, where this sentiment was repeatedly presented.

3.8. Getting caught in the field

[Abrielle's supervision][63]

Coach– Okay, let's check in and tell me how it is going and what's on your mind.

Abrielle –Basically Myrna, I keep hitting these periods of depression. And I feel that I am being pulled by stuff that's in the field – I *know* I am. But I don't seem to be able to get out of it. That's the main thing that's on my mind right now.

Coach– Uhum. I'm just going to ask you to say a bit more about what you're picking up from the field, what are you talking about?

Abrielle – So as you know, I am working on this remote reserve, and I've been coming up here every month, staying for anywhere between a week and three weeks. Most recently I've been working with parents here and looking at parenting issues – trying to see what they have lost in terms of skills and knowledge, and trying to rebuild that. But, you know, the reality is that most of the people I work with don't even have their kids in their own care because of extreme poverty or addiction or domestic violence or mental illness in the families. The kids are in foster care and the parents are trying hard to get them back, but it's a very hard thing because it requires such a major overhaul of so many aspects of life. So it's kind of an overwhelming situation. And I've been finding myself in this minor depression whenever I come up here. And feeling like… just feeling like I need to cry all the time. I can't go a day without crying. And also just feeling hopeless and inadequate. I find that the project is too hard to navigate emotionally, but also I am struggling with what's happening in my personal life, like being responsible for my son. I just find it to be too demanding. I feel exhausted all the time. There is also just a large role of depression in the field of my personal life right now. I am speaking regularly to a few close friends who are going through it, and in particular I am spending time with a close girlfriend who has been in and out of the hospital with anxiety and depression. So it is possible I am also taking on some of that role.

Every once in a while, I manage to raise my head above the water and notice that everything is actually fine in my life and I'm blowing it out of proportion. I have that awareness but nevertheless I can't consistently pull myself out. When I am home and I have my head on my shoulders and I have help from Jeremy and my family, I can manage it a lot better – but when I come back to the community it's just totally out of hand… I keep feeling like it's bigger than me. I can see some of the fractal patterns: like the fact that my solution for how I am going to feel better is that I want to have another baby. Which is a lot like what young mothers do in this community. They keep having babies.

Coach– So the primary thing is that you're getting caught up in these feelings that are not just part of you but that are also part of the field, and you are wondering how do I step out of them. Is that it?

Abrielle– Yeah.

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[63] Based on a coaching call with Myrna Lewis, Dec 2011

Coach– So, just for a second, I'd like you to get in touch with that feeling of overwhelm and depression. And you've already done this on your own, but I want you to explicitly acknowledge that these negative feelings are part of a field that is mucky and thick. Recognize that it's almost impossible, if you're going to be in that field, *not* to be feeling these things. It's like going into a funeral and inevitably you're going to feel sad. Can you stay with that for a minute and let me know when you've got it?

Abrielle– I've got it.

Coach– Okay, now I'd like you to take another step: now recognize the part of these feelings that are true for you. So yes, there is a powerful field out there, but it's connecting with a part that is really true for you. There is an element of truth that is resonating in you, otherwise it wouldn't hook you. So become aware of what part of you goes into depression and why?

Abrielle– Are you saying acknowledge *that* it is, or acknowledge *what* it is? Right now I can acknowledge that a personal element exists but I don't know what it is.

Coach– I'd like you if you can to try to actually see *what* it is. So I'll give you my own example. If I, Myrna, have a very strong internal judge that gets very angry when I don't do things quite right – then that internal judge shows up in a situation where I'm being evaluated by external bodies. And it's partly the madness and the toughness of the situation, but it's really my own internal judge that paralyses me.

Abrielle *(after a pause)*– Okay, I think I just got mine too.

Coach– Do you feel like you can tell me about it?

Abrielle– Well I think there is a part of me that likes to feel sorry for myself. I have a tendency to see myself as a victim. The feeling that I have been wronged and therefore have no chance in life. It's a very basic feeling that has been with me always: as basic as feeling sorry for myself because I was born a girl and not a boy.

Coach– Good. So now what I'd like you to do is this: take this aspect of you that you have now mentioned – the victim– and I want you to personify that part. Give that an image. If you were to describe that part as something, like a persona with its own physicality, what would it be? When you've got that let me know.

Abrielle– I get an image of something… it's some kind of animal. I think maybe a deer or something. A very skinny animal that's been wounded. And it is in an urban setting, in a dark back alley. It's cornered between a dumpster and the wall in a back alley, and it's wounded and it's on the ground. And it's wet also, because it's been raining.

Coach– Great. So as you've identified that part of you, the deer. Now I want you to recognize that this is a *part* of you: it's not the *whole* of you, it's one part. And I'd like you to see if you can put it aside for a second. Not totally put it aside, but if we recognize that it's a *part*, can you become aware of what *other* parts there could be? There would be another part of you that would be relating to the deer.

Abrielle – You mean an opposite part? A complementary part?

Coach– Not necessarily. And I want you to just do this without thinking too much. Do it intuitively: if you go back to that dark alley, who do you see alongside the deer? What image comes to mind? What persona is alongside the deer? Just go with it as quickly as you can, don't think too much, just feel it.

Abrielle– Okay. I'm seeing another, much smaller animal, I think maybe it's a mouse or squirrel or something like that. Let's say that it is a mouse… It's just as helpless as the wounded deer, but it's also… I get the sense that it's incredibly sensitive. It's very sympathetic. *(Pause)* Yeah, sensitive. Very vulnerable, but quite remarkably sensitive.

Coach– Good, lovely. So now I like you to become aware that this mouse is also part of you. You don't have to look for it outside of you, it's within you. AND, it's the part that can help the overwhelmed, depressed part when you get lost in the field. It's almost like the depression of the field hits into your sense of vulnerability and an overwhelming sense of being a victim in that buck, in that little deer. And then the other part that's in relation to it, the part that's there, –which actually, when you're caught up in the victim position, seems to go away– is your incredible sensitivity represented by the mouse. So, I am going to say it in a slightly other way: What you need, what you can bring to your overwhelm and your sense of depression when you're in the field, is your sensitivity. Are you with me?

Abrielle– Yeah.

Coach– So, this environment that you are caught up in is overwhelming. And there is not much that you're actually going to do about it. But what you can do is bring incredible sensitivity to it, like the vulnerable mouse. The mouse can't help the deer, it can't change the fact that it is raining, it can't dress the wounds– but it can bring a message of "I'm here with you and I'm sensitive to where you're at". Does that make sense?

Abrielle– Yeah.

Coach– So I'm going to summarize it this way and let's see if it fits, and by the way if it doesn't fit that's okay: If you're caught in a field what can you do? Step one is that you need to acknowledge there is a field and you are going to be affected by the field. You're human. Don't think you're going to go into these emotionally stormy places and *not* feel, and not be caught up in it. In fact I would be worried if you were unaffected. You should not be doing this work if you are unaffected.

So second step then is to recognize, what part of you is being caught in the field. And usually that's linked to your deepest patterns from your childhood. And in a way it's playing out again as it has been your whole life.

And then what you can do is turn to that part of you that you've *not* typically identified with in step three. So if you're the deer in the urban back alleys, cold and feeling frightened and trembling and very much in victim mode, if you can turn to your sensitivity it may bring you some comfort. So you need to make room for your sensitivity even if it makes you feel more vulnerable, as opposed to saying "I need to shut it down, I need to be strong."

Abrielle– Yeah.

Coach– Okay, and now I'm going to say something which is going to sound strange, and if it doesn't fit with you forget I said it. But I'm going to try and take it to a slightly other level: That sensitivity that you look towards, is not only your own. That sensitivity is part of a higher self. You know what I mean?

Abrielle– Not really.

Coach– Okay, I am going to try and say it some other way: it's almost like the sensitivity you're looking at is not only your sensitivity. You're tapping into a sensitivity, an archetypal energy that's present in the field you're working in, but also in all of humanity. You're not only tapping into Abrielle's sensitivity, you're tapping into an almost spiritual sensitivity. It's like, in a crazy kind of way, like the god within yourself. So if I were to describe what the god within Abrielle would look like, the god within Abrielle would manifest itself with incredible sensitivity. It's your gift. Does that make sense?

Abrielle–Yeah.

Coach– So what I'm trying to say is, you can trust it, and rely on this strong, sensitive part in yourself because it's like the manifestation of something bigger in you. I'm using the word god, not to be religious, but I'm using the word to describe something greater than the ego force. It's like, a deeper part of yourself, the larger part that Jung describes as the inner self, the godly part, the numinous. Does that make sense?

Abrielle– Yeah

Coach– And in a way I like to suggest to you to honour that part in yourself. Honour it and recognize it and cherish it. Cause that's the part of you that you tend not to identify with– at least not as strongly or quickly as you identify with the victim. But the sensitivity, that's the part that's quite beautiful within you. *(After a pause)* I just did a lot of talking. Do you want to just tell me how you are at the moment?

Abrielle– I feel like I have just come through something. Like a rainstorm. There is something very comforting about this greater thing that we're part of. I don't think of it in religious terms either, but I do have a feeling of being connected with something profound right now.

Coach– Do you want to say anything else? Or should we finish up? What would you like? Are you comfortable staying with the feeling?

Abrielle– Well, if I try to listen to that sensitive part, it says that I should go eat something really nice and take a warm shower and do something really comforting for myself!

Coach– Good, good. You should do that. So maybe let's just do a quick check out and say goodbye. I'd like to say thank you for allowing yourself to go through that and I really appreciate how much you put into it, it's been a very profound journey with you. And I'd like to say good luck in the field.

Abrielle– I feel that this was very good for me and it's going to be very helpful in the middle of the field. I'll let you know how I make out when we talk next week.
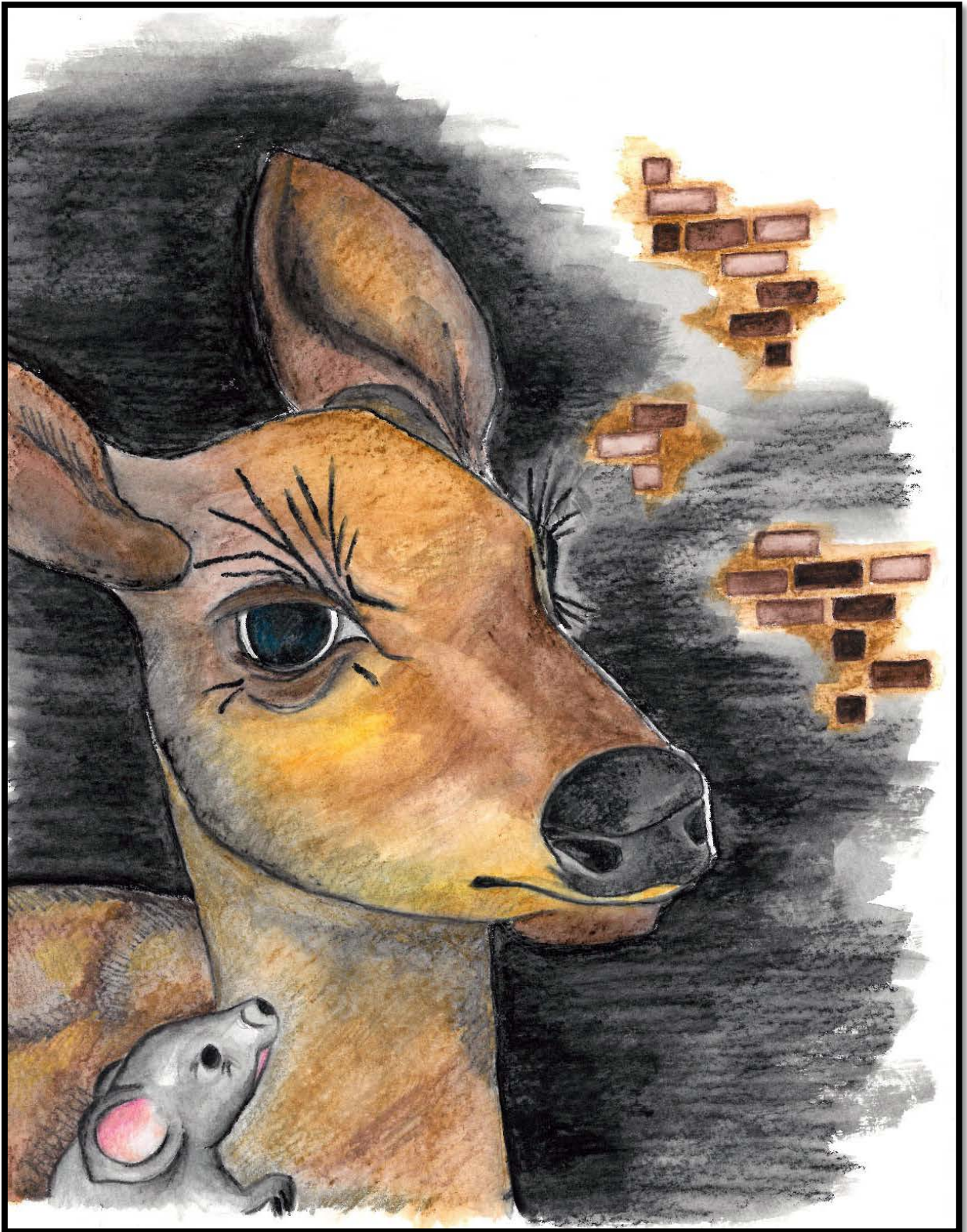
Illustration 11: Abrielle as Wounded Deer

3.9. Girls who cut

[Abrielle's supervision][64]

Abrielle– So it's been an eventful week and I want to talk to you about something that happened on Wednesday, specifically.

Coach– Okay, let's do that.

SECTION ONE: ACCOUNT OF SESSION AND REFLECTION-IN-ACTION

Abrielle– I went into the alternative high school on the reserve on Wednesday as part of this series of conversations on parenting that we're facilitating up here. And I held a little session with the girls –the female students– who are 16, 17, 18. It was a small session with just a handful of us. I was very mindful of bringing my sensitivity to the session the way we talked about last week. It was helpful in that for the most part I felt fairly sane –the depressive tendencies are there, but I am managing okay. And actually, I think as a result of that sensitivity some amazing things happened in the session, in terms of the girls being open in a way that I had never seen before. Very quickly, the topic of conversation turned to addictions. The girls told all these stories about drug abuse, alcoholism, smoking, self-harm, everything, everything. And at some point I noticed that I was very uncomfortable around the topic, like I was completely out of my depth. Then my neutrality totally slipped and there was at least one moment when I completely fucked up... That's what I'd like to talk about, that loss of neutrality around the addiction topic.

Coach– Okay. Lets go through it together. How did the session begin and how did you get into the drug thing?

Abrielle– Well, at the start of the session I wasn't sure how I was going to introduce the topic of parenting in a natural kind of way. But Ocean was there with me, and he had the girls' attention more than I did – and he kind of gave me an opening when he started doing something a little dangerous. And I asked, "If you're taking care of a baby what do you do to make sure they're safe?" So the girls started saying, "Well, like, we shouldn't let babies eat batteries or put their hands in the socket"! From there we started talking about physical dangers to babies. Then one of them said, "Babies are really affected by the emotional state of the parents". And then they gave many stories about that, like, "When my sister is depressed, her baby starts to act up". And as they were telling these stories a couple of them brought up drinking in connection with the mental/emotional state. And first they said, "You know if you're drinking you can't really pay attention to the baby", and then I said, "What about before the baby is born? What happens when you're pregnant?" And they knew about the dangers of drinking when you're pregnant, and they told stories about some of kids in the community who have Fetal Alcohol Syndrome.

At one point one of them said, "My sister is doing drugs and she has babies and, and – my mom is really harsh with my sister, but I always take my sister's side because I

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[64] Based on a coaching call with Myrna Lewis, Dec 2011

know how hard it is when you're addicted. I wasn't addicted to drugs, but I was addicted to smoking." I asked if anyone else had personal experiences with addiction and suddenly they started telling me their addiction stories. One girl said, "Yeah, I was addicted to alcohol" and she had this really quite horrifying story about overdosing, then she told us very assuringly, "I have given up alcohol"... And then, one of the other girls said, "I have an addiction that I don't usually talk about. I have been cutting myself." She described how she has been doing it, she showed us the scars on her wrists and she also said that she has stopped. She said, "I know it's not the right thing to do, I know I shouldn't do it, but it makes me feel better at the time, it makes me feel better when I cut myself". And as she was talking about this, that's the moment I lost my neutrality. I suddenly found myself wanting her to stop talking. I did not want to hear what she was saying. And as soon as she finished her sentence the first thing that came out of my mouth was: "Oh, I totally understand!" And as soon as I said it I knew that it wasn't true. What was really happening was exactly the opposite: I had no idea how to relate to what she was saying! I *didn't* understand!

And as I said that, something happened in that moment to the space in the room. It was like up to that point everything I had done had opened this comfortable space for conversation, and with that one reaction I could almost literally see that space shrinking, closing in on itself. And then, I felt that we didn't really get anywhere after that. I tried to say, you know, "What does all of this mean for those of you or your friends who are having babies?" and they kind of said, "Yeah we should be good girls and we should support each other." But the conversation never really felt important or genuine any more. It was like they were just telling me what they thought I wanted to hear. So this was about 45 minutes into the session and the energy had dissipated. They were restless now and when I finally said they were free to go they pretty well stormed out. So I thought that was an unfortunate ending and of course I felt responsible for it. But I didn't feel that any of the girls were in danger at the end of the session. It more felt like we were going deeper and deeper and then I had killed the moment. So the energy was flat at the end, it wasn't charged.

Coach– Hmmm, and where are you at with it now?

Abrielle– Well, I am not beating myself up too much about it, but I am thinking that these girls are the hardest part of the community to work with. I mean they are so honest and so interesting, but it's almost too raw – too raw for me to handle. And maybe I don't need to work with the hardest part of the community and I should just work with the parents and grandparents who are relatively easy! But the other side of it is that these girls are a lot closer to the core issues and more willing to say what's real, so I find working with them really valuable. So I am of two minds about it. It's a dilemma.

Coach– Well maybe we should do an argument about what you should do. Or we can look more closely at what hooked you and then come back to this question.

Abrielle– Yeah I think we should look at the hook.

SECTION TWO – COACHING AND REFLECTION-ON-ACTION

Coach– Great. Okay, just say more about what happens to you when the youth talk about this stuff. What is happening to Abrielle, as they talk about the addictions... Cause

you're sitting there with Ocean, a beautiful healthy baby, a child who has a chance in the world while ten other kids are being born into these families, and they are not given his possibility and potential… What happens to you in this conversation?

Abrielle– Partly, I just was feeling out of my depth, feeling that the stuff they are dealing with is so beyond my expertise and my experience. You know, I have a sister who has recently graduated as an art therapist, and she is looking for jobs and most of the jobs in therapy in Vancouver are in addictions. And even though she has worked with addictions she is being told she doesn't have enough experience. So my reaction was like "Oh my god, this is a topic that needs a lot of experience and you can't even go near it otherwise"! The interesting thing is that people in this community have talked to me about truly horrific stuff in the sessions. Like, the grandparents talked about sexual abuse and all this awful stuff that happened to them in Residential School as children. And that's really really heavy stuff– and it was hard to hear but I was fundamentally okay listening to those stories. I didn't lose my ground. But with the girls, that was something else.

When I think about the moment that I lost my ground, more specifically, when it actually happened the conversation wasn't so much around alcohol and drug addiction, it was about self-harm.

Coach– The story of the girl who is cutting?

Abrielle– Yes… She was kind of sitting like this (*extending one arm)* and she had her arm out and she was kind of doing this thing: showing us with her fingernail where she has been cutting herself … And as I was watching this what was going through my mind, and what was so devastating for me was that she had come across to me as such a brilliant girl: she was so well-spoken and had so much to say, and she was just so mature for being 17. I think that's the thing about this community: every once in a while you see someone with all this potential, it's obvious that they have potential. Yet they are suffering so much and they are so vulnerable. They could hurt themselves, they could kill themselves the next day and that would be it. All that potential totally gone.

Coach – So let's start there, let's go with that, cause that sounds like exactly where it is at: These are people with tremendous potential, as anybody in life has: that true, amazing potential. And yet it's like at any moment it could explode, or they could feel that life is not worth living. Right?

Abrielle– Yes, and even on top of that, in the case of this girl, the tragic thing is that the odds are so stacked against her. The surrounding is so *(sighing)…* it has so much more power than she does. It doesn't matter how much potential she has, she was born into and is caught up in a time and a place where … she can't fight her situation.

Coach– So if you allowed that to come up, if you described that as a metaphor, what would that metaphor be? What does it look like?

Abrielle (*after a pause)*– The image that comes to me is that the surrounding is almost squeezing, squeezing the life out of her. Like a strong muscle, wrapping around, pressing and squeezing… *(showing the squeezing motion with her hands)*

Coach *(mimicking the hand gesture)*- And if you were to look at the muscle, what are its qualities?

Abrielle – It's a round muscle, it has a pulse of its own. It has a pulse, like a natural order or something. As it contracts over and over, it strangles the girl inside, like a ring of death.

Coach– So, like a steel ring?

Abrielle– No. More like a… like if it was a strong snake.

Coach – A snake that is wrapped around, squeezing the girl.

Abrielle– Yeah.

Coach– That's a lovely image. Just move with it a little bit more and in a way let it become a snake. As the snake moves around this living part and starts squeezing, can you almost see her there? This young girl?

Abrielle– Yeah. She looks very fragile to me. *(Long silence)*

Coach– Just allow yourself to go there.

Abrielle– *(Long silence)* I think what's scary about this feeling of being squeezed by the strong muscle, is a fear of not being able to breathe, dying by suffocation because you can't catch your breath.

Coach– Uhum. So … this might be too soon, tell me when you're ready?

Abrielle– Go ahead.

Coach– So I want to ask you, what could you do in this situation? If you look at it, there is this object, this strong snake around this young person. What do you want to do when you're looking at the image?

Abrielle– So you mean if I am *looking* at it, *not* if I am the person in the middle being squeezed, right?

Coach– Right. You are Abrielle, looking at this phenomenon.

Abrielle *(almost immediately)*– I feel like cutting the snake. Getting a knife or a sharp object and trying to cut it.

Coach– And if you do that what happens? Can you manage?

Abrielle– It's kind of bloody and gross. But I feel like it's working.

Coach– Let's look at the force that you're using with the knife, and the nature of your determination. What happens if you take it frame by frame and look at yourself as you're picking up and then lowering that knife?

Abrielle– I'm looking for easy places or strategic places to put the knife, and as I cut I'm getting blood on my hands. But I realize I don't need to cut very many times, cause the snake kind of lets go as soon as he's a little wounded. He turns around to go lick his own wounds.

Coach– So it's *not* dead.

Abrielle– It's not dead, no, definitely not. It's just kind of distracted, or temporarily disabled.

Coach– And just become aware of what has to happen in you to take up the knife.

Abrielle– *(Long silence)* I feel like I have to be able to do it quickly and get out of the way, and also get the young girl out of the way. So I need to be light on my feet. I can't be carrying a baby at the same time! I need to go in with that mindset of doing it quickly, being nimble, and getting out. It's a dangerous situation because when I wound the snake, since it's not going to die it's going to keep moving. Most likely it is going to go and leave us alone. But maybe it's going to come back and get us. Maybe it's going to come get *me*.

Coach– What *does* happen?

Abrielle– *(Laughing in response)*

Coach– It sounds like it went off to lick its wounds.

Abrielle– Yeah.

Coach– Okay. What happened to the girl?

Abrielle– As the snake lets go I bring her close to me. She is, she is out of breath and weak, so I feel like I need to hold her up. But she's going to live. She is okay.

Coach– So does that feel right as you look at the picture now? Does it fit? Does it feel intuitively right?

Abrielle– Yeah I think so.

Coach– So let's translate that then into what you need to do. What does that say?

Abrielle– That if I am going to work with these girls I have to be clear that the circumstances are so dire, and so powerful, that I can't totally change them and remove their power completely– but maybe I can weaken them enough that people can get out temporarily. All I can give is temporary relief, maybe just enough for someone to catch their breath, so they don't suffocate. And that can work: we can all be okay. But if I'm going to do it I need to be light on my feet. *(Long silence)*

SECTION THREE– DEEPER COACHING AND INNER WORK

Abrielle– I guess, I feel that I get how the analogy translates to the situation. But now I'm... I am questioning whether I have the lightness and nimbleness to do this right now.

Coach– What would that be? What would the lightness and the nimbleness translate to practically?

Abrielle– I think, literally, it's something as simple as being able to have childcare so that I don't have to have Ocean on my back as I am trying to kill a snake! Basically I've facilitated all these sessions with him in the room. I've tried to get childcare at the sessions but mostly I haven't been able to. I asked around for reliable child-minders, I

made the calls and I even promised to pay more than I usually would… but the person often doesn't show up.

I think to do this work I need to feel centered, calm or composed, and I haven't really been feeling that way. Before I had a kid, I was able to just sit still and remain in one place and feel really grounded, and now I *never* get to do that. So I am feeling a little frazzled all the time, and I would love to get rid of that but it's not obvious how I would do it – and maybe the reality is that at this time I just can't do it!

Coach – So I am wondering if what we can look at in terms of Ocean is how to stop fighting the situation. So, okay, if you were to accept that "nimble" might not be the "nimble" that you would have thought of before you had a child, but "nimble" is going to have a different look now. And given your circumstances, it's not that you are going to be all centered in the same way of "centered-quiet" that you are used to. So maybe the question is, if quiet is what you're seeking, how could you find it in the noise that you've got? Cause the old kind of quiet is just not going to be an option. And in a way I think this is *your* snake. The snake is the demands of the situation that you're in. So in a crazy way you're in the same fractal pattern: you can't breathe. What could you do with your personal snake?

Abrielle– Hmmm. Well again, maybe the best I can do is to take little stabs at it? Little wounds. Maybe those are the little breaks that I get here and there?

Coach– Let me suggest something a little different. Cause I think if I was in the grip of a snake, in a way the more you try to breathe the more difficult it is: the more you actually create the tension. It's almost like you want to let *out* the breath. To shrink. And through the shrinking be able to wiggle out.

Abrielle– Aha!

Coach– The more you puff up your chest with air, the more it's going to put pressure on you. So I am wondering if you were to stop breathing and increasing resistance? You're sitting in these groups, and the reality is that Ocean is there and it's hard because of lack of childcare, and part of you is thinking "Oh my god, the babysitter hasn't arrived and on top of it I have to see to this group, and I am worried about Ocean, and am I going to do okay, and can I be centered enough???" So it's just going around and around in your head – and I'm wondering if that noise, your own internal snake, just gets bigger and bigger. As opposed to, you know: "this is the situation, I just have to live with it."

Abrielle– Yeah. That will be a very helpful way of thinking about it: just allowing myself to do my best given the situation, instead of constantly thinking that I have a problem that I need to solve.

Coach– Yeah, I almost want to suggest the total opposite: your child is not a problem at all, he is the answer! It's like the universe is saying "do it *with* the child". And I'm wondering rather than fighting it, how could you almost discover the wisdom in it? So there you are with a group of teenage girls and they are talking about all kinds of addictions including cutting themselves. What's the gift of Ocean being in the room? Just go with your gut feeling. If Ocean is about to cut himself what would you want to do?

Abrielle – Take the knife away, I guess. Distract him.

Coach– Uhum, and I have a sense you would do something else alongside that. Just go with your gut feeling: if Ocean was playing with a blade, what would you do?

Abrielle *(after a pause)*– I would pick him up and hold him in my arms.

Coach – Yes, you would hold him in your arms. And I am sure that you would also reassure him that you love him as you're holding him. That you'd cuddle him at that time.

Abrielle– Yeah definitely.

Coach– So if you were to respond to that girl in the same way, what would it look like? And it's interesting, hey? It's the same movement that you described before: I am snatching the girl from the snake, I am taking her away. A similar movement: I'm going to grab and take the child away. It's protective.

Abrielle– Right. And what would be the equivalent of cuddling? I must say I do have a kind of instinct of wanting to touch her and physically comfort her– but because of where these kids are coming from that would not be appropriate.

Coach– No I don't think you could do that, but what would you say in words? If you were to translate the hug in words what would you say in the moment that she is showing you how she cuts? Cause that's the moment when you kind of said, "Oh I understand". What would be a different response?

Abrielle– *(after a long pause)* The only thing that comes to my mind is something like, "I'm glad you're alive to talk to me. I'm glad that you're here. I'm glad that you didn't do damage to yourself. So we can have this conversation." Something like that.

Coach– Right. So, it's almost like you're talking to her as a person, you're relating to her as an individual. You've moved out of neutrality.

Abrielle– Right.

Coach– And you're now responding as a human being. As a very caring human being. Does that feel better than to say "I understand?"

Abrielle– Yes. *(Smiling)*

Coach– So you should absolutely do that when you hit those moments of overwhelm. Forget about facilitating for a moment. Just respond as a caring human being. Connect with the person in a way that feels genuine. And then move back into neutrality. How does that feel?

Abrielle– It definitely feels like I should try it.

Coach– Good... So I've got to get my grandson pretty soon, and do the babysitting thing now. I'm sorry about this but it's like now the multitasking parent role we were talking about is right here in the room!

(Both laughing.)

Abrielle– I'll let you go now. We'll talk soon.

Illustration 12: Abrielle in the Snake's Grip

3.10. Ocean as change-agent

[Act 2, Scene 4]

(Abrielle, Hanane and Ravenna on a walk into town. Ocean hanging out in his baby carrier on Abrielle' chest.)

Hanane– You know, the session you did with the teenagers almost wants me to give up on everybody else in the community and *only* work with youth. It seems like they are the only ones who are being totally truthful. It makes me wonder if we've been wasting our time with parents and grandparents.

Ravenna– I almost agree. I mean, what those kids were describing, *that* is what's actually going on in this community: the parents are not losing their kids to the Ministry because they don't know how to say no or because they are not hugging their kids enough! They are losing their kids because they are addicted to stuff and that makes the parents absent, unreliable, violent, negligent, all of those things. That's the core of the issue.

Hanane– Kind of interesting that in the session you did with the girls they talked about addictions, and in the other session when we only had the boys they talked about crime. That's also a core issue: the dads are often absent from their children's lives because they are so often tangled up in criminal activity or they are in prison. It didn't explicitly come out in the sessions with adults– but the young boys had no trouble talking about that.

Abrielle– Yeah. Those kids are definitely real. But I do honestly find them a little too intense. The only way for me to work with them is what came out in my supervision: it needs to be in fairly short spurts – like, just going in and coming back out fairly quickly, since I have no choice but to take everything I have with me *(she smiled down at Ocean who is experimenting with his lips to make new sounds.)*

Ravenna– It reminds me of what Jamaine said in describing how he sees his work as a school teacher here: "you've got to move in quickly and get the better of the situation, before it gets the better of you!"

Hanane– But seriously Abrielle, I don't know how you're doing it. It's just incredible that you are able to do *anything* when you're carrying so much. Every other woman – well, every other Canadian woman would still be on maternity leave at this stage.

Abrielle *(laughing at what she's going to say next)*– You know, my friend Yon who does a lot of DD facilitation in the Netherlands talks about "the last pee" (Yonathan Keren, pers. comm.): when you go to the bathroom before you start facilitating a DD session, because you have to, because you never know how long the process is going to take – you could be in the session for hours and hours! And when you're neutral you need to stay present and follow the group's needs, so you can't attend to your own physical needs, whether they're going to the bathroom or eating or whatever. So there's always this 'last pee' and we've joked about it for a long time… but when I was pregnant I began to panic about this kind of thing – because I literally couldn't have that last pee. I had to go several times during a session! I mean otherwise I'd pee my pants, you know!? And

we can laugh about it but there was this realization that something is happening to me now, biologically, that raises the status of my physical needs – to the degree that I can't really be fully present and neutral in the way that I used to be. And that kind of thing has really come into full view now when I am here doing this work with Ocean in tow. There are times when he crawls out into the hallway and I literally have to leave the session in the middle of some hot, emotional conversation to make sure he's safe. I don't even have the ability to physically stay with the people through this heavy stuff they are working through! Honestly, I sometimes wonder myself how it is possible that I *am* doing it at all.

Ravenna – Okay, well that might be true, but I think you're missing out on a whole other aspect – all the extraordinary advantages that Ocean's presence is giving you. I mean, you have a different kind of awareness as a mother that the rest of us just don't. It's a huge advantage, especially given the topic we've ended up focusing on. You freakin' understand the experience of being a parent! Your life is much closer to the community members – your stories are more relatable, your challenges are more real. I mean, the challenge of always having your mind partly on your child – *we* don't understand that, those of us who don't have children – and yet that dominates the experience of all the folks in this community that we're trying to work with. You can have a connection to them, and you can feel compassion for what they are going through in a way that I just don't think we can.

Hanane– *(tucking a blanket around Ocean)* It's true, we're totally jealous of you.

Ravenna– I also think you're failing to see what you're doing when you are in the sessions with Ocean – because to me, the most effective part of what you do, is that you're parenting at the same time as we're having these more abstract conversations *about* parenting. So you're kind of role modeling a way of parenting that maybe a lot of people here have not seen. They haven't had a lot of positive role models. So when you're with Ocean, and you stay present to him and his needs and you nurse him in the middle of facilitating a session– that's amazing to watch. And what you're communicating is: my first priority, my first allegiance is to my child. All of this work and stuff, all of this is secondary. And I think it is great for other parents to watch you do that.

Abrielle– *(bouncing up and down to calm Ocean down)* That's very sweet. And you're right. I am totally blessed with everything that is happening, everything that I have been given, even if I want to complain about it sometimes. And I must say that I am also really grateful that even though you guys don't have your own children, you're sharing the parenting role with me. I mean, we're literally doing what the Elders talk about: helping me raise a child as a village. And I think Ocean is so lucky to have that.

Hanane– He's awesome. I've learned so much from him.

Abrielle– You specially Hanane, you have this awesome way of interacting with kids that just comes naturally to you. Like the other day, you brought out those nesting blocks at the workshop and one little girl was trying to figure out how to put them together. And she came up to you with the blocks and instead of assembling them for her you kept saying "try it, I bet you can figure it out on your own!" And you kept

encouraging her until she did actually finally figure it out. I think that kind of supportive patience is so important to demonstrate here too– that way of creating independent children without abandoning them. So yes, even though we refuse to teach any parenting skills, the parents are probably learning by watching not just me, but all of us.

Hanane– *(smiling to herself)* It feels really good to me that we've had all those children in those sessions… It seems so central to how this work is done– how you do any kind of work in Aboriginal communities. I always assumed that having the kids attend meetings with their families was just for practical reasons: I mean, there are so many kids in these communities and to exclude them from meetings is essentially the same thing as excluding their parents who we want to be there... But the truth is, the kids also offer us new ways of connecting with each other, and somehow with our own humanity, that wouldn't be available if they weren't physically in the room. So, I wonder if this ability to connect is part of the reason we want the kids there in our sessions.

Abrielle– It's definitely been shown that babies bring out the gentle, nurturing part in people. I listened to a documentary on CBC about this experiment of bringing babies into schools where the older kids and teenagers were bullying each other – the babies totally changed the dynamics and the bullies very quickly became caregivers. It seems the very presence of the babies brings out the flip side of bully. The part that is typically under the waterline comes to the surface. And that ability to flip is actually kind of key for healing and reconciliation, isn't it?

Ravenna – I think that's true. And the other reason I see for having kids present relates to the very central tension at the heart of the Indigenous dilemmas: how much of the traditional and how much of the new do we want and need? So the Elders, just by their presence, represent the traditional side – and that almost needs to be balanced by the presence of young kids, representing the new and emerging. Without both ends, the conversation gets out of balance, I think.

Hanane– And I also think it's important to have young kids present because when you have such a dire social situation in a community we need constant reminders of the possibility of the birth of new things. Who wouldn't want to be a baby and have a chance at starting fresh, when life has already become so complicated? Charlie was saying to me the other day that by the time you're a teenager, you are already caught up, fully tangled up in all the problems of this community. He said, I can only imagine that the teenagers would love to return to a state of innocence, to a baby state, before they got stuck in the web of complexities – the systems, the institutions… Maybe that way they would have a chance, a good go at the world: before the big snake notices they are even there.

3.11. What to do about Johnny?

[Hanane's dilemma][65]

Ravenna– Hey Hanane, can I ask your help with… or, wait a minute, you look like you're in a bit of state. What's happening?

Hanane– I *am* in a bit of a state. Can I ask you to help *me* first?!

Ravenna – Yup. What's going on?

Hanane– Well, I am struggling with what to do about the facilitation course I am teaching this weekend in Vancouver. Not the course itself but… you know how I had this plan to bring a couple of community members from here down to Vancouver to take the course?

Ravenna– Uhum.

Hanane– Okay, well, one person is definitely coming. The other person I had invited, who was really keen to come, seems to have disappeared off the face of the earth and has not been responding to any of my messages in the past month, including ones I sent through his mother and sister! And so last Friday I decided to instead extend an invitation to this other person, one of the dads who came to a couple of the parenting workshops, Johnny. He's this really sweet guy, you know, his eyes light up every time he talks about his kids. And he just strikes me as being smart and capable – like if he was given a chance he could do great things in this community. So anyway, I called him and explained the class and invited him, and at the time he seemed quite excited about the course and about an all-expenses-paid trip to Vancouver… but then he has been just impossible to coordinate with since that day. Everything about his travel is complicated, but he won't return my calls and he won't show up to our appointments so that we can talk about it and make arrangements. And the thing is that I have already gone ahead and made reservations for him on the Greyhound bus and at the hotel– because I was afraid they would run out of room. And now it's only two days before the course, so unless I can get a hold of him and confirm things with him, I need to cancel those reservations by the end of the day or I will get charged for them. So it's urgent!

Ravenna– Hmmm. And you still can't get a hold of him, right? So what's your way forward?

Hanane– Basically at this point I need to decide whether I am going to keep pursuing Johnny, and go ahead making the rest of the arrangements and hoping that things will fall into place and he starts talking to me and actually shows up in Vancouver in two days – OR whether I am going to say, "Too bad, you should have been more on top of it, and I am sorry but you are uninvited to the course!" and cancel all the arrangements. So, I am stuck in this decision. I don't know what to do.

Ravenna– Want to argue both sides and I can help amplify for you?

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[65] This section is based on an actual argument I had with myself on Jan 18th, 2012 regarding this question. My colleague, Sera Thompson, amplified part of this argument by phone - in much the same way that Ravenna is amplifying for Hanane in this story. The name and identity of the people in question, as well as details of the situation have been significantly modified to ensure anonymity.

Hanane– Yes please.

Ravenna– Okay. And do you need anything before you go into the argument?

Hanane– No… Well, yes, actually, what I need is to be quite speedy about the decision cause it is almost 3 o'clock and if I am going to call the hotel and bus line I have to do it before the end of business hours. So please, if you can, amplify for me strongly so I can get to the bottom of it quickly, and give me a time check if we're getting close to 4pm, will you?

Ravenna– Got it! Jump in when you're ready.

Hanane– Okay, so I'll start with the side that says: Forget it! It's too late! Johnny is not coming to the course.

> Arrow– First of all, Johnny now has a history of not showing up. For two of the parenting sessions he kept texting me and saying he would come and then texting me afterwards apologizing for not coming. Then last week he kept ditching me when I tried to talk to him on the phone – saying he would call me back, but never did. Then, yesterday he stood me up after I walked for 20 minutes in the freezing cold to go meet with him in town like we had planned – and I even got frostbite! When I called he said he was napping! And now, today, he is again 45 minutes late and probably not showing up for the meeting we are supposed to be having right now.

>> Amplification– So it sounds like this guy is being a bit of a jerk. (Hanane: "Ummm, okay, I don't feel quite that strongly!" Ravenna corrects herself.) Try this one: he is a flake. I mean, how many times is he going to stand you up? You're pissed at him.

> Arrow– Yes, I am pissed. Well, more than anything I just feel like he cannot be trusted to make the 9am bus on Friday, let alone show up for class at 9am two days in a row, let alone get on a 7am bus on Monday to get back home!

>> Amplification– He is irresponsible. You just know he is going to screw up again. You don't trust him for a second.

> Arrow– The thing is that the cost of bringing him is high –about $750– and right now it looks like I may be paying it out of pocket – which wouldn't be a problem if I knew that he would be there for the class, but I am not willing to pay it for him to miss it because he was sleeping in!

>> Amplification– You're not sitting on a pot of gold and you just can't afford to take a chance on a lazy guy who doesn't even appreciate what you're doing for him! (Hanane: "I don't know that it is because he is lazy – but yes definitely I feel under-appreciated." Ravenna: "Under-appreciated. Right.")

> Arrow– And, I really need to concentrate for this course. I need to be focused to be able to teach it well, to make it a great course. It's a hard course to teach as it is because I have to be so present to what is in the room. If a part of my brain has to worry about whether Johnny is going to come I risk losing concentration altogether.

Amplification– This is just too risky. It's distracting you so much your course is going to be a mess. — There is also something like: you're already overwhelmed with the demands of the week. This is just too much. Too much to try and do it all.

Arrow– Yeah, definitely. I am overwhelmed. To be honest I don't think Johnny is functional enough for the responsibility that going to a course at UBC represents. He is too dysfunctional for me to be able to help him.

Amplification– It's a waste of your time. It's hopeless trying to work with Johnny. Your energies are better spent somewhere where you can make a difference.

Arrow– Yeah. I mean maybe what he really needs is someone who will drive up to his home and get him out of bed the way that the alternative school teachers are doing with the teenagers. Maybe I could do that if it was the only thing I was doing – but my primary responsibility is to teach this course and teach it well – for the other students who are my primary clients after all! I can't cater to Johnny at the expense of everyone else.

Amplification– You can't babysit this guy! If he needs someone to literally pick him up out of his crib and carry him to the class you're not that person. You're not mom! *(Hanane laughs and nods.)* You've got other priorities. Get your priorities straight!

Arrow– I guess I also have this little fear that he will really suffer in Vancouver, that he won't be able to find his way or get food to eat. Or worse – this sounds really prejudiced of me but– what if he finds the downtown eastside and connects with some cousin there and then misses his bus and then has to stay there forever?!

Amplification– You are literally making this guy homeless! *(Hanane laughs.)* He's surviving just fine in his village, and you can ruin his life with your good intentions! You feel anxious about his safety.

Arrow– Yes. Another thing is that it's already a little unfair and arbitrary that I have invited Johnny and *not* somebody else. I know it is going to cause jealousy in the community if he does come. It's not like he has proved himself to be better than anybody else! What ground do I have in giving him an opportunity over others?

Amplification– This is just trouble all around. You are regretting having ever invited him. It's like you're trying to do something good here but you're shooting yourself in the foot – jeopardizing the bigger project.

Arrow– And anyway, it is presumptuous of me to think he wants to play some kind of leadership role in his community– which is secretly the goal of this whole training – to prepare him for some of that. He is too dysfunctional to do it anyway. I don't trust him to be able to show up to meetings let alone facilitate them.

Amplification– How arrogant of you to decide what Johnny is going to do with his life! You have a secret agenda here – which is unfair to Johnny and, honestly: foolish. You can't make leaders against their will! *(Hanane nods.)* Your secret agenda is never going to work. Time to be honest and give it up.

(Silence. Ravenna: "Is there anything else you want to say from this side?")

Arrow– I think I've got them all. Basically, I am pissed at him. I feel sort of annoyed that he is not taking even a little initiative, when my initiative has been so large. I feel used when he drops his end of the bargain.

> Amplification– So it's really like: gosh, you're bending over backwards for this guy and he's doing nothing in return. He can't even bother to get out of bed to come meet with you. It's like, you try so hard and he's shitting on you! He's totally taking our generosity for granted. You're being exploited, abused, disrespected… It's almost like an abusive relationship. And that's just painful.

(Hanane nods in silence for a while, dwelling in those arrows.)

Hanane– Okay, let me try the other side: I should not yet cancel the arrangements and should keep doing everything I can to bring Johnny to the course.

Ravenna– Ready when you are. *(A short silence follows while Hanane thinks about it.)*

Arrow– Well, first of all, this shouldn't be news: this is what this community is like. There was been such a long history of oppression, of course people are dysfunctional. Look at the conditions here! What do I expect?

> Amplification – It's like: wake up to reality Hanane! Are you honestly blaming this guy for failing to show up for your little meetings and your silly little course, when every day of his life he is dealing with the legacy of genocide!? Come out of your delusion. This is what it is like to work with people in this community. It's fucking hard.

Arrow– It's almost like the field in this community makes you lethargic. *I* don't even want to get out of bed when I come here. I get sucked in. How can I expect others to do better than I do?!

> Amplification– Yeah. It's next to impossible to be functional here. You have had the experience of getting swallowed into the vortex – so of all people you should know what that's like. Have compassion for the folks here.

Arrow– Maybe I am being unreasonable to ask anybody to come to any meetings with me. Maybe I should be going to wake them up and meet with them at their place. I am trying to be effective in *their* culture after all– it's not fair to expect that they be effective in mine.

> Amplification– Cultural colonialism! You're guilty of it. You're doing it. You're imposing your culture and expecting them to conform. (Hanane: "Ouch!" Ravenna: "Too far?" Hanane shrugs and goes on.)

Arrow– Ummm, anyway, maybe this is just my whole control issue. I need to know that he is going to come and be at the class and turn into a leader… I am trying to control the situation, determine a product.

> Amplification– You gotta watch your neutrality! You can't be a control freak. Go with the flow. Either he'll come or not come – no need to get so uptight about it.

Arrow– Maybe my role is just to make the conditions for something else to happen – in this case, for Johnny to have the *opportunity* to take this course. And that's worth doing, regardless of whether it's successful or not. Maybe that's the different way of working that is needed within these communities, that way of looking at it that allows you to survive and do things long term.

> Amplification– Yeah. Like you said before: remember your neutrality. Non-attachment. You gotta do your part and trust that the rest will unfold as it will. You can't force things to happen – and if you do you either become another crushing colonial force or you get totally crushed yourself.

Arrow– Maybe the task is not to be efficient with time or dollars here, but to be generous, to expect that much of it will be 'wasted' in creating conditions and opportunities that people won't step into. And it's still worth doing because it's the best we can do.

> Amplification– You have to think outside of the common approaches here. The whole obsession with efficiency and effectiveness– it just doesn't apply here. In fact, thank goodness your project hasn't been efficient and effective! It means it has managed to stay outside of the dominant paradigms. That's how the world is going to change. That's the only way to do things here.

Ravenna – Those last ones are sounding a little bit like insights, don't they? Do you want to check and see if there are any other arrows you're holding back?

Hanane– Yeah, you're right. No I think I'm done with the arrows.

Ravenna– You sure? I'm not trying to rush you.

Hanane– No I think that's all of them.

Ravenna– So, if you look back at what you said, what are the arrows that really hit home? Which ones were particularly painful or surprising? What stands out as you stand back now? And just be gentle as you pull them out. Take your time.

Hanane– *(brief pause)* Well, the arrow that you amplified as "cultural colonialism" … Oooh! That one really hurt! And I mean, I definitely don't feel guilty of anything *that* serious – but there is some truth to it, isn't there? I *am* expecting Johnny to do things according to my culture – my city culture, my office culture, my university culture or whatever. And that's not exactly fair to him. I immediately feel less angry at him when I think about it that way.

The second arrow that stood out is about my sense of overwhelm. I think I need to realize that I have some limits of how much I can take on before it's too much for me. And in this case, I may have just met my limits. The reality is that teaching this course with 20+ students is already a stretch for me when I am not in the best place myself, when I have just returned from fieldwork, when I am stretched in all kinds of ways. Like all humans, I have limits and when I come to them I need to back off. Otherwise I will break. I will get sick. It is more important to have compassion for myself, to take good

care of myself, to preserve myself so I don't burn out. I still have a lot that I want to do with my life!

And then, there was another arrow from the first side that really resonated, which was the one about the pain of feeling disrespected and taken advantage of. I just realized how much pain this has caused me. And it's not to blame Johnny necessarily – but rather to realize that for me, I need to be met half way to feel respected. One-sided relationships, where I have to do all the work, are just not attractive to me. And I definitely cannot be in an abusive relationship when I keep feeling like I am being taken advantage of. I suffer too much in those... I need a kind of reciprocity, or mutuality, to be able to function in the relationship. So that's good to remember for all my future relationships and for the work I will do.

Ravenna– So if you take those three pieces of wisdom – that you've been expecting too much of yourself, and in a way expecting too much also of Johnny, and that you need to be met half-way in relationships – what does that tell you about what you should do now? What's the answer to your dilemma? How are you going to move?

Hanane – I think that I will cancel the reservations and I will just explain to Johnny that in the end I didn't really have the level of capability and time and energy that was needed to bring him in for the course. I don't even think I need to say any more than this: just that it wasn't a possibility, it wasn't a good fit after all.

Ravenna– Does that feel okay to you?

Hanane– Yes, it feels completely fine.

Ravenna– Cool. Okay, well it's almost 4 o'clock. Go cancel those reservations while you still can![66]

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[66] I carried through with the decision described above. Johnny was disappointed to have been "un-invited" to the course, but we stayed on good terms.

3.12. Evaluating our work

[Act 2, Scene 5]

(Conversation between Hanane, Ravenna and Abrielle back at the dinner table. Ocean is already in bed.)

Hanane– So, I know this is an important conversation to have, but I have to confess I feel quite resistant to it.

Abrielle– What is the resistance about?

Hanane– I just… every time I think about evaluation I feel kind of frozen and uninspired. I know this is the whole point of the project – we've tried some things and at the end of the day we need to be able to say how well they worked… But I have no idea how we would do that. I have been wondering if we've been idiots and done this whole project wrong – because we started off with these wonderfully vague goals about healing and transformation, but how do you measure any of that? How do you judge the success of something when you have no clear, measurable targets… when you don't even have a totally clear definition of what healing means, or what transformation looks like… And when you're not around for nearly long enough to see about the long-term impacts of what you've done (even if you could measure them)? I feel a little bit like we've fallen into the trap of "if you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there." We've come all this way but we've come without a map and without a defined destination. So we can sit here and say, "oh it's been a lovely journey" or "look at what nice trees we found!", but that's kind of bullshit because for all we know we might as well be totally lost!

(The other two stare at her in silence for a moment.)

Ravenna– Well, since we're not sugar-coating anything let me say this: I think *you* are full of bullshit Hanane!

Hanane– Oh good, I was hoping you'd say that! *Why!?*

Ravenna– Well, your argument is from the middle ages! *(The other two chuckle.)* I mean, seriously, do you think we're conducting a science experiment where you can, like, put the community in a beaker and weigh it and stick a litmus paper in it and figure out if a chemical reaction took place after *x* months of intervention!?? Or are you expecting some sort of flashing amber light and beeping sound to come on when we hit our 14% social change target?!

Hanane *(laughing)* – That would be lovely, wouldn't it!?

Ravenna – Oh sure, that would be just peachy! But in fact we're working within a complex system –remember?– where… where clarity and specificity and measurability are not only unlikely and unreasonable to expect, but are also dangerously limiting. We're doing social innovation work. It would be foolish –and *blinding*– to set goals and targets at the beginning and then say, did we achieve them or not? The nature of the problems we are working with don't lend themselves to that kind of evaluation, because there are so many moving parts and non-linear paths and positive and negative

feedback loops… If we were looking too closely at targets we would probably miss the whole picture of what's going on, and we would probably never want to do anything again because whatever change we managed to measure within the time limits of our project would probably be entirely disappointing.

Hanane– Oh right, oh right, fair enough. I am with you. I realize the complexity of the picture… but what is our alternative to the scientific model here? How do we evaluate without measurable targets?

Abrielle– I think that we have actually *been* evaluating based on an alternative model, and maybe we just haven't named it yet. But actually, at every stage of the project, after every workshop, after every major decision or event, we've been sitting together at this table and saying, well, how did that work? What did we learn? Does it feel like we're on the right path? What evidence do we have of that? How do we adjust what we're doing to make it better? We haven't been shooting for specific targets, or even following one specific transformation theory – but we've been going on what we *feel* and what we *hear* and what we become aware of. I think we have been continuously evaluating, all along the way.

Hanane– Yeah, but I thought that was just what you do in action inquiry, right? You constantly get feedback through all the channels – first person, second person, third person– and you decide what to do next.

Ravenna– It's true, that *is* the basis of action inquiry – those cycles of action and reflection. And it's also the basis of developmental evaluation (Westley, Zimmerman and Patton, 2006), which is the appropriate evaluation approach for the kind of project we're doing.

Abrielle– It's call "developmental evaluation"?

Ravenna– Yeah, that's what it's called and I think you're right Abrielle, we have been doing it and we can relax about it.

Hanane– Okay, sure. That makes me feel a little better.

Abrielle– So, maybe this evaluation conversation is really about summarizing what we have found out along the way and wondering if we see any new patterns looking back on the whole set of what we have done. *(Ravenna nods.)* Right? *(Hanane now nods too.)* Okay, so, I would say that in terms of our project's central questions around transformation and healing we've seen several things happen in the workshops: There has been (a) lowering of the waterline and some considerable role fluidity (Lewis), (b) instances of empowerment and recognition (Bush and Folger), and (c) repairing of the web of social relationships in the community (Waldram, Napoleon, Ross and the Healing Foundation). So that's kind of a "mechanistic" way of looking at healing and transformation, and by that I mean, those three things are mechanisms through which positive change –in relationships to self and others– is supposed to take place. Tracing evidence that those mechanisms have been at work is not a perfect way to measure our impact, but it definitely gives us some information and suggests that *something* has happened.

Ravenna– You were the one who called it "a thousand tiny transformations" Hanane, and to me that's the right way to think about our impact.

Hanane– Uhum *(nodding thoughtfully).*

Abrielle– I also had another look at my notes and interview transcripts and I think we can also use a "linguistic" approach to speak to our impact. We could look at the metaphors people used (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). So for example, I noticed that our workshop participants started to talk in the language of healing, from very early on in the process, and without us suggesting it. I think it was maybe the second workshop we did when we were sitting around and somebody said, "When I was in prison I sat in healing circles similar to this one…"

Ravenna– I'll never forget that cause it just floored me. It's such a striking comparison… but you're right he was the one who called it a healing circle – we never framed the session that way, we never said that healing was the intention. The framing was around parenting skills.

Abrielle– Right. The other thing I noticed is the use of metaphors that might be related to healing. I read somewhere that when people talk about the experience of healing they often express it in physical terms as the lifting off of a burden. And we definitely heard that in the sessions and interviews. In one check-out I remember this woman saying she's *feeling lighter in her chest.* Someone else in an interview said it was like a *weight had been lifted from her shoulders* after sharing her own struggles and shortcomings with other parents. Somebody else said in an interview that being in the sharing circle was so comforting that *his body felt good* afterwards. Not everybody had these experiences, but I am saying that some did. So it might be a stretch to say these statements are evidence of healing, but I think there is enough of a pattern that, again, it tells us *something* has happened.

Ravenna– Huh. That's pretty interesting. What percentage of participants would you guess had these kinds of experiences?

Abrielle– I would guess about half, maybe?

Ravenna –And was there any other kinds of metaphors you noticed coming out?

Abrielle– Let me look through my notes…

Hanane– This is probably trivial, but the metaphor that was explicitly used and ran through the grandparents and parents sessions was about *breaking the cycle. (Abrielle and Ravenna nod.)* That one is obviously a very prudent metaphor for speaking about intergenerational trauma, and it is in common use in the literature and in Aboriginal healing programs – so it's not like our participants came up with it, they were probably repeating what they had heard elsewhere. And coming to think of it, our participants mostly used it to talk about their aspirations of healing and the bigger picture of their lives– not necessarily what came out of the workshops we did with them.

Ravenna– That's true. But still, it's interesting that they talked about breaking the cycle in the context of our workshops – and the implication for me is that they saw our work

as part of the longer-term project of working through intergenerational trauma, which is great.

Abrielle– Actually, one person interviewed also said that she felt the workshops had a *rippling effect*, and she explained it to mean –almost exactly what you just said– that what we were doing here has implications for the larger healing project, impacting other things in the community and impacting the way she relates to people outside of the workshops… Now, the other metaphor they commonly used was *bonding,* as in *we bonded with each other.* So that one speaks to that idea of relational and collective healing…

Hanane– That metaphor is interesting too because *bonding* suggests forming fairly strong and fairly permanent relationships – it's a way stronger word than, say, *connecting.* If we were talking chemistry, *bonding* would mean the creation of a new substance with new qualities… Look Ravenna, it turns out we *can* put it in a beaker and measure chemical reactions after all! *(They all chuckle.)*

Abrielle– But you know what's curious? When I asked people explicitly what they thought "healing" meant, nobody talked about the relational and community aspects. Instead everyone talked about the personal and internal aspect and the individual capacity to deal with trauma.

Hanane– Give us examples.

Abrielle– Okay, well first of all, I should say that many interviewees said they didn't know how to define the term, but those who did… here is some of what they said: "healing is… a feeling… a feeling of change inside you", "healing means mending the wounds of our own childhood", "there are so many lost souls here and healing means that they are found", "healing means getting over past trauma and experiences that hinder your development and hinder you being your authentic self", "healing is opening a can, and being able to deal with whatever subject I'm here to deal with."

Ravenna– Aha. So that's pretty consistent with the literature that claims that healing comes from within and moves outward, often starting with the individual and then moving to the family and then to the community (Krawll, 1994).

Abrielle– Yeah. And I guess our discussion here suggests that, in the GN case, while the word healing tends to conjure up the individual aspect of that "journey", the communal aspect – which is really the realm that our workshops tried to play in– is also relevant and effective, and in fact people talked a lot about it when we left the conversation more open. So, if we look at this community as a whole, healing is happening – or can be happening– at more than one of those levels, which makes sense.

(They nod. Ravenna takes notes on her laptop.)

Ravenna– Okay, that's great. We've got some sense of the impact of the workshops and what healing means in this context. And I wonder if we should switch gears for a bit and talk about the success and failure of some of the specific things we did – like the Deep Democracy tools we used. I know we've done this all along too, but I would like a summation.

Abrielle *(getting up)*– I'm just going to check on Ocean and I'll be right back.

Hanane– *(To Abrielle)* Okay. *(To Ravenna)*. That's a good idea because that has been a curiosity all along, hasn't it? How well do Deep Democracy tools work in this specific context – which is as far removed as you can get from the South African context they were developed within…

Ravenna– And especially since Deep Democracy offers group facilitation and conflict resolution tools – and we are trying to apply them to a situation where there is a lot of interpersonal and group conflict but also a lot of internal conflict or trauma – how well do those tools work in this more therapeutic context?

Hanane– Right.

Ravenna– And I think we might just focus on the main three tools that are unique to the DD toolkit: the Soft Shoe Shuffle, the four steps of decision-making, and the argument.

Abrielle *(returning without Ocean)* – That sounds good to me.

Ravenna– Okay. Soft Shoe Shuffle? How well did it work?

Hanane– Well, I would say the success was mixed. It didn't work well with teenagers in that early workshop that Abrielle facilitated. That was a surprise cause in every other DD story we've heard the Soft Shoe Shuffle has been a hit with young people. But in this case I think we concluded that because of the history of abuse in the community the young people are just too uncomfortable in their bodies and standing next to other people was maybe just too much for them.

Abrielle– Although, that's just a theory from their teachers. There were all kinds of things happening in that session and the lack of participation was part of the dynamic in the room – so I am still not totally convinced that as a rule the Soft Shoe Shuffle wouldn't work with the teenagers here. But it's true that every time I have tried to work with them there has been such a feeling of lethargy and resistance to movement that I haven't felt like going that route.

Ravenna– Okay, so let's say for whatever reason it doesn't seem appropriate with teenagers.

Hanane– It also doesn't seem appropriate with the Elders. With all the physical mobility issues and hearing issues … I mean I wouldn't dare try it with them.

Ravenna– Right. On the other hand, it did work quite well with the band staff from those early workshops and with the parents groups later on. That "middle generation" seemed to like it. It seemed to energize them every time, lots of idea came out quite quickly, and we got a lot of positive feedback on it.

Hanane– And the feedback that most stands out for me and that was repeated most often, was that it felt good when they said something and other people came and stood next to them. Because of the feelings of isolation in that generation of this community, I think the feeling that you're being accompanied like that in your perspectives has quite a profound impact. Maybe it even contributes to that sense that they have *bonded.*

Ravenna– Yes. Was there any negative feedback about the Soft Shoe Shuffle in the interviews?

Abrielle– There were at least two people who said they didn't enjoy it. They didn't really give a clear reason, but they were both people who are quite comfortable sitting in chairs and talking and they had been some of the most talkative people in the parents' groups. They said they preferred sitting in circle and brainstorming, which makes sense given their existing style and strength.

Hanane– And with any tool and exercise there is always going to be some who don't like it.

Ravenna– Right. Anything else about the Soft Shoe Shuffle? *(The other two shake their heads no.)* Okay. The four steps of decision-making?

Hanane– *(after a pause)* Did we use them!?

Ravenna– Well, I mean, we didn't make a whole lot of decisions because that was not the focus of our sessions. But we definitely used the first three steps in our facilitation all the time and in every meeting: gaining all the views, looking for dissent and spreading the dissent.

Hanane– Okay, right. Well, I would say that in almost all the sessions it was fairly difficult to get the dissenting views out. People were just not very likely to say no to each other – they tended to want to support each other and be harmonious. I assumed this was cultural. I know there can be a tendency in Indigenous communities not to be confrontational face-to-face and especially in public, even if there is huge animosity or disagreement between people (Ross, 1992). I would say we did not manage to circumvent those cultural tendencies with these tools.

Abrielle– And from a neutral perspective, I think that was totally fine. I mean, we kept probing for the "no" and making it safe to say no, but it didn't tend to come out very often, maybe because it has some important cultural function in this community. I am glad that we didn't push for it too hard. That was the respectful way to use those tools.

Ravenna– Yes, I agree. And then there was maybe a handful of instances I remember when we used the fourth step: asking for a vote and incorporating the minority wisdom into the decision– the "what do you need to come along?" question. In every case it was around a fairly minor decision, like 'should we change the direction of this conversation or stick with it?', or 'should we keep going with this meeting or have we had enough?' It seemed like the fourth step was received well. But there wasn't anything particularly profound that emerged around it.

Hanane– Yup, that was my experience too.

Abrielle– Although I would say that the very fact that we used it and that people experienced it was very important in that it gave a legitimate voice to the minority. When we think about all the people in this community who are struggling to have a voice, and they have been asked for the first time "what do you need to come along?", I think that's pretty significant even if the decisions themselves were insignificant.

Hanane– I'm totally with you.

Ravenna– Okay. Anything else about the decision-making steps? *(The others shake their heads no.)*

Ravenna– Argument?

Hanane– Again I have to ask: did we use it!?

Abrielle– *(Shaking her head, no.)* We definitely never had a full-fledged argument in the workshops.

Ravenna– But interestingly there were many polarities in the sessions and we came to the edge of having an argument many times. We never quite got there.

Abrielle– Right. I remember some very clear examples of that, actually. The most striking was in one of the last sessions with the parents when this polarity came up about the fostering situation on the res. Somebody said, "We need to be organizing and advocating to make sure that our children don't go into foster care in white communities, that they stay here with our families". And then somebody else said, "Are you kidding me? I much rather my child goes somewhere else where she is safe because I don't trust people in this community, I don't trust my own family!" And there was this moment when I felt dizzy from the sharpness of that edge, you know? And you were facilitating Ravenna, and you framed it very well as: there are two sides and two different views on this topic. You nicely separated it from the people who had spoken, and you even drew some kind of diagram on the flip-chart showing the two sides, and you said we could go deeper into this and explore this tension with a fun kind of exercise. And at that moment I thought we were about to go into an argument. But then as soon as the participants saw the polarity drawn out they were like, "yeah yeah yeah, that exists" and then they totally changed the subject and never came back to it!

Ravenna– Right. I remember that moment too. I was a little surprised, but I was going with the energy of the group so I didn't want to push them into the argument. And you're right, it was almost like as soon as the polarity became totally clear it lost all its charge. Like, now that we had named it and put it on the flip-chart we no longer had to worry about it! It didn't seem to bother people, even though we know that tension is very alive here and very serious, especially since the Ministry is talking about handing over some of the decision-making around child welfare to the Bands. "*Where* children are fostered?" will be a totally explosive question if in fact that responsibility is downloaded to the Band. I'm even scared to think about what could happen– it could rip the whole community apart…

Hanane– And maybe that's why they didn't want to go into the argument. Because they knew what a serious thing this is, and there was just such a huge edge there that no one can imagine going over it to have the argument.

Ravenna– Maybe. I'm not sure. That can be true for other instances where we could have had an argument too. The issues here are serious and scary and edges are big – and maybe the community is just not ready or too afraid to look at the controversies.

Abrielle– Plus the cultural stuff that prevents them from going there too… Maybe it is just not appropriate for them.

Ravenna– Okay, so I guess our conclusion is that the DD argument tool was not appropriate in the context of our project. The Soft Shoe Shuffle was only fitting with some audiences. And the DD four steps were useful and potentially empowering, although we didn't use them for any decisions with significant consequences.

(They all consider all of this for a few minutes and Ravenna takes more notes.)

Hanane– Hmmm. At some level this doesn't ring true for me.

Ravenna– Say more.

Hanane– Because half an hour ago we sort of established that we have had somewhat of a transformational impact – in tiny ways, maybe, but nonetheless. And now we are saying that the DD tools – which were explicitly what we depended on– were not all that useful or didn't work all that well! So… how did we do it then!?

Abrielle– That's a good question. I think there are two answers to it, from what I can see. One is that we actually *did* use the tools with much higher success rate *among us.* Not necessarily in the sessions with the community members – but in these discussions around this table, and in our own internal processes, in the supervision and peer coaching. We've had so many good arguments and a million important decisions that we made using the DD tools. I'm thinking of our design decisions, timing decisions, personal commitment decisions: all of those, I am sure, influenced our effectiveness in the project and are responsible for any positive impact we generated. So, actually, the DD tools have been very very useful in that they enabled us to stay within this, often very difficult working environment, to be able to work together and with Xenia and with the community, making all the adjustments that we needed to make along the way. I know for myself that if I didn't have the DD tools, and if you guys and Myrna were not helping to hold space for me using those tools, I would not have survived the project. I would have probably quit long ago.

Hanane– That's true. I feel the same way.

Ravenna– So, in an indirect way we might say that the DD tools were quite successful.

Abrielle– That's how I feel. And I think the second thing to remember is that DD is not just about the tools. The tools are a small part – but what I think we have depended on more strongly than the tools are: (1) role theory as a lens for seeing what is going on, and (2) the development of our metaskills, and especially our neutrality, so that we can hold the appropriate spaces for what needs to happen, regardless of the tools or techniques or formats that we used in sessions.

Hanane– Uhum. I don't think that I would have survived without role theory, without being able to see through the complexities, identifying patterns and knowing when I was falling into them and how to get myself out.

Ravenna– And similarly, we've talked so many times about our neutrality and its central place, and about our personal qualities and the attitude we're each developing to support that. So I think you're right on, Abrielle, the *view* of Deep Democracy was extremely useful and probably even essential to what we were able to do. *(Continues after a pause.)* Cool. Is there anything else we want to say about evaluating the

usefulness of DD, or evaluating our impact in the community more generally? *(After another pause, watching the expressions of the others.)* How are we feeling right now?

Abrielle *(a little hesitantly)*– I must say that despite all of what we have talked about I am feeling a little disappointed. Like… not disappointed exactly, but sad that we haven't done more. That the suffering in this community is so deep, and that we have suffered so much in the process, and yet all we have to show for our year of efforts are these "tiny transformations"... I don't know what I was expecting, but I suppose I was expecting something more.

(The others watch Abrielle sympathetically as she tears up.)

Ravenna *(reflects back, amplifying slightly)* – You're feeling let down by our project. You had so much hope and we haven't lived up to it.

Abrielle– Yeah. I mean, okay, so somebody left the meeting saying *oh I feel so much lighter in my chest*– but then she goes home and she is back to her life and that lightness is gone by the next morning… In a best case scenario, maybe she stays inspired for long enough to commit to keeping the parenting group going – but god, that's going to be really hard. We have no idea if it's going to happen. And even if it does… it's a drop in the bucket compared to how much need there is in this community.

Ravenna– It's like a bottomless pit. Whatever we do it doesn't make that much of a difference.

Abrielle– It actually feels like we're in the dark, throwing darts at a dart board, hoping that we hit some kind of target at some point! But chances of hitting something in the first place are miniscule and chances of ever being able to hit it again are even smaller. It's kind of a sad exercise.

(Pause)

Abrielle– I think I'm going into my depression again. Sorry guys. We don't have to go there.

Hanane– Do you want to go there? Cause we can make time for it.

Abrielle– No, I really don't need to go back there right now. But you know as I was talking something became apparent to me, which is that in my mind I had been romanticizing the DD tools quite a bit. Like, I was imagining that DD was the magic bullet, or the magic dart if you like: that it was going to hit targets that nothing else can hit! And I think that's unreasonable. And it's sad for me to let go of that idea of a magic dart, but I'm ready to let go of it now.

(Long pause.)

Ravenna– Anything else?

Hanane– Well, I'm not getting the depression feeling so much, but I am getting a sort of disorientation, or a feeling of confusion about our impact – also despite all of what we've said… I had a dream about this… should I tell you about it?

Ravenna – Of course. *(Abrielle also nods.)*

Hanane– I dreamt that one of the Tsulquate Elders organized a big Soft Shoe Shuffle on some contentious local issue. It took place outside, at the top of the hill, and all members of the community attended. We all missed it because we weren't up here when it happened – but we arrived, like, the day after and we heard that it had been this amazing conversation, and community members said to each other all these things that they haven't been able to say in years. In fact it was so groundbreaking that reporters from Victoria came up here to document it and interview people, especially the Elder who was now being praised and carried around like a queen on an expensive throne! I went to the top of the hill, where there was still a lot of excitement and lots of people gathered around. There was this young TV reporter and I watched him say into the camera that this had been an amazing event and there was a rumour that it had all started with some UBC students coming up to this community and teaching people these methods – but that there was no way to confirm the rumours and they were probably not true! "What a silly idea", he implied. I was taken back by this and wanted to protest right away and say, "No, *it was us!* We brought this stuff in, we taught people how to have these conversations"... But nobody seemed to pay any attention to me. Almost like I was invisible. The Elder who was now the queen was getting all the attention, and while part of me was heart-broken about this, another part of me started to doubt that we had anything to do with it at all: *oh, maybe it wasn't us! Maybe it was the Elder all along.* And I woke up in confusion, not knowing how to feel.

(Pause as Abrielle and Ravenna smile.)

Hanane– What does it mean guys!?

Ravenna– The first thing that comes to my mind is that maybe we are having quite a big impact and we're underestimating it– which also speaks to Abrielle's disappointment: maybe we need to give ourselves more credit.

Hanane– Maybe. Or maybe it's the opposite, maybe we need to give the community more credit!

Ravenna– Or maybe it means we shouldn't care so much who gets the credit!

Abrielle– Well, who knows for sure what it means, but I think the dream brings out this interesting point, which is that there is a kind of blurring between the different efforts – it's hard to assign credit for good changes that have been happening.

Hanane– Well exactly. I mean, so much has been happening in this community in the past little while, independent of our efforts: There has been a whole language revitalization program through UVic and half a dozen GN folks are graduating from it. The cultural programs at the school are thriving: we saw two amazing play potlatches put on by the school, which had never been done before. The economic development efforts have suddenly taken off: the Band has started an eco-tourism venture and an art shack. The new elected Band Council is more diverse than it has been in years: it includes young people and people from different families. The Cultural Committee has decided to put on a big Healing Feast at the Hall next month. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission is putting on a local hearing here –in this remote part of the North Island of all places! Then, someone from this community goes and gets elected as Port Hardy town councilor for the first time, which is going to improve the relationship

between the Town and the Band. And then, you know, the Member of Parliament from this riding randomly becomes Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and suddenly there is all this political attention: dignitaries coming to visit the res, TV cameras coming to showcase problems and opportunities here – and before you know it, the items of Xenia's CCP wish-list are getting federal funding! I mean, it's like, there is a whole tide of unprecedented good things happening here that we had nothing to do with… but what are the chances that they all randomly started happening as soon as we came up here and said we want to do a project on community healing!?

Abrielle *(smiling)*– I know what you mean, it seems too unlikely that all these things are happening coincidentally and independently of each other. And they can't be pinned to any single individual or organization here either. It really does feel like a changing tide.

Hanane– I might be crazy, but I kind of wonder if our effort, even just our attention, has had something to do with creating that tide. Like we are some distant planet that has pulled the water particles!

Ravenna– If we see ourselves in terms of being in this field, from a role theory perspective, we could see all this as a pattern: all these efforts and changes are part of that turning tide. And we've been part of that pattern, our project has been one of those fractals. It's not that we have *caused* the tide – but we have been part of it. We have contributed.

Hanane– Okay, maybe that's a better way of looking at it. We could also say, from a role theory perspective, that there has been a role of "helpful intervention" in this field. And at times we have filled that role – but really it belongs in this field and others have been taking it up as well.

Abrielle– If we see it that way, the question of who should get credit is almost irrelevant.

Hanane– Right!

Abrielle– We've all been interacting in this field of energy, and the "helpful" role has manifested in us in bits and pieces at one time or another… That makes me feel so lucky!

Hanane– Yeah! Totally. It makes me feel blessed.

Ravenna *(smiling, to Hanane)*– Is it as good as being carried like a queen on an expensive throne?!

Hanane *(laughing at this)*– Almost! Almost.

Ravenna *(getting up and holding one side of Hanane's chair)* – Ready Abrielle?!

Abrielle *(jumping to her feet and holding the other side of Hanane's chair)* – Ready!

(Ravenna and Abrielle pick up Hanane and carry her up the stairs to her room, giggling and struggling to stay on the chair, like a queen on an expensive throne.)

Illustration 13: End Title Page (photo by Jessie Hemphill)

4.0. End

4.1. No time to dry our tears

A wave of grief hit Tsulquate in 2012 and took me by surprise. The final months of my engagement were marked by a series of deaths in the community. This included the passing of Irene Sheard and Cindy Scow, who had participated actively in the parenting workshops, as a wise grandmother of many and a young mother of seven, respectively. Elders Dorie Brotchie and Jessie Walkus also passed, leaving my friends and workshop participants – Betty Walkus and Gloria Sarah Walkus (wife and daughter or Dorie) and Alvin Walkus and Gloria Ann Walkus (husband and daughter of Jessie) grieving.

No one describes the emotional and cultural reactions of the community to these deaths more tenderly and thoughtfully than Richard George, cited with permission on the following pages.

GILAKAS'LA I'VE HAD TO EXPLAIN TO PEOPLE I'M IN MOURNING FOR A FRIEND OF MINE WHO BECAME MY SISTER SO BY CHOICE I DO NOT ATTEND CULTURAL EVENTS IT WAS SAID IF I DO IT IS AS THOW I WAS DANCING ON THE GRAVE I'VE EVEN PUT MY JULERY AWAY FOR A YEAR THERE WAS SO MUCH MY FAMILY TOUGHT ME THAT I STILL HANG ON TO THIS DAY ON THE FOURTH DAY OF THE LOVED ONES PASSING WE CUT OUR HAIR IN THE ILD DAYS OUR PEOPLE USE TO PULL THER HAIR OUT AND SCRATCH THERE FACE'S TO SHOW THEY ARE IN MOURNING WE USE TO HAVE WHALER'S TOO THEY WOULD CRY OUT LOAD AND GIVE HISTORY OF THE LOVED ONE PASSED I REMEMBER GRANNY AX'XWA DOING THIS WHEN MY GREAT GRAMPA HENRY ABLE BELL PASSED SHE STARTED SOON AS SHE GOT OUT OF THE CAR TILL SHE GOT INTO MY AUNT DOREEN'S HOME THAT WAS SOMETHING TO WITNESS OUR OLD PEOPLE USE TO PAY THEM AND FEED THEM WE EVEN DID A BURNING CEREMONY WERE WE WOULD BURN FOOD AND THE BELONGINGS OF THE LOVED ONE THIS IS A GOOD RELEASE WE ARE NOT TO BURN SHARP THINGS OR FOOT WARE AND THE CUT HAIR HAD TO BE BRUNT SEPARATE FROM THIS CEREMONY WE WOULD EVEN SMOKE OUR HOMES MY GRAND MOTHER LUCY (SEAWEED) GEORGE TOUGHT MY FATHER AND I TO USE HEMLOCK BRANCHES TO BURN SHAKE IT OFF AND SMOKE THE HOUSE

AS A CHILD WE WERE NOT ALLOWED TO ATTEND FUNERALS WE WERE TOLD TO STAY IN DOORS FROM THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE DEATH TO THE DAY OF THE FUNERAL OUR CERTIN WAS CLOSED AND OUR FAMILY AND COMMUNITY WAS IN SILENTS I REMEMBER WALKING FROM MY GRANNY'S HOME TO MINE MY UNCLE ABEL TOOK ME BY THE HAND AND WALKED ME HOME HE WAS THE WATCHMEN ON THE DAY OF A FUNERAL WE YOUNG ONES WOULD MEET AT GEORGE & ELIZA WALKUS HOME OR LOU & ELIZABETH WALKUS HOME OR AT CHUCK & FRAN NEWMAN'S HOME THERE THEY WOULD HAVE LUNCH READY FOR ALL US CHILDREN AS SOON AS THE FUNERAL WAS DONE WE WERE ALLOWED TO PLAY OUTSIDE AGAIN ALOT HAS CHAGED TODAY WE DON'T HAVE THAT KIND OF RESPECT TODAY WHAT I REMEMBER I FOLLOW AND KEEP I WAS TOLD BY MY PARENTS IF WE ARE NOT AROUND YOU ATTEND AND REPRESENT OUR FAMILY SO I DO MY BEST I'VE ALSO LERNT THAT SELF CARE IS VERY IMPORTANT WHEN GIVING SUPPORT YOU KNOW AS MY AUNT DOREEN AND I SHARE STORIES SHE TELLS OF MY GREAT GREAT GRAND MOTHER DEL'DALA SAYING THERE WILL BE A TIME WE ARE NOT GOING TO HAVE THE TIME TO DRY OUR TEARS AND ANOTHER WILL PASS THIS IS TAKING PLACE TODAY EVEN WHEN OUR FAMILY HAD A PLANED EVENT IF THERE WAS A DEATH THEY WOULD CALL IN THE GRIEVING FAMILY TO FEED THEM I DO REMEMBER GOING TO COMFORT SERVICES IN DIFFERENT HOMES IN OUR VILLAGE I LOVE OUR NATIVE WAYS EVEN THOW MY FAMILY HAVE ALL PASSED IT WAS TOUGHT TO ME WE ARE NEVER WITHOUT PARENTS, GRAND PARENTS, AUNTS OR UNCLES NOR BROTHERS AND SISTERS MY GRAMPA ALWAYS TOLD US IF YOU HAVE ANY DIFFERENCES MAKE IT RIGHT BEFORE THE SUN SETS WE NEVER KNOW WHAT TOMORROW HOLDS FOR US YOU DON'T WANT TO LIVE WITH ANY REGRETS OF NOT DOING SO BIG MOM USE TO ALWAYS TELL US MAKE SURE YOU PRAY AT THE START OF YOUR DAY AND THE END OF YOU DAY AND BEFORE YOU EAT I SO GIVE THANKS TO MY FAMILY FOR MY TEACHINGS SURE HAS HELPED ME OUT TODAY I LOVE YOU MY FAMILY AND FRIENDS TAKE GOOD CARE...

4.2. Death close to home

[Act 3– scene 1][67]

(Xenia and Hanane rush to the living room to find Ravenna who has already dried her tears.)

Hanane *(sitting next to Ravenna and holding her hand)* – Did you talk to Abrielle?

Ravenna – I did.

Hanane– How is she doing? … Wait, first, how are *you* doing?

Ravenna– Oh, I am okay. It was a hard conversation but I am okay. *She* is not doing so well. She cried a lot on the phone.

Xenia– God. I can't imagine… Did she say more about how Jane died?

Ravenna – Yeah… Apparently she had been released from Vancouver General Hospital two weeks before because they didn't really think she was in danger. But Jane had General Anxiety Disorder for years, and then these pangs of depression on top of that. She was on medication and she was changing the dosage of her drugs, which I guess can be really hard on you. Anyway, Abrielle was one of a group of people who had been supporting her during the past few months, and she had had lunch with Jane several times in the past couple of weeks, to just try to make sure she wasn't alone during the day and had people to talk to. Then on Wednesday she had lunch with her again. Abrielle said it was a tricky lunch because Ocean was quite a handful and demanding a lot of attention, but that Jane generally seemed better than the previous weeks. She was lucid and she was describing her struggle with the pills. And then… then Jane left and went home, and she killed herself.

Hanane– Holy shit. So it happened on Wednesday?

Ravenna– Yeah.

Hanane– *(letting out a long sigh)* How did she…?

Ravenna– She hung herself in the bike shed. Her husband Andrew found her there that evening.

Xenia *(after a long pause)*– You know they say that's how it happens: you only really get up the gumption and the clarity to kill yourself once you're feeling a little better. Not in the depth of your misery, but once you feel a little better.

(The other two nod.)

Hanane– It's so devastating. I didn't even know Jane, and I have no emotional stake in the story, but I feel totally devastated by it.

Xenia– How is Abrielle coping with it? Is she well supported?

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[67] This section reflects several conversations with several people within my personal social network in the days and weeks immediately following the event of my friend Jane's death on January 25th, 2012, particularly Normajean McLaren, Gerry Oleman, William Choukeir, and Jodie Martinson.

Ravenna– Yeah yeah, she has a ton of support. I guess a large group of Jane and Andrew's friends are getting together almost every night. Also Abrielle has about a million spiritual teachers and mentors that she keeps in touch with, so she has been calling on a few people for support. And her family is around… She is going to be okay and she knows it, but she is just going through the emotional roller-coaster right now.

Xenia– Right, of course.

Ravenna – She is feeling a fair bit of responsibility about the whole thing. She said she knows it wasn't her fault, but she seemed lost in all those thoughts of "what if I had said this and done that". The fact that she was probably the last person to talk to Jane… she feels like she should have been able to be more helpful, or at least picked up on the fact that Jane was so acutely suicidal. So she feels quite a bit of guilt around that.

Hanane *(after another pause)*– What did you say to her?

Ravenna – What did *I* say to Abrielle?

Hanane– Yeah, as she was telling you about the guilt, how did you respond?

Ravenna– I said the first thing that came to my mind, which was… I said: "Abrielle, you're not honestly so self-centred to believe that you're responsible for this, are you!?"

Hanane *(smiling a little)*– That's what you said!?

Ravenna – Yeah. Was that totally insensitive of me?

Hanane *(smiling more)*– It's an unexpected response. How did she take it?

Ravenna– She cried more. But then she texted me an hour later and said, "Thanks for the ego check!"

Hanane– I'm glad you thought to say that, Ravenna. She probably needed to hear it from someone.

(The three sit in silence for a while, thinking of Abrielle.)

Hanane– Do you think she *had* some responsibility?

Ravenna– *(taken back)* Is this a serious question?

Hanane – Yeah. I mean, I don't want to sit here and assign blame, but I am sure that Abrielle is continuing to struggle with the question of her role, so maybe we can help her by exploring it. Maybe we can shift the field, you know?

Xenia– Well, I suppose…

Hanane– I mean you have to admit there is something strange about this: We all know Abrielle was *terrified* by suicide. In all the work that we've been doing here, and despite all her ability and groundedness, the topic of suicide was the one thing that frightened her and hooked her repeatedly. From the first time we came here and as soon as she started doing work with the youth I remember her resisting the work and saying, "If one of these young people kills themselves I don't think I can go on with the project. I will totally fall apart." And of course, there *is* a lot of suicide in this community– but in

the end Abrielle's worst fear came true much closer to home: somebody within her inner circle died by suicide. So… is there no connection here?

Ravenna – Well, my first answer is no! There is no connection.

Hanane– Yes, that's the first possibility. Tell us more about it.

Ravenna– I think this is purely a coincidence. What is happening here in the community is totally unrelated to what was happening in Abrielle's circle of friends in Vancouver. There are a lot of problems here on the res and reasons why the suicide rate is so high in native communities. But it was totally different in Jane's case. The fact is that Jane was sick with a mental illness. There was a chemical problem in her brain– not enough serotonin, or whatever. For all we know she was born with that condition, and who knows, maybe her life circumstances brought on the illness more fully – but basically she died from a disease which has an entirely physiological basis. Just like dying from cancer or… cystic-fibrosis!

Anyway, the common view within the suicide literature is that once your mental illness progresses to that place, there is pretty much nothing that can be done about it, short of continuing to treat it heavily with drugs and hoping that they do enough to contain the suicidal tendencies. But once somebody is in that frame of mind when they are determined to commit suicide they basically have a kind of tunnel vision – they don't see another alternative (Shneidman, 1992 ;Omer and Avshalom, 2001; Arrick, 1981). Once Jane entered that tunnel there is nothing that Abrielle or anyone could have said or done to prevent what happened. It wasn't even Jane's decision at the end. The illness took her. That's how I see it.

Hanane– Yes. That's certainly a likely possibility.

Ravenna– And at the same time…

Xenia– What's your second answer?

Ravenna– My second answer is almost the opposite of my first: at some level, there *were* things Abrielle might have done –and didn't do– that could have prevented what happened. Don't get me wrong, I don't blame *her* per se – because I don't think any of us can be responsible for anybody else – but I think we can acknowledge some partial role for Abrielle, and for others of Jane's friends for that matter. Even when the person goes into that tunnel vision mode, there are a whole bunch of things that would be worth trying. What is that thing that uncle Charlie says about how you're supposed to talk to somebody who is about to kill themselves?

Hanane– He says: you speak very loudly to them because they are in a trance, they are in a dream state, they have a hard time hearing you!

Ravenna– Yes. That kind of thing. And there are a lot of suicide prevention guidebooks (Omer and Avshalom, 2001; Granello and Granello, 2007). There are mental illness first-aid classes offered in Vancouver. There are things that laypeople can do to help, up

until that very last moment. And given that suicide is such a major issue in the circles that Abrielle was navigating – including this community here – maybe she should have learned about these strategies. In fact maybe *we all* should have. Maybe we should have all taken a class before we started this research. I think Abrielle kind of did the opposite. Yes, she talked about her fears of suicide and self-harming behaviour, and I know that she did a whole bunch of work in coaching sessions with Myrna to figure out how she was going to be all right working in this community despite those fears – but I think she prevented herself from engaging with it in any intellectual way. She didn't want any information about it. She rejected the advice books. And the fact that she didn't know what she was dealing with, the fact that she didn't recognize the warning signals when Jane's conditions apparently "improved" – I think that is unfortunate. Of course there is no guarantee she could have helped, but I do think she held herself back.

Hanane – Right. I can think of a third possibility, and it's a little less rational than what you've expressed Ravenna, and a little more metaphysical. But I have a feeling that the thought has occurred to Abrielle, so I'll just put it out there. Maybe what is at play is something like that "law of attraction", you know? This idea that when you think about something that much, when you give it a lot of mental energy, you attract it towards you and it actually manifests in your own life. I must say I don't necessarily buy this philosophy myself and I think the positive-thinking movement is kind of bullshit– but let's explore it. It's really a parallel to what we were talking about the other night, when we were talking about healing: maybe our modest project has influenced the changing tide of this community, maybe we have influenced something in the field, at some kind of energetic level. Maybe our intention to be here in a healing way has somehow attracted the attention of the universe, and suddenly there are all these parallel – probably much more large-scale and effective– initiatives happening around healing in this little community. So in that sense, Abrielle's attention to the role of suicide might have unintentionally brought that role alive in her personal life.

Ravenna– It's kind of a scary thought. And you're right, Abrielle is probably thinking that way. She often sees her personal life being affected by her work and the other way around.

Xenia– I have a different explanation for what you've just described, and maybe this is a fourth possibility that combines the first and the third ... I think it's not so much that Abrielle's attention to suicide here has influenced the field, or *attracted* the death of her friend – I think it's more likely that this is a coincidence, but because of Abrielle's *awareness* of the role of suicide she is *reading* this as a pattern – and to some degree *we* are reading it as a pattern in this conversation. I think coincidences like this happen all the time, but we usually don't pick up on them, they don't look like anything to us, if we're not aware and engaged with the big themes of our universe. Once we become aware, it's like the curtains have been pulled away and all we see are connections between events!

Ravenna– Right. So from a role theory perspective, we might say that there is a fractal pattern of suicide within the field that is Abrielle's universe, and once she became aware of it she could see it in multiple places. That's the connection between the events in the two settings: it's not that one caused the other, it's that they exhibit the same fractal pattern.

Xenia– Yes. I'm thinking of the story Abrielle once told us about when she first got pregnant, remember? She said she went to the market and she suddenly saw *all* these pregnant women and she was like: how on earth did everybody get pregnant at the exact time as I!? But in reality, the pregnant women were already always there – it's just that her awareness, because of her own pregnancy, made the other pregnant women suddenly visible to her! I think in the same way, the topic of suicide became visible to her here because of her awareness of Jane's challenges – or maybe the other way around.

Ravenna– That makes sense to me.

Hanane– Makes sense to me too. And I have one other explanation. A fifth possibility.

Xenia– Tell us!

Hanane– I think that at some level Abrielle facilitated Jane's suicide. And again I am not trying to lay the blame on her – I think Ravenna is right, we are not responsible for each other's decisions. But I can see how Abrielle could have helped to make Jane's decision-making *easier*. So here I am going with the most literal definition of *facilitation* the way we understand it in Deep Democracy, which is to *make it easier* for whatever is supposed to happen to happen.

Ravenna– Say more.

Hanane– I imagine –based on what I have experienced in my own relationship with Abrielle– that during that lunch on Wednesday she held a non-judgmental, neutral space for Jane. She is good at that. When I go to her to talk – unless I ask very specifically for advice – she never tells me what to do or not to do. She doesn't believe in that kind of interference. She has that respect for my wisdom, whatever that might be – she says that only *I* can make the right decision for myself. So she will just hold this space and let me do my thinking out loud, gently supporting me. You know what I'm talking about?

Xenia– Yes, she's very good at that.

Hanane– I think that's the frame of mind that Abrielle was in during that lunch. That's the frame of mind she has been practicing with the community members here who are in deep pain, the way that Jane was. She doesn't try to solve their problems or tell them what to do–she knows that she *can't*. She will just be very present to them, the way that she would be if she was at a deathbed. And I think, even if she didn't cognitively realize that Jane was suicidal at that moment, Abrielle was sensitive enough to see the suffering, and so she sat with her with an attitude of "I know you're in pain, I don't

know what is right for you, and I can't really help you. I am just going to be here for you, and I am going to support whatever you want to do, whatever decision you make."

Ravenna– Hmmm. That's an interesting idea. And what you are implying – or what Abrielle's non-judgmental attitude was implying – is that Jane's decision to end her life was the right one?

Hanane– Well, I just think, *who are we to say*!? I don't personally relate to it as a good option and I think Abrielle probably doesn't either. And obviously Jane's decision has caused a lot of pain and suffering, particularly for her husband and everyone close to her – so it's hard to call it "right". But I think ultimately we don't have any way of knowing if that was the right choice for Jane. We don't know about the degree of her agony, we don't know about her choices or her assessment of her own possibilities in life, or how she saw her illness as affecting other people around her. We don't know what kind of logic she had access to – and we can't say that it was necessarily inferior to *our* logic just because she had a mental illness. And also, we don't know what lies beyond the moment of death. Who are we to say that life –even in its most heartbreaking form – is better than death? Who are we to say that everyone, including Jane, should choose life over death regardless of the circumstances? I just don't think it's our place.

Ravenna – I can see that.

Xenia– I have to say that this is a comforting thought to me… and I am going to cry now… But the thought that on her last day Jane was with somebody who respected her agency so much, who offered her a full presence, without any kind of judgment about what she had already decided to do…the idea that she was fully accepted for who she was, for the wisdom even in her mental illness … I find a lot of comfort in that. And I think if Abrielle was in fact the last person that Jane saw, that she probably wanted it that way.

(There is a long pause and silent tears.)

Hanane– She gave Jane a good parting.

Ravenna – The best that one can hope for, under those circumstances.

4.3. Grieving

[Abrielle's poem]

The days are long,
Every moment stretched into eternity,
Every unimportant detail made vivid and memorable by the weight of the
circumstances.

> "She definitely did not seem at risk",
> I say to Andrew on the phone with complete confidence.
> I'm sure she's just at the gym or gone for a walk.
> But when we are not called to join the search mission
> We begin to worry.
> We argue over whether to just go over,
> Jeremy says yes, I say no.
> The next day, Jeremy's voice is shaking on the phone
> As he finally reaches Andrew's cell.
> "Jane is dead."
> I watch him in disbelief
> My mind goes blank for what seems like a long time,
> Before the tears are even summoned.

There are moments of absolute clarity.
My purpose in life is evident:
Make lunch for the crew,
Keep candles burning in the corner of the room,
Punch out memorial buttons –pink with white polka dots– to hand out at the funeral.
Jane's soul needs attending to as she makes her transition,
Her friends and family need attending to as they stay behind,
There is so much to do.

Then suddenly and without warning
Everything becomes blurry.

> The cold kitchen floor has me pinned.
> Gravity has doubled in strength or else I am twice as heavy.
> The shaking and sobbing comes in waves
> And is out of control.
> I am alone at home
> Except for my one year old who crawls around me on the floor
> Oblivious, and seemingly unfazed
> By whatever it is I am going through.
> Every once in a while he climbs into my lap,
> I kiss his curls and hold his little hands,

Then he goes back to playing with the pots and pans.
Dad calls to check on me
I can't bother to be coherent and I rudely hang up on him.
He sends Mom over even though I say *please don't*.
She is harder to hang up on.
She sits with me on the floor as I cry.
"I've caught Jane's depression, mama, I'm sure I have."
She doesn't say *don't be silly, that's not how it works*.
She asks instead if I want her to take the baby away for a while.
"Why does everyone want to take my baby away?" I shout.
"He is the only thing that makes life worth living right now!"

Janey wanted a child and never got to have one.
That thought devastates me beyond anything else.

Her number is still in my "Recently Used" list
So I keep texting her for days.
Every time I'm certain she is about to text back.
It's not so much an act of active denial
As it is an act of active delusion.
There are moments when I have no handle on reality– whatever *that* is.
I think this is a morbid escape of my imagination:
I think this is last week and I am making up a worst-case scenario of what *can* happen
So that I can figure out how to help Jane.
I think there is still time to help her
Once we have successfully reversed the events of the past few days.
(It happens in movies all the time.)
Or once I wake up from this nightmare.

At night
People die one by one in my dreams.
One night it is my sister.
Another night it is an ex-lover,
A colleague,
A beloved teacher and mentor.
In the dreams
I'm emotionally removed from the deaths
And obsessively focused
On attending to the mundane details of my own life
Given the sudden absence:
"Who is going to babysit on Friday night instead?"
"What changes do I make to the information on the website?"
"Does this mean I can keep the books he lent me?"
I wake up abruptly
I check my facts: *they are alive, my mind is playing tricks on me*
Then stay up, mourning the imaginary deaths all the same.

They are moments when all this feels absurd
What is the big deal?
People are born and people die all the time!
I'm pulled by a tendency to philosophize
To intellectualize the whole thing, to write about it, to study my own process
Or else to read about theories of suicide and put this one in context.
These are somewhat comforting moments
But they feel cold and sterile
And leave me wondering if I am still human.

And then there are moments of beauty
All of us dressed in our best colours for the funeral
Baby pink and fuchsia petals covering the coffin
Eight of us girls walking Jane's body out of the funeral home
Singing and gently weeping in unison.
The skies are an exceptional bright blue that day
And the mountains shine with fresh February snow in the background.
The sweet, beautiful moments are the worst
Made bitter by the fact that she is missing them all
That she was in so much pain
That she chose to miss them all.

4.4. Letters to Jane

The story of my ongoing relationship with Jane since her death on January 25th, 2012. All letters appear exactly as posted on Jane's memorial website.

<u>January 30, 2012 at 5:23 pm</u>

Hi Jane
I feel like we were literally in the middle of a conversation when you left last Wed. You were cold and shivering and I felt you were in a hurry as we walked together north on Commercial Drive, me pushing the stroller, you walking your bike.
I said, "you know, if you need to jump on your bike and go, don't let me slow you down". And you didn't! We shared a light hug (a Vancouver hug). Then you cruised away on your bike.

Importantly, I want to let you know the status of Tandoori Corner at 4th and Commercial.
We got there just before noon that day.
I said "They're closed with no signs of why, no hours posted, no note, no anything."
You said "I wonder if they've gone out of business."
I said "God I hope not, cause I REALLY LOVE this place!" To which you laughed a more serious laugh than I had heard in a long time. Then we went somewhere else for lunch. I checked today. They haven't gone out of business. They only open at noon. We were just a little early and we didn't wait long enough.

I wish that this whole conversation had gone just a little differently.
I wish I had said "God I hope you don't go Jane, cause I REALLY LOVE YOU!"
And I wish you had waited a little longer, that you hadn't given up when things were, perhaps, about to get better. I wish there were signs posted around, so you didn't have to make your decision in the dark.

<u>February 2, 2012 at 8:19 pm</u>

This was the tail end of our conversation, the day you left:

I was saying, "maybe we should stop going out for lunch and instead start cooking together". You had just been complaining about your physical health, "I feel like my body parts are deteriorating", you had said (you got that nasty Norwalk virus that we all got two weeks before, but unlike ours, your body never seemed to quite recover from it), and so I pushed on. "I mean, you know so much about nutrition and what your body needs, why don't we make and eat exactly what you need to eat to feel better?" You were listening intently, then you lifted your eyes from my face and said, "I know what you're saying", but you said it so unconvincingly that I felt a need to explain myself further. "Look, I am just trying to think what do you still have control over? I mean, there is all this stuff that you can't do anything about, but what food you put in your mouth: that's still a choice." You were nodding so I ventured to add, more quietly, "I'm just thinking that maybe the only way to be happy is to figure out what we have control

over and exercise that control." As I spoke it I knew it was advice I needed to give myself, not you, but it was already out. "Yeah, I see what you're saying", you said once again, without going any further.

I can't recall the conversation without it bringing tears to my eyes. Within a couple of hours you would exercise control over your life in a way that I had never imagined possible. In the days that have followed your suicide, I have been tempted to regret this interaction, to feel guilty for what has happened– but then I *know* that your decision was not something I had control over. Along with the community of friends that keeps gathering, I am continuously struggling to make sense of what has happened, and when I think I've caught some shred of meaning it keeps slipping away from me. But for now, in the spirit of honouring you and with a trembling heart on the day we put you to rest, I would like to honour your last action, the last exercise of your control and your choice. Your last move, my dear friend, has left me heartbroken and hurting; but I am willing to respect it as the most graceful move you knew in your wisdom that you had available to you, as the move you chose to make.

February 29, 2012 at 6:49 am

I wonder tonight if you have already joined us back in this world, reincarnated into a new life form as a baby girl, or a mountain bird, or a carnation. Or did all that stuff about sitting on a cloud waiting for some divine judgment to send us to heaven or hell happen to be true.

Wherever you are, don't think I'm not thinking of you.

April 26, 2012 at 6:12 pm
You're on my mind today –your would–have-been birthday– and yesterday, of course, marking 3 months since your death. Three months? So much has changed in me since then– it feels like much longer. Must feel much much longer for you.
You must know that there are many events happening in your honour, not just on the special days but regularly too. Sharing circles, craft making parties, bike rides in your name. Your friends continuing to celebrate you and keep your memory alive.
I haven't been able to bring myself to go to any.

It feels bizarre to me to commemorate you in these ways, as if you were the Titanic or Terry Fox or the end of World War II. Or some legend, an archetype of loveliness or generosity or vulnerability or whatever. Or a cause, something to work on, like improving this fucked up mental health system we have. I wish I was able to give your life and death meaning in these ways. Instead, when I think of you everything is still completely raw.

Weeping, I roll in all the questions that you so painfully opened and left behind: what makes a life worth living? who is to say what is real and what is a delusion? where do we go with our pain? what is the point of love if all the love in the world is not enough to save us?

Sitting with these questions is what I am doing in your memory today.

<u>August 20, 2012 at 12:35 pm</u>
A year after your and Andrew's wedding, almost exactly to the day, we attended Kat and Ben's this weekend, all the way on the other side of the country. Members of our overlapping Halifax circles were in attendance, as was a whole crew of Kat and Andrew's mutual university friends from Ontario, most of whom I had met at your wedding. Needless to say, your nonattendance was acutely felt.

But even though I cried bitterly over your vacant chair (even before it was mentioned in the ceremony– which it was) I want you to know that your absence is finally feeling differently to me. For a long time after you were gone, I felt like I was walking around, watching people joke and laugh on the street – and wonder how on earth they can be happy when there is death and suffering in the world? I knew this didn't make much sense but it seemed inconceivable that I could ever feel joy again, without forgetting – betraying– you.

I notice now that there has been a shift. It was possible to take part in our friends' happy occasion, even while you were constantly on my mind. It almost felt as if you were present with us, somehow sponsoring the happiness, blessing the event, smiling down on us, your smile extending into the space through us. Many people have talked about how you continue to blossom and shine through into our world: I have finally come around to this feeling! Somehow without thinking about it I seem to have a way of moving on without letting go.

You probably know that I am expecting a second baby, a second boy. Early this morning as I was lying in bed half awake, I had this image of him sitting on auntie Jane's lap, being bounced up and down in the spirit world. You were filling him in on gossip and sweet stories before he comes to join us here. This image too was very reassuring.

I love you and miss being with you in person Jane. Thank you for being part of my life.

4.5. Where do we go from here?

[Act 3, scene 2]

(Conversation between Hanane, Ravenna and Xenia.)

Hanane– Ravenna, are you going to eat that whole bag of chips?

Ravenna (*does not look up)*– Yup.

Hanane– That doesn't sound like you.

Ravenna – Emotional eating.

Xenia– You're not yourself these days. Is it about Abrielle?

Ravenna – That's part of it. I hate not having those guys around. More than Abrielle, I miss Ocean.

Xenia– What's the other part of it?

Ravenna *(sighs)*– That we don't have a project any more… That we've been going over and over what we have so far but don't seem to be able to figure out what our next steps are.

Hanane– Yeah, I share that role. It sucks to be in limbo like this, not knowing what to do next, or what to do with ourselves from day to day. And it's especially hard with a part of our team missing.

Ravenna *(under her breath)* – At least Ocean gave us an excuse to hang out at the park.

Xenia– Well, is it possible that you're done? Like, the project is finished?

Ravenna– No.

Xenia– How do you know?

Ravenna – It *feels* unfinished.

Xenia– How do you mean?

Ravenna *(lifting her head up from the bag of chips)* – Well, I want us to go out with a bang, not to vanish into nothingness!

Hanane (*giggling, then seriously)* – I think we always had it in our heads, while we were doing those parenting workshops, that we would leave a product behind – and first we thought it was going to be the comic book and we could have a celebratory event, like a release party… But since the comic book is *not* the right thing to do, now we have no product. To me it feels like the project cannot find a way to be finished.

Xenia– You know that doesn't really matter from my perspective, right? I mean, I was all excited about the comic book too, but I think you have to listen to the community. And I just want to say there is no pressure from my end, if there's no final product that's cool.

Ravenna – I don't know… We can't just leave it here.

Hanane– Honestly, it's kind of surprising to me that we can't find the next step, cause clearly there is so much happening in the community that is connected to our topic of

healing – there is probably a need for *something* we could imagine doing right now, with all the recent deaths and the ongoing work of processing the trauma... Feels like we should be able to plug into one of the initiatives that are happening already.

Xenia– Yeah, there are lots of possibilities. What is going on that excites you right now?

Hanane– Well, for me, I would love to somehow be part of the Healing Feast, but I know that's not straightforward.

Ravenna– Not straightforward at all. The Healing Feast is Cultural Committee's project, it has to be done by the community according to local traditions. We have nothing to offer it.

Xenia– Yes I think it will be tricky to get involved in that, partly also because the Cultural Committee has not decided what form the Healing Feast will take. I will do whatever I can to bring you guys in, in some capacity, but it may be more as observers than anything else. Which I know doesn't satisfy the desire for the "big bang" exit.

Hanane– The other thing that I would love to get involved with is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. I just think it's so amazing that they are coming here – of all the small communities in BC this is one of four that they chose to go to. And that is an intercultural space for healing, it's almost a perfect place for us to play a role.

Xenia– It's worth pursuing. I mean I am sure those TRC folks can use some help on the ground here since they're doing everything from Victoria. But again, your role will be somewhat marginal...

(There is a sudden loud popping sound. Xenia and Hanane turn towards Ravenna who has emptied the bag of chips, inflated it, and popped it.)

Xenia *(startled)* – Wo! What was *that* about?

Ravenna – Big bang simulation. What did you think?

Xenia – That was freakin' loud is what I thought! *(laughs)*

Hanane *(joining in the laughter)* – I think my heart stopped for a second! What did you think Ravenna? How did it feel to go out with a big bang?

Ravenna– It was kind of exhilarating... but... I don't know... Is there any other bags we can pop?!

Xenia *(going into the kitchen)*– I'll get you some.

Hanane – Oh great. This will be fun!

(Xenia comes back with a stack of paper bags and the three women sit on the floor, inflating and bursting bags for a while, calling out their reactions to each explosion:)

Ravenna – I love the loudness. And the few seconds before the explosion, when we are anticipating. And the few seconds of silence immediately afterwards.

Hanane– It's definitely less scary when anticipated.

Xenia– I can see what you mean by exhilarating. I feel like a little kid making a little mischief.

Ravenna – Uhum. There is something satisfying about that kid-like feeling.

Xenia– And it is loud enough that it is impossible to ignore. It grabs attention every time.

Hanane– Yes, definitely something performative about it.

Ravenna– Like, "Look at me!", "Notice me!", "I'm making a big noise!"

(Ravenna now stands up and exaggerates the movements as she bursts more bags.)

Hanane– *(lightly imitating Ravenna's gestures)* Like, "bring out the TV cameras!"

Xenia– Ooops, that one didn't quite pop.

Ravenna *(stops and looks at Xenia)*– Hah. Sometimes it's a flop.

(They pop a few without saying anything. Then stop.)

Ravenna – Hmmm. More and more I see the performative aspect of it, and it feels more and more superficial, almost meaningless to me.

Hanane– Too showy.

Ravenna – Yeah. Like I'm doing it to be noticed and to get a little excited, but there is no bigger purpose. I mean the bag is empty – well, it's full of air. There is no substance.

Hanane– Full of hot air?

Ravenna *(pausing first)* – Yeah. I think I'm full of hot air. *(longer pause)* I think I want the big bang exit for my own gratification and feelings of self-importance. It's not for the community. *(Sighs.)* Yeah.

Hanane – It's okay Ravenna.

Ravenna– Yeah I know it's okay that I want the attention. But I am consciously not going to let that guide what I do next or how I feel about it.

Hanane– So what would that mean?

Ravenna– I think it means that whatever we do next, however the project ends, it doesn't have to be about me. I want to do what makes sense for the community, even if that is really subtle or invisible. I don't *have to* go with the big bang.

Hanane – Is there anything that the attention-seeking part of you needs to come along?

Ravenna *(thinks carefully about it)*– No. I've popped enough bags now. I'll put the rest of this stack under my pillow in case I have a further need for them.

Xenia – The bags are all yours! I love that this cheered you up.

Ravenna *(starting to clean up the mess of torn-up paper around them)*– Hey, to each her own healing path!

4.6. Sitting in the water

[Abrielle's supervision][68]

Coach– So where did we leave off yesterday?

Abrielle– I think you had just asked me when I was going back to Port Hardy, and I said, "Oh, in a couple of weeks." *(giggling)* And you picked up my tone and said "Oh boy, you're really not looking forward to this, are you?!"… So should we talk a little bit about that?

Coach– Yes, absolutely, let's do that.

Abrielle– Okay, let me see… well, I think what's happening is partly that the last time I was there I got very unlucky and things got very tough. I got in three days later than I was supposed to because I got sick right before I was supposed to travel —and I kind of get sick every time I go and often also when I come back, so it's just really draining that way. And, when I was up there, things were getting cancelled as usual –meetings and things–, so it felt like a waste of time being there. *And* it was also minus 20C outside, and we couldn't really get out of the house. So I just got kind of isolated, with this little bit of depression that I pick up every time I go there, which scares me especially since I watched my friend give into it… So yes, I don't want to go back into that. Even though I *know* logically it's not going to be the same this time, that things are different every time, I *fear* that it's going to be the same somehow.

And then, I think more broadly, I am dreading my project because I don't know where I am going with it any more. The kind of stuff I really wanted to do was the kind of workshop sessions I did at the end of last year. And then I went back and interviewed people who were in those sessions. So I feel like the questions about facilitation and group work, and about the potential for healing, the questions that I was really curious about have been answered as much as they are going to be answered in this project. And of course I could do more and learn more but I could *always* do more and learn more, for ten more years, and at some point I just need to write this dissertation and get it done *(chuckling).*

At the same time, the action aspect of my work, the community aspect, feels unfinished so I can't walk away. The interviews were quite interesting, but one thing they did was rule out my idea for a final product – which was this comic book on parenting practices. Then, the other thing that came out of the interviews was an interest in starting a parents advisory committee that can kind of say, "Look, this is what the parents need", and that can represent parents' interests, and can talk to Band Council and the Health and Family Services and the School. I thought that was a great idea, and the staff I talked to thought it was a great idea. So me and Gloria, one of the mothers from the community who actually came to the facilitation course in Vancouver –she's great–, we are working on the terms of reference for this parents committee. This is kind of the next step that needs to be done. But the project is already stuck. There isn't a lot of energy behind it– it didn't even generate much discussion on the FaceBook page which surprised me.

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[68] Based on a coaching call with Myrna Lewis, February 2012

Gloria has other opportunities coming up for her and is not very available and there is no other obvious champion in the community. And I don't really seem able to get the ear of the band members in the top positions who can mandate this to happen. My feeling is that it's going to be nearly impossible to set it up even though the need for it is so clear, which is very disappointing to me personally and makes me feel like I have failed to deliver.

So anyway, there is a part of me that really just wants to stop working on this project now, because at the end of December I felt like I *did* something, and it was working and it was inspiring. I don't want to end the project on something that's not working! I mean this is very much part of the story that's happening on the res: things may seem to get a little better, but then they fall apart, they get worse again. And to be honest I don't want to tell that story *(laughing),* and I also don't really want to *see* it. I guess I am not a very good researcher after all… That's what's going on.

Coach– Okay, so let me try and reflect some of that back and we can see where to start.

The first thing that struck me is that you're getting sick every time. And I'm wondering what your body is saying and what wisdom there is in that pattern. So I think we should do something about that, because in a way that may also give some information about the project– cause your body's repeated sickness is almost like a continuation of what's happening with the project: you do something and things may temporarily improve– but then as soon as you've got it, it slips away. So we can ask: what is the attitude that one needs to have, to kind of turn the situation and to get out of this dynamic?

Then again, maybe the fact that you've got the attitude that it needs to be turned instead of living with it, maybe that's the problem. You're saying that at some level you're not willing to see it the way it is, being with it the way it is. It's almost like Jane's death: maybe the best thing you could do was just to be there with her when she wanted to kill herself. And you did that but I think you haven't accepted that it was okay to do. And so you're still struggling around the whole topic of suicide and it seems like you're needing help with that too. You didn't talk about it just now, but I was so struck when I read your journal, when you wrote about this woman… Carol? Karen? The one who has now become responsible for suicide prevention for the whole band?

Abrielle– Cathy.

Coach– Cathy, yes. And I wondered, how can one person hold all that? I don't blame her feeling overwhelmed with that, particularly given the rate of suicide that there is. It's like one person is being designated to help a major epidemic. And she is desperately looking for training and resources to know what to do… But anyway, those are the major things, the most emotionally significant knots I am hearing about. I don't know if I've just compounded it, but have I got the major themes in a nutshell?

Abrielle– Right. Yes.

Coach– And as I say them back to you, which one feels like you want to look at that I can help you with?

Abrielle – I think maybe it would be good to talk about me getting sick because I did a little bit of work on it myself and I can tell you what I did and what I found out and then we can take it to the next stage. Is that okay?

Coach– Yeah, sure.

Abrielle– So, I already knew that this was a pattern around my trip last month. That time I got the fever and chills. I get lots of different symptoms and it's a little different every time… but the thing that often really bothers me is the chills. *That* is the symptom that most freaks me out. So I thought about what that meant, and what is my phobia of the chills trying to tell me. And my first thought was that it's a phobia of having no control, this sense of being moved by some other thing that I cannot stop – like, it's just happening *to* me. For some reason I find that unbearable. Thinking about it, I was reminded of when I was in labour, which was exactly a year ago now, and the only point in the labour when I freaked out was when I was shaking. I had just finally managed to break my water, then came to the bed with a sense of accomplishment, but then started shaking uncontrollably. I was so upset about it. And the midwife said, "You know, this could go on for hours – it could go on until you give birth, so just kind of get used to it" *(laughing).* And she gave me a little bit of Rescue Remedy. And then… and then, I tried really hard to centre and go inside myself. I imagined myself almost swimming my way into my own centre. I was in this very deep place within myself pretty much from that point on – so much that I couldn't even hear what was going on outside myself. And I decided from there, from really deep inside, that I wanted to go back into the pool of water where I had started labouring hours before. The minute I got back into the water the chills stopped, and I felt like I was back on track. And pretty quickly Ocean was born.

So I was thinking, if that's my experience of how I have successfully worked through the chills, what would be the equivalent of that now? Maybe the answer is that, *that* level of concentration or whatever I had during labour is what I need to have during these trips. You know, maybe I should really be looking inwardly. Because I am trying to do a lot of stuff externally, my work is really very relationship-based and so I am always concentrated on other people and on the external environment and trying to cope with that. But maybe if I am able to start looking internally the next move will *come to me.* And I think the equivalent of being in the water is having a lot of comfort, somehow finding a lot of warmth and comfort while I am doing this work. I seem to need that to be able to get through.

Coach– So can I say something? I see that last part as something different, so let me say it and see if it resonates for you.

Abrielle – Okay.

Coach – Um, well, the water is so symbolic in Jungian psychology and you're using that metaphor repeatedly. It's symbolic of the unconscious. So an interpretation would be that if you could go *unconsciously*, – not just inwardly, but unconsciously – then lots can unfold. So yes, you've got something around wanting to be in control, but when you feel the chills, as opposed to thinking of structure and control and "what do I need to put in place to make it stop and get comfort?" you could almost allow yourself to become more intuitive, to go inside more, and feel more and dream more... And allow what's more

intuitive to come into the fore, as opposed to "well I should be doing this, this, and this". How does that sound?

Abrielle – It makes sense and I don't think it's at all at odds with what I was thinking.

Coach– Yeah. And I'm wondering if that's really the answer to all of this. If that's the string that one can pull. So in the case of Cathy and suicide prevention on the reserve, what if she stopped looking for training and resources and started looking unconsciously for what would be appropriate in this case? Because you know, she could read books and take classes on suicide first aid and all these 'methods' of what to do … But I just keep feeling like I don't know if having a place for suicide prevention in a western style –like a drop-in centre, or even looking at suicide as something we need to rush to prevent– is the way. What would happen if instead we asked: What's trying to commit suicide in this community? What's trying to die at such a young age? What's this desire to die about, as opposed to stopping it and preventing it? And if we were going to symbolically commit suicide, if instead of problematizing it, if we all decide to symbolically commit suicide, would that bring more of a healing? And again we're going back to the theme that most excites me about your work. That the kind of healing you're trying to bring, you're not coming in with a kind of paradigm, a medical model which says this is right or wrong. There is no diagnosing or treatment – just an acceptance and a valuing of what is already there and trying to work with that. Does it make sense at all?

Abrielle – Uhum. It's very interesting because I think you're onto something – there is definitely something that is trying to die in this community. I experience it as a tension between the old and the new – the old ways and the modern ways– where both sides want to hold on, but in reality something has to die! Or maybe some aspects of each need to die to accommodate each other, otherwise the whole fabric will be torn apart. And when I think about how Cathy works I wonder if she's already moving along the more intuitive lines – because I have never seen anybody work the way she does. She doesn't sit in her office, instead she makes a lot of home visits. I don't have a clue how she decides where to go or what kind of insight she has into people's lives, but she basically seems to go and hang out with different people for big chunks of the day! It's like in the absence of training, or even resources for training, she comes up with an approach that is pretty well tuned to the culture and the place. And I think what I am getting out of our conversation is that I could actually encourage her to go further down that path instead of giving her western style how-to books on suicide prevention!

Coach– Yeah. Ultimately I'd love to skill her in a way that she could facilitate what's there the way you're trying to do – but obviously I am totally biased about that!... But I'm just wondering if we should take this back to your own work and dive a little bit more into your own unconsciousness and look at the moment by moment, what's coming up, what's intuitively coming alive in you? So the shivers, what are the shivers about? I mean part of it is that you don't like it because it's out of control, but what is the symbolism, is what I am trying to say? And when you're in that situation, overwhelmed with things, where do you find the inner strength? I wonder if you could tap into that deeper stuff, if things would be easier for you…

Abrielle– Can I just say something?

Coach– Yeah.

Abrielle – I must be at some kind of major major edge because all of a sudden I can't follow at all what you're saying *(laughing)*! My mind is totally not here any more.

Coach– Where have you gone?

Abrielle– I have just kind of lost you. It's like you're speaking some other language. Maybe I'm… I think that the question of what is next… Well, I am lost in that question. It's strange because I think when I am in a group session, or in a moment of crisis, or in acute need of an immediate decision, in those situations I am moving with some kind of intuitive knowledge, and that's easy. But when I sit here at my desk and think about the project and what is next… that's when I can't seem to see it and I get overwhelmed.

Coach– Uhum. And you're feeling that overwhelmed feeling right now?

Abrielle – Yes.

Coach– And what do you need? How can I help you?

Abrielle– I just don't think I can go any further right now. Maybe I am actually close to seeing my way forward – like I am just on the edge of the water and need to dip a little further and I will have some answers. But that little bit of dipping is bringing up all this anxiety.

Coach– Yes I think that's possible. Why don't we respect that edge reaction and just leave this here for now?

Abrielle– Yeah, that would be good for me. I think I need to dream on it. I need to take it easy and walk around with the question and see what emerges.

Coach– Good. You go and do that. Don't try to think about it. Just try to feel it. And let me know when it comes to you, cause I'm curious.

Abrielle– Haha. Okay. I will. I will talk to you soon. Thanks very much, Myrna.

Coach– Pleasure. Take care of yourself.

4.7. I'm good at the monkey bars

[A story in three voices]

Hanane – We are in the back of the Community Hall, doing something I never imagined we'd be doing: spreading out a large canvas and tubes of paints, leading a day-long community mural painting session alongside the community's Healing Feast. The idea for the piece came to Abrielle in an inspired walk around her block, and was enthusiastically taken up by our artistic director, Ravenna. I am beside myself with excitement! I can't imagine anything better than socializing and making art at the same time. I much prefer it to our original plan of endless hours as solitary comic sketchers. The concept is that the lessons we learned from the parenting workshops would be reflected on this canvas. We stay up the night before, coming up with four main messages out of the pages of workshop notes, deciding on a broad concept for the mural, and penciling in some initial images and words. This morning we pile all the art supplies onto Ocean's stroller, the six-foot-tall roll of canvas sticking way out the top, little buckets of paint weighing down the seat, crayons and paintbrushes poking out of bags hanging from handlebars… There is no room for Ocean so he happily toddles alongside the stroller down to the Community Hall. From now on the canvas will be collaboratively painted by whoever walks up to it. Expecting madness to ensue!

> Abrielle – In search of the next steps of the project, I had taken several baths. Any night Ocean went to bed at a reasonable time I would sneak into the bath tub and lie there in warm water, *not* thinking, sometimes intentionally trying to find my way deeper into myself, more often pretending I was Archimedes waiting for an *Eureka* moment. Slow process. Nothing seemed to be happening. Then on Monday I was walking around half-lost, holding the question in my mind, when I ran into Erika outside our usual cafe and sat down for a coffee with her. Erika and I have been grieving Jane's death together, separately, in parallel. She had just come back from a weeklong retreat in a magical land and among magical people who had taken her to a sweat-lodge, loved her and rejuvenated

her. She told me about all this and then asked me what *I* was doing for self-care. I had to chuckle. "I have a one year old. I don't do *anything* for self-care!" Then I thought about it and added, "Sometimes I *sleep*!" Erika didn't question me further, but something had already jolted in me with this public confession that I don't take care of myself. As I walked away from the coffee shop there was a second question on my mind: if I were to do something for my own healing, what would that be?

Immediately I walked into the HiVE, the co-working space that Jeremy and others have set up down on Hastings Street in Vancouver. They had just changed the art on the walls and the new pieces stood out the minute I entered the space: two large murals, one along the wall of the ramp, snaking down to the main floor, the other hanging above the coffee corner and lounge area. Large eyes on large painted faces staring us down. Words running everywhere. Messages standing out in enormous red letters. These were dark, political murals – unpolished, mixed-media, North American versions of Diego Rivera's– apparently painted by Vancouver artists in partnership with local communities. I sat down to work on something but couldn't take my eyes off the murals. I felt both an excitement and a jealousy towards the artists. And then it came to me: if I could make time to do something for myself it would be painting. Not necessarily painting well or even legibly– but just playing with colours that run into each other, marveling at accidental brushstrokes, observing the textures of paint-meeting-canvas, enjoying the physicality of moving around to create something much larger than yourself... Then I realized the only way I could make time for it, was if I called it the next stage of the project on Tsulquate! And why not? Why shouldn't I do something I really enjoy as "work"? And if it is going to be healing for me, may it not also be healing for the people in the community?

When I brought the idea back to Hanane, Xenia and Ravenna they caught my excitement – and so here we are...

Ravenna– When we arrive at the Hall at 10 am I am a little taken back by the formality of the set up. Hundreds of chairs around the room, arranged in orderly rows in a large U-shape, facing a stage. I recognize it from a couple of occasions in my youth: the pot-latch, with its rules that nobody explained to me and I wasn't allowed to ask about– I was just supposed to know. Not letting this faze me, I mount the large canvas on the back wall in what I think is an unobtrusive location, with the help of a couple of teenagers. Nevertheless, Xenia comes up to me within five minutes to say we have to take the canvas down. "The Elders don't like it here", she whispers to me. I attempt to hide it, but she sees me let out a big sigh. I can see she is frustrated too. It doesn't seem to matter that in the previous week we have checked with the event organizers, including the Elder-in-charge, to make sure our painting project is appropriate and understood. Here we are, ready to paint, and already kicked out of the space before we even begin! What chance do the healing powers of our art have if we are not even considered good enough to be in the space!? Xenia has negotiated for us to be set up instead in the back room, a kind of backstage area, a dingy space with unwashed walls and dirty tiled floors, acting as storage for a couple of hockey nets, bikes and other miscellaneous junk. This is also the space where about 50 children will be hanging out, with barely enough room to do anything else. Part of me wants to say, "Look, I can't agree to these working conditions!" My disappointment must be visible because Hanane notices, comes over and puts her hand on my shoulder and whispers in my ear, "Remember your neutrality!" Then she helps me take down the canvas and move it into exile.

> Abrielle – In many ways, our work up here has been all about learning to lead from a neutral position. This is easy when we're facilitating a community session and don't have a big stake in what is being discussed. It is much harder when we are being researchers and even harder when we are being artists. We have to come in with a plan, with designs, with an agenda that affects us directly and significantly– and at once we have to let it all go. Things never unfold as we envision them, no matter how

much we prepare, how many people we talk to beforehand. This is just the nature of community work. To the extent that we get caught up in our own plans and agendas, we suffer and we miss out on the possibility of what is about to unfold.

Hanane– Being exiled into the children's quarters is a blessing in disguise. Maybe I would have taken offense to this if I considered it a move to reduce us to the level of children – but instead I feel we had been *elevated* to the level of children! In the back room we can be much more freely ourselves. And we can really give the children some proper attention, which feels comfortably consistent with everything we've been about in this community for the past year.

Ravenna– In some way it is unbelievable to me that nobody has arranged for child-care at this largest of all community events, where the adults' attention is supposed to be centered on the healing ceremonies. Then again, I know only too well about the complexity of arranging for childcare and actually *getting* it in this community, so I can't blame anyone. I suppose none of the adults would want to be responsible for all the band's children, no matter how much cash was offered. So instead the task of child-minding falls to us by default, to do for no money and on top of our own project!! But as Natasha says to me the next morning, it is awesome that for once the children have something meaningful to do. I guess that *is* something.

Hanane– Many of the children interact with the canvas even before there is any paint on it. They ask us if we drew all that stuff. They point to the figures and say, "Here's my mommy" and, "Here's our baby"! We bring out a big roll of construction paper, lay a large piece on the floor and let the kids start drawing and colouring. Babies start crawling all over the paper immediately. Abrielle makes sure none of them sucks too much on any toxic felt pens or crayons. The kids like to get our attention and explain to us what they are drawing: a mouse, a snail, hearts, a graffiti-style letter "S"! They also love for us to draw with them. At one little boy's request I draw an elephant, then move on to other things, and when I come back in half an hour, my elephant has been

surrounded by a family of kid-drawn imitation elephants in different colours. This makes me laugh out loud.

After we all draw and play for a while, I build up enough courage to say we can move to the canvas soon. I explain the basic sketches on the canvas, "Here's a baby with an older sister, his mom, and his grandpa. The writing is about how they are hoping to treat each other well. We're going to colour the faces and the letters. And we're going to put the ocean over here and the forest over here." I put down another piece of paper on the floor and say let's practice drawing some sea creatures to put in the ocean first! They kids rush in to draw fish and turtles and octopi and jelly fish – all with awesome googly eyes. Then I give them pencils, one or two at a time, and they draw these things on the canvas in the right bottom corner where the ocean is supposed to go.

> Ravenna– David, one of the teenagers who had helped me put up the canvas in the morning comes into the back room just before noon. He had been impressed at the initial drawings we had put on the canvas and told me this morning that he was himself an artist, that he had practiced for 4 years; that he did "First Nations Art", and that his specialty was the eagle. I had explained the concept of the painting to him and I had asked him if he would come and add a piece to it. Half way through the morning I had walked up to him, while he was hanging out with his teenage friends, to ask him again if he would draw something. He had looked down and said, "I'm okay right now" and I had been kicking myself for forgetting that you never embarrass a teenager by asking him to take initiative on anything in front of his friends! Anyway, I thought I had blown it with him. But now he comes up to us holding a glass etching of a stylized eagle he has done. He has obviously gone home to bring it to show us as a sample. This guy is the real deal! Encouraged by our excitement, he walks up to the canvas and carefully copies his design in the right top corner. All the children stop doing what they are doing, stand back around David and watch him draw in silent admiration. I wonder if some of them have just met a role model in their own community and my heart is warmed at that thought.

Abrielle – When I had envisioned the mural project I had imagined adult band members participating, if not in the drawing and painting then maybe by writing their thoughts on "good parenting practices" on pieces of paper that we could then work into the painting. This does not happen, partly because of the space restrictions, partly because the painting becomes a "kids activity". But several adults stop by the canvas to see what we are up to on their way to the bathrooms, which are only accessible through the back room (another strategic advantage of our location). Xenia also puts a message on FaceBook telling the parents and grandparents that had been part of our workshops to come check out the mural – and a few of them do come. Bouncing, nursing and running after Ocean – who has found a new level of freedom now that he can walk- I manage to get in short conversations with the parents and grandparents, helping them see the connection between the workshops and painting: how their words are represented on the mural. We also have many other side conversations about ongoing parenting challenges and other things – which feel in many ways like a continuation of the workshops and interviews, reinforcing in my mind the success of the relationships we have built and the necessity of ongoing parenting conversations in the community. Knowing that the need for the ongoing space to connect is unlikely to be met any time soon, I find myself heartbroken while I none-the-less try to smile.

Ravenna– "Can we pleeeease use some actual paints now!?" the little girls are following us around, asking repeatedly. I decide that I have to quickly devise a sophisticated structure and rules to be able to handle a dozen kids who want to paint on the canvas all at once –without any skills or previous experience– and another couple of dozen who are wildly running around and would probably love to attack the canvas with handfuls of paint. "One painter at a time" is the operating principle I can come up with on the spot, later relaxed to "up to two painters at a time". I start by giving 6-year old Sarah a small cup of blue paint

and a brush, and get her started on painting in the large letter "D" in the word "DISCIPLINE". Soon there is a line-up of kids behind Sarah waiting for their turn. I make an effort to remember whose turn it is and to call each kid by name when his or her turn comes to take the paintbrush. I also give as many miscellaneous "important" tasks as I can think of to the kids who are waiting: "You hold this dirty paintbrush and don't let it drop!"; "You hold onto the paper-towel that we're going to need in a minute"; "You run and get some water"; "You guard this side of the canvas so it doesn't get attacked by those big boys"! This seems to make them feel special and stay focused, almost as if they are taking part in a game or a theater production where they each have a role. It also has the side benefit of preventing some level of brattyness, which in turn makes our job easier.

Hanane– I am touched by how excited the kids are to hold the paintbrush, a first-time for many of them, and appreciate that they each have a different style and approach to colouring on the big canvas. Some kids staying safely within the lines, others recklessly ignoring them. Three-year-old Kenna is so memorable, insisting that she should have multiple turns, holding the paintbrush perpendicular to the canvas and with both hands for maximum control, carefully filling in the letter "E", then "I", then "C". I give some of the older kids the choice of doing something more complicated than painting letters, like mixing primary colours to make pink (an educational adventure in itself) and working on their favourite sections of the mural –usually involving the pink colour they have just invented. After each child had finished his or her turn at the canvas I get them to stand next to their piece, and I take their picture.

Abrielle– One memorable moment for me is when a little girl says to me, "You guys are so talented, you are so good at drawing". My first instinct is to argue with her and say, "No we're not that good!" but instead I say, "Thank you! And what are *you* good at?" She pauses for a second, then her face lights up and she jumps up saying, "I'm good at the monkey bars!" I burst out laughing, at which all the other kids around us start to tell me what they are each good at: "I'm good at finishing my supper!"; "I'm a

good hockey player"; "I'm good at throwing rocks!"; "I'm good with babies!"; "I'm good at making people laugh!" And he sure is.

Ravenna– At some point in the afternoon the duct-tape lets go and the canvas comes falling to the floor. I don't panic as much as I usually would, having already seen so many amazing and unexpected things happen, feeling like the result of the fall would be just another element to incorporate into the painting. The perfection of this piece of art is *not* going to be in its flawlessness anyway.

In her wisdom, Abrielle takes this opportunity to take a break, to walk out of the Hall and go for a stroll in the rain with Ocean, who has been too wired by all the action to sleep all day. While they have some time alone together and I deal with the canvas, Hanane surprises us by getting a set of face paints out of her bag and lining up the children to get their faces painted. She is becoming quite a trickster, that girl!

Hanane– The kids surround me, chattering. One little girl insists on sitting on my lap and being my assistant, while the others sit in the chair opposite me, one by one. I remember most of their names, which they always seem to find unbelievable. I ask each kid what he or she wants painted – they want butterflies, flowers, kittens, Batmans, Spidermans, Supermans, and my favourite: a Canucks fan!

At first there is nothing extraordinary about getting the kids' faces painted, until I notice that a couple of them show a subtle reaction when my hand first touches their faces. They seem a little startled. I think I see one little boy pull back ever so slightly, and one little girl start to giggle. Scanning my brain quickly for clues as to what this might be about, I come across Charlie's voice, talking to me long ago about his experiences as a survivor of child abuse. "Lots of those kids are never going to know the joy of physical contact… touching skin. It took me many years to know and to love that feeling" (Gerry Oleman, pers. comm.). Suddenly I am self-conscious about what I am doing. What have I started? How are these kids experiencing what is happening? My hands start to burn as I put red hearts on a pair of tiny cheeks. I am too embarrassed to go on, but even more embarrassed to stop and make this look like a big deal. Then another question occurs to

me: how come these kids are trusting me to do this? The important part of the answer is explicit in the question: *they trust me.* For whatever reason, they trust me. I sense that this is reason enough for me to go on – but I now take extra care to be worthy of their trust. I continue to hold up each little chin, tentatively at first, reading the kids' expressions, adjusting the extent of the touch accordingly, making it as loving as I could without any kind of charge – the way I hold Ocean, matching his innocence. This takes so much focus, so much presence, that by the time all the faces are covered in colour I am completely spent.

> Ravenna– I am not sure exactly how or when, but at some point I become aware that what we are doing over in the back room, though far away from any artistic or facilitative conception we had before the event, is an illustration of the very parenting principles that our mural is illustrating. (1) We are "nurturing a feeling of self worth" in the children by putting them in the centre of the activity, by telling them they are naturally artists, by learning their names, by constantly encouraging their creativity and talking with them about their work, by taking their pictures showing off their creations, by giving them individual attention even if it is for a few moments at a time. (2) We are using "discipline to teach right from wrong", not in the sense that we are punishing any child, but through introducing structures –rules, line-ups, the idea of taking a turn– and teaching about responsibilities –small but important roles in the production–, and also by occasionally raising our voices to tell the kids to stop hitting each other or climbing the precarious hockey nets or running on wet floors. (3) As adults, we are demonstrating that it is important to "take care of yourself so you can take care of the children", when we respect our own limits, take breaks, ask each other and those around us for help, and have our own nourishing adult conversations with the parents and grandparents while we are in the midst of the project. (4) We are making it easier for everybody at the Hall to "stay connected to their culture" by engaging the kids so that the adults can participate in the healing ceremonies. At the same time we are keeping the kids close enough to the ceremony –in the back room, connected with the main Hall–

that they can run in and be part of it as appropriate: moving to the beat of drums, touching the masks as they go by, joining their families for meals. At another level, we are staying connected with our *own* cultures, as researchers, artists, visitors, and child-enthusiasts – while staying in conversation with our host culture. This feels sane.

> Abrielle– Ocean falls asleep around 8pm in my arms. He has been crawling and toddling around all day, interacting with all kinds of people, being passed around from one's arms to another's, looking so happy. Sometimes I wonder how I could have born such a social child! I feel grateful for the experiences he is being given, for being loved and appreciated at such a young age by so many people who have become part of our extended family. I feel grateful also for all the joys of today, the beautiful moments, the energy and the life in that back room. The mural is now going back to Vancouver with me, to be mounted on the wall at the HiVE while I spend many more hours, playing with colours, finishing what was started here[69].

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[69] In "factual" reality, I facilitated the painting of the mural on my own, and all the sub-stories described above happened to me! The Hemphill family members added their touch before I took the mural, finished it in Vancouver and returned it to Tsulquate in July 2012. According to the latest news I got, the mural now lives on the wall at the Community Hall.

PARENTING WORKSHOP REPORT

Why is parenting a key issue for GN?

GN has a young and rapidly growing population. More than 50% of community members are under the age of 20 and there are over 70 babies and small children (under 5) on the reserve alone. Children and those who raise children are valued, and GN wishes to be "a community that raises happy, healthy children and passes good parenting skills to future generations" (CCP). Many grandparents and other family members are involved in raising children. However, parenting remains a challenging and sometimes isolating task, particularly for single parents, teen parents and those with several children. Many children are in foster homes and parents often struggle to regain and keep their kids in their own care.

What did we learn from the parenting workshops last fall?

I was lucky to be able to convene a series of workshops on the topic of parenting on Tsulquate last Oct/Nov. We had two sessions for grandparents and three sessions for parents held at the Elders Centre, as well as two sessions with the youth at Eke Me Xi. In total, 25 community members took part.

The workshops had an open format and often functioned as sharing circles. The elders spoke about growing up in the old times, and shared their knowledge of good parenting practices. Young parents reflected on these lessons, then built on them with their own stories of parenting struggles and successes, exchanging tips and ideas. The youth talked about their experiences

being raised as children, and their ideas about how children can grow up to be happy and healthy. Collectively, we generated a list of good parenting practices under four headings:

1. Nurture a sense of self-worth in children

2. Discipline to teach right from wrong

3. Care for yourself so you can care for your children

4. Stay connected to your culture

To capture and celebrate these good practices, I then created a large drawing that incorporates the above four statements. The drawing was displayed in the back of the Hall at the Healing Feast in March, and many GN children added to the drawing and helped to paint it. The painting has now been completed and will hopefully be displayed at the Trust All-Band Meeting on July 18th. Please come and check it out!

What more can be done to help GN parents with their parenting?

Following the workshops I interview participants and relevant GN staff to identify what would be the best next steps. What I found was that GN parents are looking for opportunities to support each other (parenting circles) and to learn about parenting (skill development classes). However, staff are hesitant to organize such programs because in the past attendance has been so low. One idea put forward was to create a Parents Committee that can work with families, staff, and band council to make sure parenting programs are customized to the parents' needs, and address barriers to participation. This idea needs volunteer champions. Are you one?

AFTAB ERFAN
UBC STUDENT

Illustration 14: GN Nations Yo! News (10/07/2012)

GN Children
working on the
large painting
March 2012

241

PARENTING + PAINTING = PRETTY AMAZING!

This mural is the result of collaborative efforts between Aftab Erfan, graduate student from University of British Columbia, and over 40 members of the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw community. In October and November of 2011 we held a series of seven workshops on Tsulquate to discuss the topic of parenting. The workshops had an open format and often functioned as sharing circles, with each person offering their own experience and wisdom. Collectively, we generated a list of good parenting practices under four headings:

1. Nurture a feeling of self-worth in children

2. Discipline to teach right from wrong

3. Take care of your Self [so you can care for your children]

4. Stay connected to your Culture

The painting was created to capture and celebrate the aspiration to raise our children according to these principles. The four figures – baby, young child, adult woman, and elder – symbolically represent each of the four principles.

(continued on page 4)

YO!
JULY 24
2012

NEWS

Mural Title & Details:

The Art of Parenting
According to Old and New Wisdom
Aftab Erfan and members of the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw First Nations
Acrylics on canvas, lettering in water-based markers
6x13 feet
2012

PAGE 1 | GWA'SALA-'NAKWAXDA'XW NATIONS YO! NEWS   24/07/2012

Illustration 15: GN Nations Yo! News (24/07/2012)

Each figure is surrendered by more specific parenting practices that came out of the workshops (e.g. listen to the children's views, don't resort to hitting etc). Elements of nature – ocean, land, sky, forests, and animals- were in the background of everything we did and often entered our conversations. They have been featured in the painting.

Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw children and youth participated in the early stages of painting the mural during the Healing Feast in March 2012, and much of their art work and brushstrokes have been reserved in the finished product.

Credits:

This project was made possible through the participation of grandparents (Irene Sheard, Betty Walkus, Alvin Walkus Sr., Richard George and Annie R. Walkus) who shared stories of growing up in the old times and lessons on good parenting practices.

Parents (Gloria Walkus Brotchie, Gloria

Walkus, Ricky Coon, Jamie and Lisa King, Cindy Scow, Margaret Joe, Josie Walkus, Sharon Wamiss, Sarah Joe) reflected on these lessons, discussing their own challenges and successes, exchanging tips and generating valuable new ideas.

Special thanks to the teachers (Leah Henderson, Jamaine Campbell) and students of Eke Me Xi School who enriched the content through sharing their own experiences with different parenting approaches, and to the many GN children and youth who made the mural come alive with their own drawing and painting.

Thanks to Maggie Fox and Natasha Walkus for administrative support, to Colleen Walkus for babysitting services, and to Jessie Hemphill for helping to conceive, finance and carry out the project.

Aftab Erfan convened and facilitated the workshops, synthesized the information, designed and put the finishing touches on the painting as part of her doctorate in planning at UBC. More importantly, she learned new things about parenting her own young children, and for that she is especially grateful.

Stay tuned for the future permanent home of this beautiful work of art!

4.8. End in sight

[Ravenna's poem]

How do you know
When your research is done?
You've done some stuff
Or a tonne – or none!
You've loved and learned
And you've come undone,
But was that the real thing
Or just a dry run!?

In truth you know that you may never know
The difference you made
With what you have begun.
The river was flowing
Way before you came,
And the river will flow
Long after you're gone.
Change takes time and asks for our patience
Like salted cod and seaweed,
Drying in the sun.

One day at the coffee shop on the town's main strip
You wonder if this
Is my last cinnamon bun?!
You find yourself looking for local art to buy
For rocks on the beach
Pictures of a loved one.
You want things to take home
For memories to hold on
And that is how you know
Your research is done.

4.9. Healing by eagle feathers

[Hanane's story]

When I arrive at the Hall in Fort Rupert the first thing I hear is a speaker sobbing at the microphone. It's a startling start to my time at the Truth and Reconciliation hearing. The difference between the space I have stepped into and the incredible natural scenery on the way up here is jarring and unsettling. I don't catch much of the woman's story, but she does sob quietly through most of it, and then loudly after she is done giving her testimony. Her loudness is powerful to me. It reminds me of occasions for mourning from my own childhood – always accompanied by women wailing, moaning, scratching their faces, beating their chests, sometimes raising their fists to the skies in anger and then falling to the ground. My mom always says that some wailing is essential at funerals and other public grieving ceremonies: somebody has to cry loudly enough to make it okay for everybody else to weep and sniff their noses. Hearing it in this setting is also reassuring to me because it signals that the western rules of conducting oneself in public have already been broken.

For the first chunk of my time at the hearing, I have to admit, I am more caught up in how the session is conducted and who is there – in seeing and being seen, as if I was attending the opera– than the actual content of the presentations. There are at least 50 to 60 people in the room at a time, sometimes closer to 100. At least a dozen are identified as TRC support workers, identified by their bright blue vests. (I learn that the TRC has contracted an all-native team of support workers from multiple Aboriginal counseling and healing centres on the Island to assist at the hearings, having scrapped an original plan to have professional –western– therapists supervising them, thank goodness). I recognize a handful of people from Tsulquate, perhaps about 10 altogether over the course of the hearings. I think to myself that my article in the newsletter has failed to bring people out, but then I think: actually 10 people ain't bad. There are maybe 5 of us non-natives in the room (who are not tech support staff or reporters) and I notice with some embarrassment that almost all of us are wearing Cowichan sweaters. God! We're so predictable! The majority in the room comes from the Fort Rupert Band.

They are nice enough to me. One older man invites me to a seat in front of him and makes sure I help myself to juice and fruit in the back of the room.

Several of the speakers begin their comments by saying that they don't know about this idea of "reconciliation". In fact most of them struggle to pronounce the word itself. They say it's too late, the damage has been done, they are here to tell their truth but that's as much of a commitment as they are willing to make. At one point the Commissioner speaks to the meaning of reconciliation, saying it could be something different for different people. She tells the story of one young woman who, at one of the previous hearings, was kissed on the cheek by her father for the first time, and commented that *that* was her moment of reconciliation. The Commissioner suggests that maybe reconciliation can be summarized as "a change for the better", or another way, as "peace". Chief Bobby Joseph in his own closing remarks talks about the Kwak'wala term for reconciliation, which essentially means "arriving at inner peace". He suggests to his people that it is a familiar concept, masked by a big word.

Regardless of its value as a venue for reconciliation, it is clear that the hearing is a significant occasion in itself. There is something about the formality of the setting and the process that makes this feel like a grand theater performance, but also gives a kind of weight and importance to what is being said. The Commissioner and the local Chief are sitting in the front of the Hall, with the speakers and support workers facing them, and then the rest of us witnesses sitting behind the speakers. The Commissioner explains that this is for the cameras, which are not only capturing but also broadcasting the proceedings live, with viewers from 19 countries having tuned in to watch at this very moment. The TRC wants the image to show the speakers with their family and friends behind them, supporting. (One of the Elders, a woman with almost no teeth and almost no hair, refuses to sit in the speakers' chair. "That's not our way," she says. "We stand and we face our people as we speak to them." Nobody dares disagree with her.) During a short break I go to say hi to Donna, a young mother from Tsulquate, who is here to talk about the intergenerational consequences of the Residential School experiences. She rehearses her statement out loud with me– lightly, almost humorously

talking about her own ignorance and learning on the topic. Minutes later she goes before the Commissioner and tells the same stories– and now she cries and cries, taken by the energy of the field, every word having found a new meaning when spoken into the microphone.

I suppose I am similarly taken by the field, because slowly I come to notice that the quality of my listening is different from more than a dozen other occasions when I have listened to similar stories. I've heard the stories of people I know closely and I love – Charlie included – and have wept to them in the personal intimacy of the moment. And I've heard many more at the parenting workshops, where I have listened intently and empathically, but with neutrality – with a kind of detachment, without any opinion on what I want to hear or not. Now that I am sitting in the witness chair I am experiencing an unusual turmoil as waves of emotions come at me with every story told. Several times I come to the verge of tears, several times I get up to walk, several times I offer to bounce a baby as a way of calming myself down, several times I go for a break, and several times I find myself arguing with my mind to force myself to stay. Many speakers compare the experience of being taken to Residential School with the current "taking" of native children by social workers into foster homes – "they closed the school, but they enlarged it", one woman says. This is a view I heard during the parenting workshops as rather extreme, but I am now hearing it as a chilling consensus. If this is the comparison, it's no wonder that parents cannot take part in a rational conversation about the child welfare system.

As the day goes on, speakers tell stories of leaving home not knowing where they were going, being separated from siblings, hiding at school after hearing that new kids often get raped, running away, losing family members, making friends with alcohol, screaming at their own children without knowing why. They also tell stories of personal healing journeys, mostly in religious –Christian– overtones. And then, sometime in the afternoon comes a story that devastates me to my core. One woman in her 50s takes the speaker chair and proceeds to go into detail about what happened to her at the Alert Bay Residential School at the age of 8. Typically when Residential School survivors talk

about their experiences they speak in general terms – they say: I then knew that I had lost my sister, or I was sexually abused multiple times by the same priest. But this woman gives such a vivid picture, grounded in so much detail, that she immediately transports me to that time and place:

> **There was a night guard who would come around through the girls sleeping quarters to make sure we were sleeping. And if you weren't sleeping – somehow she knew if you were sleeping or not– she would turn on the light, yank you out of bed, tell you to drop your pants and bend over a dresser, and she would beat you with a stick. For some reason, she took to beating me every night. I would hide under covers, unable to sleep, waiting for the guard to come. The other girls would watch from their bed, younger ones weeping into their pillows, hoping not to be heard. The older girls would tell me to cry when I was getting the beating because that was the only way to get the guard to stop. But I was too stubborn. I said, "I would never let her see me cry". And so I was beaten like this over and over again, I don't know for how long...**

I can't handle this one. My stomach turns and I start sobbing silently as I walk up and down the back of the Hall. Long after the woman leaves the speaker chair the image of her, clenching her teeth, bent over the dresser, haunts me as if etched into my mind. I shake my head but I can't shake it off. My tears keep flowing uncontrollably. My analytic mind makes many attempts to take over, attempting to understand what it is about this particular story that triggers me so strongly. Images of myself as a young girl flash before my eyes – stubborn like the speaker, but much more like the girls who stood back and watched in silence when my classmates were beaten, humiliated for not knowing how to multiply 9 by 9, in my own elementary school in Tehran... Why didn't I say anything? What was going on in my mind? Was I scared, or too much of a teacher's pet? My mind is not able to process or recall any details. Instead I start crying all over again, every time I try to understand.

One of the Aboriginal support workers approaches me. Her name is Kim. She is wearing a cross around her neck, which comes to my attention because she is standing very close to me, facing me, and whispering to me. She asks me if I'll go sit in the back room

with her because she wants to make sure I am okay. I'm embarrassed and feel bad because the support workers are supposed to be here for those people with *real* trauma, the ones who actually suffered at Residential Schools, and who are brave enough to talk about it or hear about it. Lots of people are in tears right then in the room – lots of people need her attention. But she says, "Don't be ridiculous, I am here for you". She says, "We need to take care of you because you're very precious", which makes me cry even more, feeling as far from "precious" as I could in this moment – feeling like those little girls were precious and no one ever told them or treated them that way... I say to Kim, in broken words, that I have heard these stories before but I feel like I have finally witnessed them for the first time. I let her lead me to the back room and I resign myself to talking about what is going on in my head– maybe Kim can help me figure it out.

But Kim has a different idea. She doesn't invite me to talk at all. Instead she asks if I smudge. A little surprised, I say that I have once or twice before. She says, this is going to cleanse you so you don't walk out of here with this suffering. I sit back, not knowing what is going on, watching her light a mixture of what I think is sage and cedar– thinking back to when I have smudged before, anxiety suddenly rising in my heart: what if I don't remember how it is done, or what if I do it wrong? I decided to let Kim do her thing.

She brings the container of sage and cedar close to my chest and I am hit by the overwhelming strength of the aromas. The sensation in my nose – traveling all the way up into my head – is so powerful that it stops any analytic process. I half close my eyes and let myself be overpowered. Now the smoke rises and touches my face with gentle warmth and I tilt my head forward towards it source. My body is still jerking back with the after-shocks of sobbing, but now I am wrapped into this pleasant curtain, smoke traveling over my face and above my head. Kim brings out a pair of eagle feathers and tells me she is going to brush the suffering off me. Then she does a subtle dance around me with the feathers gently guiding the smoke back over my head, covering me completely as I close my eyes. I find a new breathing pattern as I imagine the eagle, so

close that it is touching my hair. I have worked through nothing, but I have calmed down. And at some point Kim stops. She holds my hands and prays for me, to a son of a god I don't even believe in, but I am able to sigh out loud and – like so many have said to us when interviewed about healing: I feel a lightness in my whole being.

As I walk out of the back room I have a new respect for the support workers here. Whatever it is that they do, I now see that it works. I feel close to Kim and express my appreciation in words that seem trivial. She smiles. On my way out of the Hall, a young local jewelry maker wonders if I want to buy a pair of earrings. I take a quiet look and before I can decline I see a whole series of earrings made up of a small abalone piece, some beads, and a metallic representation of an eagle feather dangling at the bottom. The pair I buy hang around my face, dangle and dance with every step, brushing suffering off me constantly, as I walk back into the world.
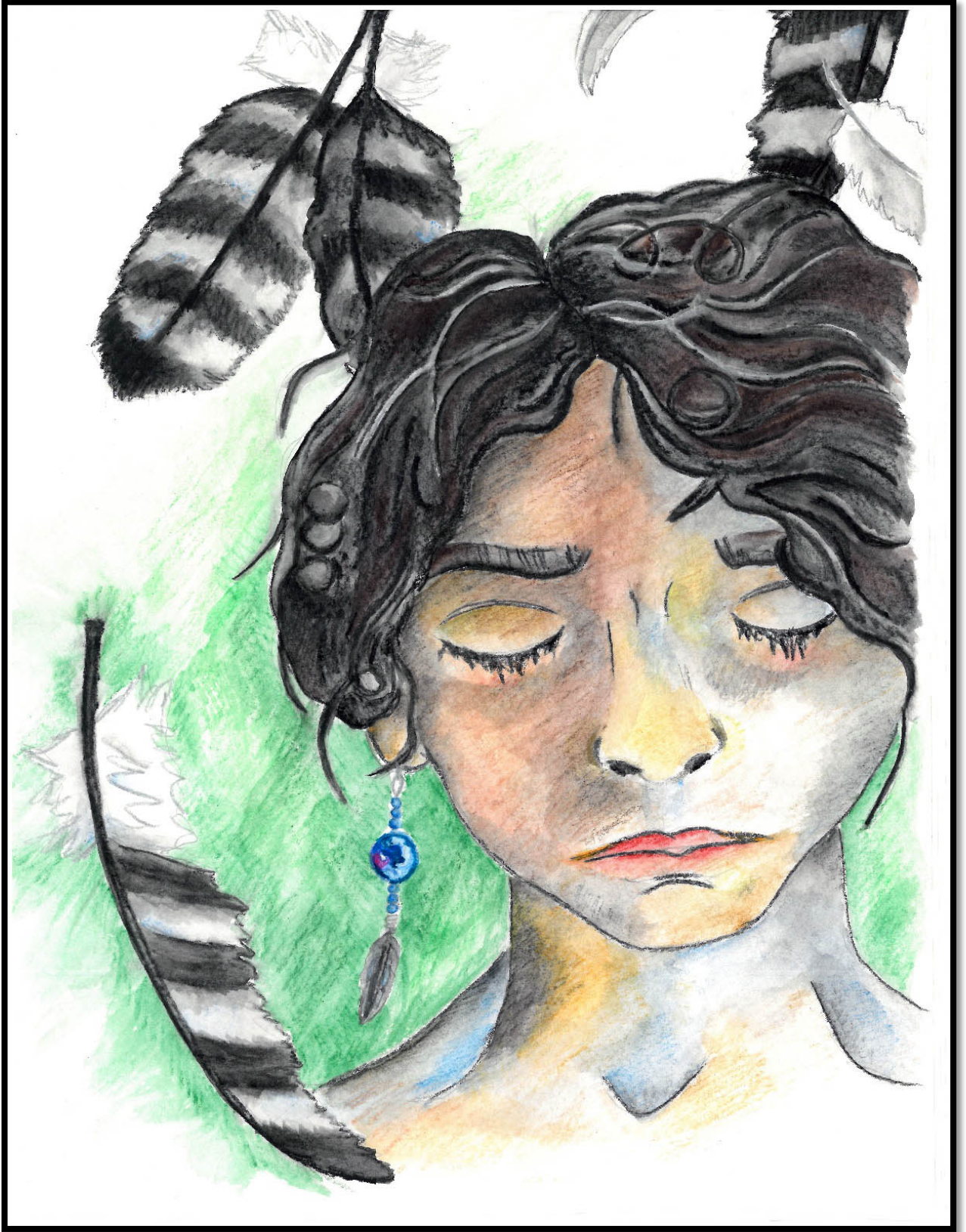
Illustration 16: Hanane's Protection

4.10. Healing by tapping our fingers

[Ravenna's story]

The Gwa'sala and the 'Nakwaxda'xw people do not have a traditional ceremony focused on healing per se. So in organizing the Healing Feast the members of the Cultural Committee have decided to go with the next closest thing, which is the *digita* – a ceremony focused on apology and forgiveness. I search for a description of the digita in every library and archive I can think of, but all I find are a couple of paragraphs in one – extremely well written– Masters thesis on *Kwakwaka'wakw Laws and Perspectives Regarding Property*:

> **"Digita is a ceremony used when a chief has need of wiping away some shame or embarrassment caused to or by himself or a member of his family. This is a ceremony whose content varies from one family to another... But a digita depending on the teachings of each family could either strictly be a feast (a meal), a feast with the sharing of a celebratory dance owned by the hosting chief, or a feast and multiple shared dances, or a ceremony is conducted within a p'asa[70] after acquiring the host's permission... Such a ceremony consists of naming the shame or embarrassment and talking it out via speeches by attendees until resolution is met and guests are given money in payment for their witnessing of the wiping away. Once the digita is done then the shame or embarrassment that was its cause is never talked about again because it has been wiped away and happy feelings are restored." (Bell, 2006, p.43)**

Xenia confirms that this will be the format of the Healing Feast: anyone who has done any wrong will speak it publicly and the community hears it and then never speaks of it again. I am extremely impressed by this idea, imagining the courage it must take for people to step up to confess to, and take responsibility for, the violence and abuse they have caused or perpetuated. This seems far more radical –and potentially radically transformative– to me than the idea behind the TRC hearings, where most people will effectively talk about the violence and abuse they have been victims of. I can't imagine how intense it must be to both make and hear these confessions, and the level of

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[70] P'asa is the Kwak'wala word for potlatch, now only rarely used.

intimacy that must be generated among the members of the community once the wrongdoings have been spoken and 'wiped away'. I am feeling honoured and excited to be allowed to be in the space to witness this, as a side effect of my mural painting project that will be happening in the background.

What in fact takes place is nothing like I imagined. It takes all morning for the big Hall to fill up and nothing happens at the mic –set up at the front of the room– for many hours. I watch the dynamics of the social gathering, by now extremely familiar: family members arrive and sit with other family members, Elders with their arms and eye-brows often crossed, aunties chatting and gossiping with nieces, babies being passed around. There is a concentration of about twenty teenagers who seem to be friends and classmates in one corner of the Hall, but other than that no one seems to step outside his or her own family group formation. Xenia is grumpy in the morning. She tells me she really doesn't want to be there. "Why not?" I ask. "All the exclusion," she responds simply. The fact that she doesn't belong to one of the large GN families, and the fact that she is only about half native and about twice as educated as anybody else on reserve means that she is isolated here in social situations. "It's nothing like this at work," she explains– and I know it's true: she is a super-star at the Band Office where her competence and her sweetness would win anybody over. Here, she sits by herself, in a corner of the bleachers, tweeting and taking photos or busying herself on her iPad. A few people she knows professionally greet her briefly, but no one takes her in. Jamaine and I join her frequently, of course. I expected the two of us to feel excluded as people clearly *not* belonging in this community. But watching Xenia on the margins like this, among her own people, is painful. "Some community healing event," I think to myself bitterly.

The speech giving finally begins in the afternoon, after a simple lunch of soup and bannock. The speeches go on for hours, but they are not at all the 'coming clean' monologues I was expecting. Paddy, the elected chief, speaks first, apparently giving a rough overview of what has been happening in the community, focusing on praying for the families that are grieving. Betty, the leader of the Cultural Committee then follows,

telling her story of arriving in the community right from the Residential School 30 years ago. Next the Elders are invited to come up. Most of them talk about the old times too, recalling seemingly disjointed memories, crying when they get to the bit about the relocation. Then there is an open mic hour or two, when some of the younger folks get up and retell some of the stories told to them by their uncles and aunties, expressing – sometimes with tears– how important community is to them and how nice it is for everyone to be there together at the Hall.

I am baffled by all of this. I struggle a little to hear what is being said for all the noise in the Hall and the poor quality of the sound system. But I struggle even more to understand what the speeches are all about. I can't really detect a theme or a purpose for the monologues. As far as I can make out there are no confessions, no owning up to one's actions, no specific mentions of either repentance or forgiveness. The stories are the ones I have heard many times before –they certainly are not the ones people want to forget about and never mention again. And they don't appear to move anyone, except occasionally the speaker. People sit through them politely enough, but I have no idea what kind of exchange is actually taking place. I wonder if it is simply that I don't understand the patterns of speech, the ways of speaking of people in this community. But I've already been at that stage years ago: I thought I had cracked this. I thought I had found a way to listen to Aboriginal people telling their stories, following their cyclical path, and be able to make meaning out of them for myself. I am frustrated by this apparent personal setback, and by this apparent discrepancy between what I expected and what I am experiencing.

Every hour or so, the string of speeches is broken up by a dance. The dances are fairly straightforward, accompanied by simple rhythms on drums and uncomplicated collective singing– nothing like the intense, impressive performances of Aboriginal groups I have seen perform in the city. But since I am so bored by the speeches by now, I start to look forward to and pay attention to the dances. Most of them involve groups of women following each other in straight lines, moving their arms simply up and down, bent at the elbows, palms facing up. Men also typically come onto the floor in groups,

usually doing a kind of eagle dance, with their arms spread and hands making feathery motions. There is one dance performed by a group standing in a circle, pairs of men and women facing each other and dancing together at a safe distance (never any touching). The masks are brought out for another dance, some large enough to need multiple carriers. The children stop whatever they are doing to watch the masks go by. One dance apparently tells a story which involves men yelling at each other across the stage in high-pitched voices, as if they were insulting one another or having a fight over something trivial. (The audience laughs at this, and though I have no idea what the words mean I wonder why it is that men yelling at each other is such a "universal funny".) There is also a special dance created for this Feast, which involves tapping one's arms with two fingers, signifying the unification of the Gwa'sala and the 'Nakwaxda'xw people. There is a lot of publicity and excitement around this new dance, but to my uneducated eyes it seems no more special than anything else I've seen today.

What I notice is that the dancers are not particularly well rehearsed, but are instead largely organized on the spot. One of the women from the Cultural Committee goes around the Hall in the half-hour before each act, recruiting dancers. Some people – including Xenia– turn the invitation down, but those who say yes then go to the back of the Hall, are given the appropriate regalia to wear, and shown a few simple movements and something about the logic of the dance they are about to perform. Then they go up front and they do it, imitating some, improvising some, sticking to the simple movements and rules they have been given. I have watched hundreds of Aboriginal dances – at the opening and closing of every festival, conference and major event in Vancouver– but this is the first time I become aware of the spontaneous nature of the art form in its community context. These are not performances put on to entertain an audience – rather, they are experiences of each dancer in his or her own body and in relation to the group, presumably also generating a collective experience for those watching from their seats.

My analysis and philosophizing is interrupted by an experience towards the end of the day. At one point, right before supper is served, everybody is invited to come down to

the floor for a last dance. A few of the older men who know me from the workshops tap me playfully on the shoulder as they head down to the dance floor, encouraging me to join them, one saying, "Come show us your moves!" A little surprised and a little embarrassed, I laugh this off and stay in my chair, feeling awkward if I go, awkward if I don't go. But before I know it, one little girl who knows me well makes the decision for me: she rushes to me, takes my hands and pulls me off my chair and to the dance floor with her. The children are having fun. As the drumbeats fill the Hall the young ones run and jump around and dance together. The adults too begin to move, borrowing from the simple dance movements they have been watching performed, and also evidently making up some of their own.

I stand around for a minute feeling like a fish out of water before I decide that I might as well try to swim. I have danced a million different styles before, even having trained in ballet and jazz when I was younger – I don't know this kind of dance, but maybe it's simple enough that I can pick it up?! I start to move my arms up and down mechanically and plainly like the other women, trying not to worry about whether I look silly. Thankfully the children are looking sillier than I do and they encourage me to relax. I spy Uncle Charlie across the Hall from me, standing up straight, slightly bouncing up and down on his knees: *that* is the extent of his dance! He has his gaze down, or maybe inward – but nonetheless smiles politely at the men and women who go by him, engaging them in a subtle physical exchange every so often. Then I spy Xenia on the edge of the dance floor, gently swaying side to side with somebody's baby in her arms. She has her back to the large group and her eyes closed, which gives me the idea to close mine. This turns out to be an amazing idea. I feel far less self-conscious, like a baby who believes nobody can see her if she can't see anybody else!

There is something in the simplicity of the movement in my body that is enormously moving. I am not being imaginative or creative in my dancing in any way. I'm not doing fancy things with my feet or making any expressive gestures. But I am becoming aware of a vertebra in my neck, or a muscle in my arm that I never knew was there before, like I have just arrived in my body after a long absence. I feel strangely free for a few

moments, under no obligation to make conversation with people around me or try to make sense of what they are doing: I feel connected to them, understanding them and the simple ways they move in space, without effort. The sensation of having others move close to me is pleasant and uncomplicated – the sense of exclusion has disappeared. My body seems to pick up something of the unity in the group that my eyes have never been able to see. The drumbeat becomes stronger now, more powerful and more moving. I later say to Uncle Charlie that I've heard native drumming so many times before but never did it move my heart the way it did today, to which he says, "It must not have been your time before. Today it was your time."

This is the aspect of the digita, and many other Aboriginal ceremonies, that I had never picked up on in my readings and conversations with people who tried to explain them to me: the ceremony is not a series of speeches woven together by dances. It is a series of dances woven together by speeches. The actual healing functions are wrapped up in the rituals, in the way people move, in the rhythms people sing and listen to. The words are secondary; the subjects talked about are largely irrelevant. We bond, not through sharing of our past experiences or future dreams, but through a shared experience in space, here and now. I wouldn't have believed it was possible, if I hadn't been there myself.

> **Months later I hear a neuroscientist describe a new little, still-unpublished study that satisfies my intellectual curiosity around *why* such simple rituals can be powerful or healing in the relational realm (Reiner, 2012).**
>
> **The basic set up of the study is this: a grad student performs a 'fairness transgression' across the table from a research subject – like cutting a pie in unequal portions and keeping the bigger piece for himself. Then the research subject is given a bottle of hot-sauce and invited to put as many drops as she would like into a glass of water that the grad student has to drink later. The number of drops of hot sauce the research subject dispenses is measured as an indication of the 'revenge impulse' or the need to punish the fairness transgression she has witnessed. And sure enough, the larger the real or perceived transgression, the more hot sauce does the research subject put in the grad student's drink!**

Next, the researchers introduce simple interventions in the time *between* the cutting of the pie and the dispensing of the hot sauce. They watch for any impacts of the interventions on the research subject's response to the fairness transgression. One intervention is to get the grad student and the research subject to sit across the table from each other and tap their fingers to music that they can each independently hear through their earphones. It turns out that when the music the two hear is in synch, which results in the two tapping their fingers in *harmony* with each other, the revenge impulse is reduced, and fewer hot sauce drops end up in the student's drink. Conversely, when the two watch each other tap out of harmony, the revenge impulse stays the same or even increases. There is no discussion involved. It seems, the very simple act of tapping our fingers in harmony is enough to reduce conflict and make us more likely to forgive each other for wrongdoings. We are just wired that way. It is just that simple.

4.11. Healing by nature
[Abrielle's story]

> **"You've had many past lives,"** the psychic said to me once she was ready to speak. **"And in many reincarnations you have appeared as a change agent. You have been attending to the suffering of the world, trying to improve the lives of others... From what I can see you've done well – but the trouble is that you've picked up a lot of the pain from the situations you have tried to impact. You've absorbed the distress, and you're carrying it around with you like a big load. I see it on your left shoulder and neck – a large dark load."** She paused, opened her eyes and continued slowly to make sure I heard every word, **"Your task in this life time, if you choose to accept it, is to learn how to put that load down. All of this stuff is not yours. It doesn't belong on your shoulders. You need to learn to stop carrying it for other people."** (Marina Hubbard, Healer, pers. comm.)

An early morning towards the end of March, mom and dad come over to stay with Ocean who is curled up and snoozing peacefully in his crib. Jeremy and I slip out quietly, jump on our bikes and ride out to Stanley Park. It's been raining over night. The air is chilly and fresh and the streets have not yet filled with the buzz of urban life. There is a comfortable silence between the two of us. We are slightly removed from the rest of the world, together on a little mission, which feels big and significant to us. I wonder if this is how people must feel when they are about to get married.

The night before, after we put Ocean to bed, we prepared the package now being carried in Jeremy's pannier. It contains the placenta, Ocean's twin, his after-birth, that the midwives left in a plastic bag in the freezer after our boy was born at our home, over a year ago. I had my first good look at it as I placed it on the kitchen table last night, watching it thaw slightly. Large, dark, mysterious. "My body went to the trouble of making this whole other complex organ, on top of making a whole baby!" I thought. I wrapped it, methodically, in layers of tissue paper: a green layer tied up with green ribbon, an orange layer tied up with orange ribbon, a red layer tied up with red ribbon, a purple layer tied up with purple ribbon… Blood soaking through in spots here and there, merging the layers together. At some point I was happy with how it looked.

The decision to bury the placenta came out of a conversation with Charlie Spruce (Gerry Oleman, pers. comm.), who visited me when he heard how I was struggling in the months after Jane's death. We went to my favourite Mediterranean restaurant around the corner from my place. He had never had Mediterranean food before and I felt honoured that he let me take him there, to share something of my world in return for everything that he had shared with us.

We talked for an hour or so, mostly catching up on each other's family life. I finally gathered up the courage to tell him about the feelings of guilt and depression I was struggling with since Jane's suicide and couldn't seem to shake, even after the official mourning period had ended and most of my friends seemed to be moving on. I also described how these feelings seemed to flare up every time I engaged with the community on Tsulquate, and every time I tried to begin writing the dissertation. Charlie listened, nodded and didn't say much. At times I wondered if he was more engrossed in the roast duck dish he was working on than my stories.

Then as we cleaned off our plates, Charlie asked for a coffee and it occurred to me to order some Turkish coffee for myself. He had never had any of that either, so we got him a second cup to taste. "The fun of Turkish coffee is in reading the grinds left in the cup once you're done drinking," I informed him. We were reading each other's cups shortly after.
I saw birds in Charlie's cup. A large phoenix perched on a tree and an intricate owl sitting guard for a village close to the brim of the cup, which he found most intriguing. Then he looked into my cup and saw the crescent moon, the profile of a mother and a child at the bottom, and a large number of parallel white lines running along one side of the cup, between the two central figures and the edge of the grind universe. "It means you need to connect your baby to the earth," he interpreted.

"Connect him to the earth?" I asked. He launched into stories of his ancestors who had a tradition of returning an infant's afterbirth to the earth. "Sometimes they buried it, or put it in the water, or hung it in a tree," he elaborated. "And what was the significance of this?" I asked. "When babies are born there is a period when they are so fragile, and in that time we are responsible for them," he said as he cradled an imaginary child in his arms. "But very soon after, as they start to eat food and walk around, the earth becomes responsible for them. The earth will provide for them, like She does for everybody else. When we put the afterbirth into nature, we trust our children to the earth – then we can continue to be responsible *to* them, but we don't have to be responsible *for* them."

I smiled. "I've got one of those in my freezer," I now confessed, "Ocean's afterbirth. I kept it because I've got it in my head that I should eat it: that somehow it holds in it the power that I lost when I became a mother, and

that I need to eat it to get that power back… The trouble is I can't actually eat it. I am not that brave."

Of course the possibility of burying it had crossed my mind. "The trouble with *that* is: where do I bury it? It feels odd to just bury it *anywhere*. And I don't have a place on this continent that I have an ancestral connection to the way that you do. I don't even own land. I live in an apartment. And my parents have already sold our childhood house with the backyard. So there is no appropriate place."

Charlie thought this was silly. "Listen to me," he suddenly got serious. "It doesn't matter where you bury it. You know, underneath the top soil *all earth is connected*. It is connected by streams and underground currents, by life of all forms. You don't have to worry about having your own piece of land – no one owns any of it anyway. You just walk into nature, and you keep walking until you find a place that you intuitively feel is *the place*. You understand?" I nodded. "I suggest you go early in the morning and make a ceremony out of it," he went on even more seriously to make sure I was going to act on this advice. "You *have* to do this Abrielle. It's not for you. It's for your baby." It occurred to me that I had never even considered what this meant for Ocean. That made me a little sad.

Then it occurred to both of us at once: I'd been holding onto many things that don't belong to me. Jane's depression, the suffering of community members I had been working with – I could put them all down. I could bury them with the placenta, let the earth be responsible for them. I wouldn't just be doing this for myself, I would be doing it for the people to whom the burdens rightfully belonged.

"Once you do this, you'll feel very differently", Charlie said with assurance.

We bike around the park for quite some time, exchanging few words. Jeremy lets me lead the way and is patient with me as I stop many times to feel if a dark corner is *the place* and decide that it is not. There is a moment when I am about to give up. None of this feels right. I'll never find the place. Then Jeremy remembers that there is a trail on the other side of the park called "Lovers' Trail". "Do you want to try that?" He asks gently and now he lets me follow him.

Sure enough, we eventually find *the place* on the edge of Lovers' Trail. It is a slight opening in the forest behind three large rocks. It is not in the shadows as I had imagined, but it is a protected place, carpeted in a soft layer of moss. The morning sun

now beams warmly down on us, broken up into sections of light by the tall trees that surround us.

We dig a hole in the soil and put our precious decorated package down, nestled between roots of resident plants. I recognize a familiar sadness in me as I let go – but almost immediately there is also a feeling of comfort. We briefly remember Ocean's birth, its magic, and the magic of the first year-and-a-bit of his life. We light Ocean's life candle, which we started burning when he came into the world and continue to burn for a few moments in recognition of every significant event of his life – his first smile, first step, first word, first meeting of grandparents, first witnessing of death. I protect the fragile, dancing flame with my hand as Jeremy covers the placenta in soil, entrusting our son to the earth.

We sit together for a while, my head on his shoulder, his hands holding mine. We sit silently, intimately and without interruption, the way we used to be able to do often before we became parents. Before we leave, he smiles and touches my belly, where we have just made room for another placenta. Our second son is already growing inside me.

Illustration 17: Lovers' Trail

5.0. Conclusion

How might I recap the lessons and findings from the stories that have now been told? Here is my short-list of discoveries made along the way, about the nature of healing and the task of assisting with a community's healing process. I will return to some of these themes, particularly in connection with their planning implications, in more detail in the coming pages.

I. My first lesson was that **the best path into talking about healing is any path but a direct one.** I found that people did not generally want to talk about their trauma, although they did readily acknowledge the importance of doing so. On the other hand, when I invited them into a conversation about other topics relevant to their lives, the hidden trauma was almost always spoken out loud. The indirect path was able to take us into the conversation more easily.

II. I discovered **it is possible to hold dialogic processes that enable small steps towards healing.** The workshops I hosted were by no means perfect, and may not have been transformational beyond the individual and relationship levels. But they made a difference in the direction of supporting the community members' healing journeys.

III. I found that **dialogical process can complement cultural healing processes and together shift the tide.** My workshops or "talking sessions" joined with and worked synergistically with the community's ongoing cultural, art-based, ritualistic, ceremonial initiatives toward healing. One form or modality does not come at the expense of the other. They can support each other.

IV. Finally, it is clear to me that **what it takes to create healing spaces is not the quality of the facilitators tools and techniques, but rather her or his metaskills.** I feel that I was able to do what I did because of chosen and cultivated inner qualities, particularly compassion, playfulness and a-beginner's-mind. What I knew and what I did mattered far less than who I was and how I came across as a person.

Overall, I classify the story of this action-research as a modest success story, in so far as the third person inquiry (i.e. interviews conducted with participants following the workshops) suggested a positive impact on community members involved. The overall success was limited: there is no evidence, for example that the project created anything akin to institutional transformations or systemic changes that could make a significant material difference to the well-being of all community members. But there is evidence that personal attitudes and action, as well as relationships were positively affected in a relatively short amount of time among community members who engaged with the project. These can be seen, at the very least, as a contribution towards the larger project of community healing and undoing the damages of a colonial past.

I should also clarify that **the project's modest success was not suddenly arrived at or discovered through a summative evaluation process at the end, but was rather *created and ensured* on a day-by-day, session-by-session basis**. As the dialogues between the characters in this dissertation suggest, there was an almost constant redesign of the project going on in the background of the public workshops, which I have referred to as developmental evaluation. The ongoing adjustments –ranging from little tweaks to entire reframing exercises– were primarily based on my first person and second person inquiry into what I was doing. The first person inquiry was into my own feelings, physical reactions, body symptoms, thoughts and reactions during and after each session – which I routinely recorded and processed (often with help from a coach or supervisor) and used as information about what was happening in the session, whether or not my interventions were helpful, and how I might adjust going forward. The second person inquiry was into my evolving relationships with my friends, colleagues and partners, who casually informed me about my impact (or lack of impact) on others, how they felt about me and my work, and literally told me what was and was not working for them, while gossiping in the street or over the dinner table. These self-reflections and intersubjective feedback loops functioned as a de-facto monitoring mechanism, helping me to orient myself at every point and make decisions about the next steps of the project. The relative success of the project is largely due to them.

5.1. A place for therapeutic planning

The primary inquiry that inspired this dissertation research was whether there can be a healing or therapeutic role for planning. More particularly, I have been asking whether such a role can be realized in communities marked by trauma, without perpetuating the patronizing and colonizing attitudes and mechanisms responsible for the trauma in the first place. The characters in the stories you just read engage with these questions in various ways. Here I draw out some of the themes from their experiences and conversations to suggest an overall response to my central research question.

As I indicated above, I see the action research described in this dissertation as having had a modest but promising healing impact. I do not wish to overstate this impact, but hold that what took place had something to do with being on the path to healing. Note that I am drawing on the dominant metaphor in the Aboriginal healing literature which describes healing as a journey, sometimes articulated as following the "Red Road," the "Sweetgrass Trail," the "Way of the Pipe" or the "Road to Wellness" (Waldram et al., 2008, p.6). The metaphor suggests that there is a clear direction towards healing, but also that the experience of 'falling off the path' is common. Nor is there necessarily a destination to be reached: even those who have been traveling the path for years often struggle to stay on it. In short, healing is "an ongoing process of self–transformation" (Gone in Waldram et al., 2008, p.7)

I have documented the evidence for these claims in various sections of the dissertation – particularly 3.3, 3.6 and 3.12– summarized here:

> – Over the course of the workshops, participants grappled with an internal and external tension that both Marris (1974) identifies as being central to trauma and Ross (1992) and Borrows (2010) place at the centre of the modern day Indigenous struggle: an attachment to the past that has been taken away, challenging –and challenged by– a desire to move into an uncertain modern future. Workshop participants productively worked through this tension with respect to the topic of discussion (parenting) and generated collective and

personal insights and ideas for action, re-integrating the two contradictory impulses into new practical knowledge. Significantly, this "new knowledge" was not *imposed* or taught, but was instead *co-generated* within the community. Furthermore, the new knowledge was a product of what Bohm has called "participatory thought" rather than "literal thought" (1996)–which is to say that it was relational and whole, not scientific or technical. The resulting rest of "parenting aspirations" were illustrated on a community mural (as four sets of *parenting aspirations*) and reportedly began to influence the behaviours of some participants. This is Marris' definition of a successful grieving process.

– The workshops became a voluntary public setting for 'opening up' and sharing of extremely personal stories about the past and the present. Many Elders spoke with the same transparency and emotionality that they brought into the Truth and Reconciliation Hearings a few months later, telling stories about experiences of relocation from their traditional territories, and about what happened to them at the Residential Schools. Many young people admitted to and talked through personal struggles they often keep private, seeking support and advice from each other. Conversation seemed to breed more conversation and a deepening of conversation. It was as if in the engagement people "evoked each other's latent ideas", as Mary Parker Follett would say (1924). The quality of listening and empathic engagement among participants was remarkable and they began to support each other. Even though the space was not completely safe for everybody, most participants commented that the workshops gave them a rare chance to share with each other what they do not typically share. In Lewis' terms (2008), there was an unmistakable "lowering of the waterline" which signifies tapping into the collective unconscious of the group, where, according to Jungian psychology, collective healing may take place.

– Following from the above, participants reported learning about each other, understanding each other, bonding and feeling connected with each other in unprecedented ways. Some reported losing some of their old biases against each

other. This is what Bush and Folger call "recognition", one of two pillars of conflict transformation. Recognition of others in human terms is particularly significant in the context of this project because repairing of the social web of relationships is commonly acknowledged to be central to the meaning of healing in Indigenous communities (Waldram et al., 2008) and the repairing of the collective self is just important as repairing the individual self (Napoleon, 2005).

– Several participants also talked about, and more importantly *demonstrated* – both within and following the workshops– a level of personal initiative and leadership previously unavailable to them. There were several key shifts that Lederach might classify as "turning points (2005), in the direction of what Bush and Folger call "empowerment", the second pillar of conflict transformation (2004). As I gently yielded my position as a leader in the workshops, community members took up that position in both small and big ways. This is Lewis' definition of role fluidity (2008) – a kind of "finding the stranger within ourselves" (see Kristeva cited in Sandercock, 2000)– which can enable people (especially people who are stuck in feelings of disempowerment, victimhood etc.) to come more fully into their strengths. The participants also began to tell a different, far more empowered story about themselves (as parents who have a collective intuitive knowledge about how to raise their children – as opposed to unskilled care–givers in need of education), which is consistent with LeBaron's definition of conflict transformation as changing the stories we tell (2002).

– Finally, workshop participants spoke of our meetings as "healing circles" even though the workshops were never framed or advertised as such. In fact, participants voluntarily and repeatedly used the terms and metaphors of healing both during the workshops and in the interviews that followed without being prompted by these words. They often used the metaphors of "feeling lighter" or "putting down a burden" to describe their experiences of the workshops, which is a linguistic clue pointing to a therapeutic impact.

While the above results point to a healing impact, the second question remains: *was the impact achieved without further reproducing patterns of colonization*? While I did not directly ask this question of my workshop participants, my impression is that the answer is yes. My most important evidence for this claim is that I developed meaningful, mutual relationships –and in some cases friendships– with workshop participants. This is significant because it signals the absence of a perceived patronizing, threatening or opportunistic attitude on my part. I am sure that I would not have been trusted, or given permission to do the work that I did if community members suspected, or *felt*, that I had a colonizing agenda. The level of suspicion of outsiders is quite high in this community –for good reasons– so its absence in relation to me was quite telling.

Of course, I began the fieldwork with an explicit commitment to a de-colonization ethics – as described in section 2.7.–, which I understood primarily as respecting Indigenous values and ways of doing (not imposing mine) while making sure that I gave more than I took (not exploiting the community). I also identified reflexivity as a "tool" to hold myself accountable to these ethics, continually. The many stories of –personal, interpersonal and assisted– reflection that appear in this dissertation revisit these themes many times, and become the basis for making adjustment to my ways of working so that I am consciously *not* imposing and *not* exploiting. As I show, the healing impacts of the engagement –particularly those that center around empowerment, recognition and reintegration– came precisely as a result of the not-imposing, not-exploiting orientation that I chose[71]. I would go so far as to suggest that **having a healing impact is only possible in traumatized communities if we find practical ways of breaking the patterns of colonization**.

Why planners can make good healers?

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[71] For example, only when I refused to teach [western] parenting lessons and also committed not to take the community's [Indigenous] parenting knowledge away with me did the participants generate their own parenting aspiration in conversation with each other.

In some sense, and if we attach broad enough meanings to the words, anything and anybody can have a healing or therapeutic impact. But I would like to argue that ***planning forums are particularly well suited for working through collective traumas*** in communities that are bogged down by them. That is to say not only that planning forums are appropriate to the task of healing, but that they may in fact be *better-suited* to the task than other processes and interventions –including those by counselors, health educators and social workers who are typically engaged in trying to "help" these communities[72]. I justify this claim based on four arguments below.

First, planning –in its most common modern forms in the North American context– is a relatively accessible collective and public activity. In fact planning forums are one of the *only* constructive collective spaces where "people at large" can show up, hear from others they don't know and be heard by them in return, and collaboratively influence programming and decision-making. Sadly, this is even true in First Nations communities that have historically had a tradition of collectivity. In a modern-day community like GN, people often do not have many occasions to be together in an intentional, accessible and open setting[73] – for many reasons ranging from the fairly large size of the communities (compared to the old times when each extended family lived as a village) to the loss of traditions such as the potlatch (which was made illegal by the Indian Act) to lateral violence[74] that makes it hard for people to want to come together.

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[72] The crucial caveat to this claim comes in the form of the next section in this concluding chapter, where I describe the competencies, sensitivities, skills and attitude that would enable planners to do this work, and suggest what may be required to get them there. Without the appropriate personal and professional development through training and ongoing support, planners can certainly do more harm than healing.
[73] See GN Comprehensive Community Plan where community members are repeatedly cited as lamenting the loss of collective gathering places and occasions.
[74] Lateral violence is the term typically used to describe a cycle of abuse rooted in colonization, oppression, intergenerational trauma and the ongoing experiences of racism and discrimination. It refers to abuse of, or violence towards, Aboriginal people at the hand of other Aboriginals (typically members of the victim's own community or family) in similar ways that the latter have themselves been abused earlier in life. See for example, the Native Women's Association of Canada's website (www.nwca.ca) for a full explanation and associated resources.

Planning activities (whether at plan formation or plan implementation phase) offer a reason for an inclusive gathering, giving community members a space to think about issues of collective interest. The gatherings are usually funded, at least at some minimum level, to provide a venue and tea and cookies. They also often offer the opportunity –or the luxury– for experimentation with innovative meeting formats, designs and facilitation approaches which are not available in other forums such as funerals, potlatches or official council meetings that have a –culturally or legally– prescribed format and tone. Significantly, planning events can combine dialogic, artistic and ceremonial aspects –all of which, as I have shown, can have a significant role in healing, in a mutually supportive manner. Healing in First Nations communities – and I would argue in most *other* communities as well – is largely about *repairing the damaged web of relationships*, about people meeting each other and coming into conversations that they haven't had before. This cannot be done in isolation – the healing of every single individual sitting in a therapist's chair will *not* in itself lead to the healing of the collective (Block, 2008, p.5, Mindell, 1995). To address collective traumas we need collective forums. Planning forums may just be the best we have got. They can be the "wailing walls" (William, cited in Mindell, 1995) or the "public spaces for mourning" (Domonic LaCapra cited in Forester, 1999) that we so badly need.

Secondly, planning is by definition about negotiating a relationship between the past and the future. And as I have repeatedly said in this dissertation, that negotiation is at the crux of the grieving process in any situation of trauma –individual or collective– associated with loss, and its successful completion is the necessary condition for healing. This is perhaps particularly apparent in the case of Indigenous communities as described by Rupert Ross[75]. Similarly, in studying native tribes of Africa, Peter Marris articulates the tension in this way:

> "Like a process of mourning, the response to the passing of traditional society was characteristically ambivalent, caught between nostalgia for the past, and a desire to pre-empt the future... Within a group, tribal associations express the need to reconcile cultural continuity with a relevant strategy for dealing with modern life." (Marris, 1974, p.64–65)

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[75] Note a similar and perhaps equally evident tension within immigrant communities.

Planning seems to be the most natural forum for the reconciliation of cultural legacy and modern life, and re-integration of the impulse to hold onto the past and move into the future – which is expressed externally as conflict between community members, and internally as trauma. An orientation toward creating the future is common amongst planners (see for example, Throgmorton 1996 and 2003) and may even be over-emphasized in our profession. But the importance of recognizing the value of the past and bringing it to bear on the future is also increasingly acknowledged (see for example Sandercock, 1998; Regan, 2011). Planning is naturally where the past comes into conversation with the future. If as planners we appreciate, gently support, and intentionally make room for these kinds of conversations, we can be on our way to becoming healers.

Thirdly, the practical and tangible aspects of most planning issues make planning an ideal forum for talking about trauma and healing without letting the conversations become too scary, too self-indulgent or too irrelevant to the material realities of everyday life. In section 2.11. of this dissertation I describe the trouble my colleagues and I faced in trying to get community members to come to a meeting to talk about healing directly: nobody wanted to! Even though everyone acknowledged the need for talking about the underlying trauma, it seemed nearly impossible to hold a meeting and convince people to come and share their stories or views. I observed that healing circles, which are regularly hosted in the community, were often poorly attended. Even a relatively well-funded and prestigious event like the local Truth and Reconciliation Hearing had a hard time drawing participants from the community. The idea of talking about healing was perhaps too abstract, or too scary, or too who-knows-what.

I realized in the course of my action research that *the best path into talking about healing is any path except the direct one.* The trauma (individual and collective) was so present in every aspect of life that it could come up no matter what topic we talked about, as long as we were able to make a safe enough space for it. It was much more fruitful to pick a topic that was alive and had energy and immediacy associated with it

and hold meetings around that, than to continue to struggle to attract people to a "workshop on trauma". I chose the topic of parenting for reasons that I describe in section 3.1. But I could have as easily picked *any* priority area out of the Comprehensive Community Plan, and I could have ended up convening equally 'therapeutic' conversations.

I tend to believe that most planning discussions make a good doorway into healing – if held with that intention– because they link the internal and external conflicts and historic traumas to tangible things that are relevant to people's lives today. Scott Bollens articulates a similar sentiment when he talks about the city and city planning as the best forum for peace building:

> "The city is important in peace building because it is in the streets and neighborhoods of urban agglomerations that there is the negotiation over, and clarification of, abstract concepts such as democracy, fairness, and tolerance. Debates over proposed projects and discussion of physical place provide opportunities to anchor and negotiate dissonant meanings in a post-conflict society; indeed, there are few opportunities outside debates over urban life where these antagonistic impulses take such concrete forms in need of pragmatic negotiation. (Bollens, 2006, p.67)

In reality most of our current planning conversations are missing out on the opportunity to be therapeutic because as planners we do not typically see a healing function for them, and in many cases we are even blind to the traumas and conflicts that are present below the surface. Some have argued that we do not need every deep value difference resolved and every wound cured before we can address the specific practical problems and opportunities of community life (e.g. Forester, 2009, p.6). Yet others have suggested that we move to problem-solving much too quickly and that "until histories, hurts, and unhealed wounds have been addressed, we will not be able to solve problems in deep or lasting ways" (e.g. Diamond cited in LeBaron, 2002, p.248). While acknowledging the truth of both views, depending on the specifics of the situation, I think it is time that we give more attention to the latter view within the planning field. In many situations until unhealed wounds have been addressed the material issues around which we try to problem-solve remain unsolvable. Only when some healing has

already taken place does our energy become available for problem-solving and moving forward.

Finally, I would argue that planning has advantages over the "helping professions" when it comes to working with trauma in a community such as the one I worked with. This is because planning carries less of the 'baggage' compared to professions such as counseling, community health, or social work – which are, in spite of best intentions, almost doomed from the start by their reputation. It is quite difficult to be a trusted counselor, health educator or social worker in a context such as the community I worked with: counselors and health educators are often associated with the western medical bias which tries to diagnose Aboriginal people as "sick" and treat them accordingly, or teach them to be "better" (Chrisjohn, Young, and Mauraun 1997; Thira 2005), and social workers are known as the professionals who take Aboriginal children away (Ross, 1992). The former is sometimes referred to as a "fourth wave of colonization"– next to the first three waves: legal, administrative and ideological– while the latter is seen as a continuation or expansion of the Residential School Program. Given these connotations, these "helping professionals" –through no fault of their own and often in spite of their best intentions– have very serious professional stereotypes to shed before they can effectively engage people.

In comparison, planners carry relatively little baggage in many situations. On the reserve where I worked community planning actually had a good name – thanks to the recent Comprehensive Community Planning process that had been quite inclusive and respectful of community members' wants and needs[76]. Of course in some communities planning has a bad rep and if planners act as heavy-handed bureaucrats or all-knowing consultants they will easily be classified as untrustworthy along with other helping professionals. But the non-expert, facilitative and collaborative model of planning – which is championed by the communicative or collaborative schools of planning – has a

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[76] Fortunately for me, GN community members do *not* directly associate the history of the relocation with the planning profession (section 2.3.) "Community planning" is understood as something quite different from (in fact, in many ways opposite to) the actions of the Department of Indian Affairs in the 1960s.

274

chance at opening a therapeutic space in many communities. Successfully doing this work requires the kind of "neutrality" on the part of the planner – the open-mindedness, compassion, and a-beginner's-mind attitude– that I describe throughout this dissertation. I will return to the subject of *how* we can develop the skills and metaskills for therapeutic planning in the next section.

A therapeutic role beyond social planning

What I have described so far is based on my own experience with GN. It might appear that my argument for a role for therapeutic planning is limited to working with Indigenous populations, or communities in similar situations, with historic and deep trauma that needs to be worked through. I want to suggest, however, that ***the therapeutic planning role described above has implications not only for Indigenous planning or social planning, but for most planning endeavours we engage in***. This claim is based on a key insight offered, once again, by Peter Marris (1974), who suggests that *all situations of social change* can trigger something very similar to the trauma and grieving process that is initiated by a personal loss (e.g. death of a loved one) or a collective loss (e.g. eradication of familiar places, community relocation etc). In so far as planners are in the business of social change they could benefit from also being in the business of assisting communities through grieving process – in other words, they would do well to be in the business of therapeutic planning[77].

Marris' argument is worth elaborating here. In his book *Loss and Change*, Marris first explores the topic of personal grieving, based on several studies including surveys of hundreds of widows in the UK. He shows that when we lose a significant relationship and a significant attachment –such as that between a husband and wife– the entire structure of meaning centered around that attachment falls apart. Grieving is a natural response to that loss of meaning and is the mechanism for re-integration of the attachment to the past with the future. This re-integration is equivalent to the

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[77] In the following discussion I am particularly addressing planners with progressive agendas for social change, those who are arguing for sustainability, social justice, equality, etc. In practice, progressive agendas often come up against community resistance. I am interested in exploring the implications of the insights from my research for helping to further those progressive agendas by engaging that resistance.

reconstruction of meaning of life for the bereaved. Marris then goes on to draw a parallel between the stories of personal loss and grief and collective loss and grief brought on by social change. He explores these parallels using case studies of a mining disaster in South Wales, urban renewal schemes in Boston[78], slum clearance in Los Angeles (as examples of collective loss) and the formation of tribal associations in Nigeria and rise of entrepreneurship in Kenya (as examples of collective grieving and re-integration). Marris argues that "the task of reintegration is essentially similar whether the structures of meaning fall apart from loss of personal relationships, a predictable social context or of an interpretable world." (1974, p.vii) He further holds that in both personal and collective situations of loss, the disruption to structures of meaning happens *even if* the change is desired or explicitly accepted by the people who are subject to it.[79] In other words, even "good" change can have traumatic results.

Marris goes on to argue that people and communities have good reason – psychologically speaking – to resist social change. The "conservative impulse" (the desire to hold on to the past), he shows, is an aspect of our ability to survive in any situation. Without conservatism, which guarantees a level of continuity, "we cannot interpret what events mean to us, nor explore new kinds of experiences with confidence." (1974, p.2) When planners argue about the need for social change based on the best and most comprehensive research available, we tend to dismiss conservatism as a kind of ignorance, selfishness or blindness to good reasoning – calling it NIMBYism, prejudice, protection of class interest, apathy, or anti-environmentalism. But when we consider it from the point of view of people's experience in society as they struggle to maintain their hold on the meaning of life, the value of the conservative impulse is easier to appreciate.

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[78] In a similar vein, psychiatrist Mindy Fullilove (2004) has studied the intersection of personal and collective trauma resulting from the urban renewal projects impacting African American communities in Pittsburgh, Newark and Roanoke between 1949 and 1973.

[79] This was in fact the experience of GN: band members voted in 1962 in favour of relocation. They moved "voluntarily", believing that it would be in their best interest overall. Nonetheless the psychological damage from the relocation is manifested in an ongoing -and very poorly supported- mourning process.

This appreciation can be the starting point for a more productive working relationship between planners and communities. But we may also have to adjust our strategies and ways of communicating to be able to negotiate with the conservative impulse. Marris suggests, "people cannot reconcile themselves to the loss of familiar attachments in terms of some impersonal utilitarian calculation of the common good. They have to find their own meaning in these changes before they can live with them" (1974, p.156). That is to say, the planners' logical arguments are not going to convince the angry citizens of the merit of whatever project or initiative is at hand. The citizens are, almost literally, unable to hear or comprehend this kind of logic, because when faced with the loss of familiar attachments they instinctively respond from a far more emotional, identity-based place within themselves. Furthermore, they often do so *unconsciously,* without knowing that they have dropped logical reasoning in favour of an instinctive survival reaction. This makes it even harder to reason with them.

So what is the alternative? In Marris' words, "the reformers must listen as well as explain, continually accommodating their design to other purposes, other kinds of experiences, modifying and renegotiating, long after they would like to believe that their conception was finished" (1974, p.156). Based on his understanding of the grieving process he suggests general principles for reducing the traumatic impact of an event before it takes place, as well as assisting in psychological recovery after the change has been introduced. These include giving impacted communities a lot of advance notice to mentally prepare for a change (since abrupt change tends to be more traumatic than expected change), to retain any elements of the landscape or experience that can signify continuity (e.g. preserving old buildings or trees around the development project), to expect and encourage public conflict so that people have a chance to react and work out the various impulses in a legitimate setting, and to put a moratorium on *more* change while community members are going through a process of meaning-making so as not to overwhelm their emotional capacity (1974, p.x and p.150).

Unfortunately for us, this is a time-consuming and laborious path. Clearly, not all of us are going to become therapeutic planners, nor should we. We continue to need

progressive planners who focus on advocacy and on technical, design-oriented, market-based and policy innovations that drive change. But without attention to the psychological dimensions of change that drive may not be as expedient as we need it to be. "A robust, pragmatic optimism towards change", Marris argues, "is fundamentally less rational, and indeed strategically blind to the nature of social transitions." (1974, p.84) In other words, *it is more strategic for planners to understand the dynamics of grief, to slow down when appropriate and employ a therapeutic orientation, than to be fully logical and optimistic champions of social change in the face of community resistance*.

I would also argue, that slowing down to accommodate the conservative impulse is a more ethical and responsible choice than strong-handedly imposing well-intentioned programs and policies on communities. To put it provocatively: if we as planners dismiss citizens' concerns and move forward strong-handedly with our proposed projects and policies –no matter how progressive we think they are– we are no better than the Indian Agents who put the GN bands on their reserve some 50 years ago. In some sense, the Agents responsible for the relocation of GN were following common practices of the time, believing that they were doing the right thing for Canadian society (reducing costs of serving remote villages) and for the Bands (providing better services to them), eventually convincing band members to agree to the relocation in 1962 in a democratic fashion[80]. In hindsight we can observe the incredible damage that the decision did to the bands, partly because it was not well supported through social planning efforts that could have eased the transition that accompanied the relocation. Similarly, many planning initiatives that were considered "progressive" at their times (e.g. urban renewal projects) have been shown in hindsight to have been harmful. Visionary planners today run a similar risk –of re-producing injustice and oppression–

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[80] As I describe in section 2.3. the Agents were also extremely careless and deceitful in the case of GN relocation. I would like to think that most progressive planners are better than that and I do not want to suggest that the two cases are equivalent. But the point remains that in each case the actions of the bureaucrats are based on strong convictions about what is right for a community. We can call this "vision", but it certainly comes with its own blind spots.

when they act on their convictions and their science, without giving serious consideration and appreciation to the voices of opposition.

To be gentler and perhaps more fair to my fellow progressive planners and visionaries, I might end with this: There is no question that we need social change – that our current cities and communities are environmentally unsustainable, socially unjust, and economically unstable. Whether we are proactive or reactive, the fact is that large changes are coming our way. If we don't proactively mitigate them we will have to retroactively adapt to them. In either case we can expect collective trauma. In light of this, and perhaps more than at any other time, a therapeutic approach to planning for social change presents us with an opportunity to do better than we have done in the past. It would allow us to remain ethical and responsible to the communities we serve, and perhaps also allow us to move more effectively on the kinds of change needed to better serve (even save) the ecological and social systems within which our communities are located.

What exactly could therapeutic planning look like in support of social change that comes as a result of environmental or social justice initiatives? How, specifically, could planners operationalize Marris' principles described above, to reduce the traumatic impact of modern-day projects and policies? And would an attention to the psychological dimensions of social change in fact reduce the opposition and pave the way for the kinds of fundamental changes that our scientific analysis about the magnitude of problems tells us we need? These remain the subjects for future research.

5.2. The making of a therapeutic planner

About six months into my intensive period of fieldwork on Tsulquate, and while I was going through a particularly rough patch in my personal life, John Friedmann pulled me aside at an event and subtly suggested that maybe I had done enough fieldwork already. "You can't realistically expect that you are going to complete the process of healing in this community within the timeframe of your dissertation research – at some arbitrary point in time you've just got to cut yourself off", was John's argument, roughly. I argued

back that regardless of where the community was at, I didn't feel that my own work or my own learning had come to a satisfying end, and so I clearly needed to continue going.

Then John said, "Well, let me ask you this. Have you learned something about facilitation and conflict resolution that is different from what you knew before?" The question had never been asked of me that way, but now that it was, a clear answer emerged, almost immediately. "Yes. I have realized that all the tools and techniques and tricks that I was excited about when I started don't really matter at the end. The only thing that makes a difference in whether or not I can do this work is who I am, how I carry myself, how I come across. The rest is almost irrelevant." "Hmmm," said John, leaning back and looking pleased with my answer, or with the confirmation of his own hunch. "You're done with the fieldwork!"

The importance of metaskills

As I have described before, I drew on a few different facilitation methods as I was working with groups of community members, depending on Deep Democracy as my main facilitation platform. The reaction to the various methods, tools and techniques were mixed, as I show throughout the "Middle" section of the story, and summarize in section 3.12. Some of what I tried seemed to "work" very well, while others did not seem to "work" at all, as judged by the level of engagement and excitement in the room, the quality of the conversations, and the post-session feedback from participants. Regardless, I consistently knew that at a deeper level something was "working": community members showed up, they engaged in the ways that felt appropriate to them, they engaged in generating ideas and a product, they seemed to like me and were friendly with me, and there was evidence of a healing or therapeutic impact as I have just shown in the last section.

The feedback about what was "working" came to me in many ways, formally and informally, through side conversations, gossip, interviews, simple surveys, and very much through my own changing feelings and states as the sessions progressed. Interestingly, often the positive feedback was not about the methods I was using – it

was about myself. Though most people were not able to pinpoint what exactly I was doing in those sessions (the word "facilitator" did not exist in their vocabulary), they talked about how I was easy to talk to, how I could ask the right questions, how I made the sessions fun, how I didn't seem to push, or that I seemed to be able to work in "an organic way"[81]. I also felt most proud of what I was doing when I was able to get into a kind of flow: following the group, being light and comfortable, being myself, not having much of an agenda. I had initially underestimated the importance of *who I was* (or more accurately: who I was learning to become) as a facilitator. These comments sparked a more serious first person inquiry than I had intended.

The importance of *who we are* as interveners/helpers, has been repeatedly asserted by those in the healing professions. Carl Jung, for example, advised his students this way:

> "Please remember, it is what you are that heals, not what you know. In the beginning of my career, I knew nothing – actually less than nothing. But it still worked. And do you know why? It was because of who I was." (cited in LeBaron, 2002, p.304).

Researchers in psychology have claimed for a long time that "the personality of the therapist has more influence on the therapeutic session than the methodology they work with" (Kent cited in Knill, 1999, p.37) and that it is ultimately the therapist's "human presence that makes the difference" to the success of an intervention (Moustakas, 1981, p.17). A parallel understanding exists within the literature on participatory community development and participatory action research. Various authors have argued that the "mindset" of the researcher and his or her "attitudes" are key in the development of a successful and genuine participatory process and matter far more than the tools and techniques employed (see for example, Kidd and Kral 2005; Chambers, 2007; Grant, Nelson and Mitchell, 2008).

To a degree, this view also exists within the field of conflict resolution – but the purported importance of the helpful "ways of being" is not matched by a commitment to

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[81] The two GN community members who actually took some facilitation training with me as part of this project both identified the idea of a facilitator's "neutrality" as the most striking message from the training.

developing these qualities in practitioners [82]. In my review of that literature, early in my doctoral studies, I found the following pattern: a large majority of the texts and trainings concern themselves with providing advice on "what to do" as a conflict resolver – skills, methods, approaches, steps, stages, tools, techniques etc (most prominent are the best-selling works such as Fisher, Patton, & Ury, 1992; Stone, Patton, & Heen; 1999, Kaner, Lind, Toldi, Fisk, & Berger, 2007)– while a minority bring our attention to the importance of "how to be" –attitudes, qualities, manner and mind-sets, and the personal emotional, spiritual, physical, imaginative resources that make this work possible (Kritek, 2002; LeBaron, 2002; Lewis, 2008). By the end of this research I stand firmly in the second camp, holding that *our attitudes, manners and ways of being as facilitators, are far more important in creating conflict transforming spaces than the tools and techniques we use.* And in recognizing this *we must walk down the challenging path of equipping practitioners with ways of being that provide for their success*.

In Deep Democracy we talk about these ways of being as "metaskills". The term was introduced by Amy Mindell (former student and, later, wife of Arnold Mindell, the founder of process-oriented psychology). Metaskills for Mindell are "feeling attitudes" that a practitioner has towards herself and others, essentially reflecting her deepest spiritual beliefs (1994). This is described through a lovely metaphor of *the moon's reflection in the water:* The practitioner's spiritual beliefs are the moon, her living practice is the water, and the metaskills are simply the way that the former is reflected in the latter. The term "spiritual" is broadly understood here and may include religious or scientific or any other kind of orientation that is the basis of how we make sense of the world. For example, I may believe that human beings are basically good in their very nature and complete just the way they are, *or* I may believe that humans are essentially sinful and their task in life is to purify themselves so they can go back to the Garden of Eden. My work in the world will reflect which of these orientations I hold, and the "feeling attitude" I exhibit when I work with groups may be accepting or directing

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[82] This is at least true of the English language literature.

accordingly. Similarly, my view of the world may be essentially Newtonian or essentially Einsteinian and my approach to working with groups may be reductionist or holistic, individually oriented or collectively oriented, accordingly.

I love this metaphor of the moon and the water, and its various connotations:
- o That the reflection is effortless – the moon is shining up there, not making any special effort to influence the water: it just does.
- o That the reflection is impossible to fake – you could never replace the moon with a street light and expect the same results.
- o That the reflection is hard to grasp – the minute we try to catch it, to put our hands around it, we disturb the surface of the water and it is gone.

All of that is not to say that we do not have influence over these reflections – we influence them through our spiritual development, that is to say, through clarifying our deepest values and our most persistent beliefs to ourselves, and intentionally working to bring our attitudes and actions in alignment with our personal truth. This is –or can be– a deliberate lifelong process of lowering our personal waterline and becoming more conscious. In her careful naming of meta-*skills* Mindell brings our attention to the developmental potential of this aspect of our work. Generally, effectiveness of a practitioner is attributed to his or her personal style (Kolb and associates, 1994). Mindell holds instead that effective practitioners go beyond their personal styles to strengthen attitudes that serve their work and break out of patterns that hinder their work (Mindell, 1994, p.26).

There are many possible channels for spiritual development. My teacher, Myrna Lewis, often speaks of four: meditation or other contemplative practice; an intimate relationship; therapy; and working with groups. As facilitators we can be encouraged to tap into all these channels, but our most obvious common ground for spiritual development is working with groups. Groups can illuminate so much of our personal truth by making new aspects of our selves visible, by triggering us in positive and negative ways, by "hooking us" and by challenging our neutrality as I have shown in

several instances throughout the story. What is particularly powerful about a facilitation approach such as Deep Democracy is that it *requires* us to develop ourselves in the context of our practice[83]. We simply cannot practice using the tools and techniques without developing our metaskills, because the tools will not work without the right attitude. For example, the four steps of decision-making, which are very much about seeking and spreading dissent and unpopular ideas will simply *not* work if the facilitator does not have a curious and compassionate attitude and cannot make the space safe for the expression of uncomfortable views. Groups will very quickly attack and then mistrust a facilitator who tries to use these tools with an incongruent attitude. Once we are on a learning path, ***the development of our metaskills can and must go hand-in-hand with the development of our skills, each strengthening the other.*** I will return to the subject of the learning path shortly.

Compassion, playfulness, and a-beginner's-mind

As I describe in section 1.4. of the introduction, I found three other metaskills to be most helpful to my work: compassion, playfulness and a-beginner's-mind. These were metaskills that I became most aware of in myself and in others. They are also the metaskills that seemed to be most closely linked to neutrality as serve as a ground for its development. I have attempted, in the course of the story, to provide a narrative of the growth, blossoming and downfall of the three metaskills through the personal journeys of Abrielle, Ravenna and Hanane. Here I briefly summarize what I learned about each.

I had always understood **compassion** as the most central metaskill and the root of neutrality, the way it is articulated in Deep Democracy (see section 2.5.). The fieldwork confirmed this view and I found myself deepening my understanding of what it means to be compassionate (as opposed to sympathetic, empathetic, caring etc.). Nearly all of Abrielle's supervision sessions explore the topic of compassion – but perhaps the most

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[83] There are too many other approaches that advocate for personal work, but do not have an effective way of integrating it into professional development. I have seen way too many facilitators and other leaders who meditate and go on spiritual development retreat, but will act violently towards the groups they work with.

clear illustration of the concept appears in section 3.9. when she relates to the experience of a local teenage girl in the grip of a powerful snake (her social situation) through *her own* parallel experience of being squeezed by a snake (her early parenting challenges). The kind of compassion that Abrielle discovers through that metaphor grows from within her, out of her own being, and extends out to meet the experience of the other. It is not a "stepping into the other's shoes" to understand her experience– it is a "stepping into one's own shoes" to find a potent commonality that links us, not just at an intellectual level but also at a felt emotional level. Note that there is a practical function for compassion held in this conceptualization: it allows the facilitator/interveners/healers to find an appropriate, peer-like, un-patronizing place from which to be with, and respond to those who are suffering. Buddhist nun Pema Chödrön articulates this best:

> "Compassion is not a relationship between the healer and the wounded. It's a relationship between equals. Only when we know our own darkness well can we be present with the darkness of others. Compassion becomes real when we recognize our shared humanity." (Chödrön, 2002)

In a similar vein, Elder Gerry Oleman once described compassion to me as "being a willing participant in the suffering of others". This simple definition highlights a dimension that really became visible to me throughout the fieldwork and particularly as I review the story of Abrielle now: *with compassion comes suffering*. In the case of Abrielle, the suffering that she experienced became paralyzing at times. As one psychotherapist explained to me months after the fieldwork (Meyer, 2012), this is fairly typical of what happens to helping professionals and those who work with trauma victims. It is called *compassion fatigue*, or *secondary traumatization*, or at times *vicarious traumatization* (Figley, 1995; Joinson, 1992) and is often associated with despair, decrease in experiences of pleasure, anxiety, and a pervasive negative attitude. This is the shadow side of compassion – it is a risk we take on when we get serious about doing this work. It is a very serious risk that I/Abrielle was only barely able to cope with, thanks to my/her extensive support network. I will return to the importance of this support network and its structure shortly.

The metaskill of **playfulness**, and the associated qualities of humour, trickstery, creativity and artistic imagination, have been attractive to me for personal and professional reasons. Playfulness is what makes this kind of work more pleasurable and more rewarding – in fact at times it is the only thing that makes the work bearable. We also know that our ability to play and be light with each other is extremely helpful when we are "frozen in the grip of conflict" (LeBaron, 2002, p.105) or when we have a hard time seeing our way forward as individuals or groups. In some sense, playfulness can also be seen as the root for "the moral imagination" (Lederach, 2005), which is the imaginative capacity that gives birth to possibilities which did not yet exist. Several of Ravenna's interventions throughout the story illustrate the value of playfulness in turning the situation and generating a creative path forward– perhaps most memorably her introduction of Heyoka, the backwards horse-rider (section 2.10.), and her identification with Marilyn Monroe (section 3.4.)

Ravenna's character, and the metaskill of playfulness certainly carried the story and the action research forward, breaking several impasses – but it also had a shadow side that had to be worked through: on several occasions, I can now observe, Ravenna got caught up in her own "play", or more accurately in the creative games that she set up. The best examples of this are the visual arts experiments that she tried to implement in the parenting sessions, most of which did not produce the results she was expecting, but instead ended up frustrating her and probably her workshop participants too (section 3.5. and 3.6.). I think that this is the risk we typically run when we bring our imaginative play, art or creative process into our facilitation: it is easy to get attached to them or get stuck within their rules or formats. This is particularly a danger when we have been hired or otherwise engaged, based on a promise to deliver a certain creative process or activity (as facilitators often are) and when we have invested significant time and effort and resources in setting up to make such a process or activity possible (e.g. buying art supplies, choosing the appropriate venue based on the activity design etc).

I think that the kind of playfulness that we want, the kind that really serves us, is the child-like, non-attached, simple, resourceful playfulness that Ocean exhibits

(particularly in section 3.6.): one game is easily abandoned in favour of another game as circumstances change or opportunities present themselves through chance. This is to say that playfulness, having access to our imaginative resources and our creative energies and skills, are not enough in themselves but need to be accompanied by a neutral attitude, in the absence of which they can hinder us instead of help us.

The metaskill of **beginner's mind** is also connected with a child-like quality, a curiosity and a non-expert (or even anti-expert) orientation. Many of the simple, even naïve questions and observations that Hanane articulates throughout the story are illustrations of this quality, but the most explicit exploration of this metaskill is presented in section 3.3. where the three characters reflect on Hanane's performance in the "hot seat" when she gets grilled by the Elders of the community. As I suggest in this section, the beginner's mind attitude is a survival ticket in a community such as Tsulquate. It is perhaps the quality most central to maintaining a non-patronizing, non-colonizing attitude as we work in communities where people have historically been disempowered by "expert" types, and where problems are too complex for any outsider to pretend he or she has solutions to. The ability to see with fresh eyes also allows for building genuine relationships with people, illustrated by the way in which Hanane easily allows her biases, stereotypes and an absolute sense of right and wrong to fall apart (see for example her dreams in section 2.11). When I re-read my story now, I am left with the expression that Hanane is in fact the most effective healer out of the three main characters, in spite of –and in fact because of – her youth, her relative lack of knowledge and experience. I now find myself admitting that I had initially underestimated the value of her central quality.

As with the other metaskills, beginner's mind has its own challenges. Perhaps the most obvious challenge is that it becomes more impossible – or at least harder to maintain– as time goes by and we engage at length with a community, organization or issue. As we inevitably learn about a situation we have to actively work to maintain a beginner's mind, to enter every meeting, every interaction and every session we facilitate with fresh eyes and with openness to what is emerging.

I think a second challenge is that an absolute not-knowing can on some occasions make us *less* effective as interveners. Here, I find myself disagreeing with both the conventional wisdom of the facilitation field, which tells us that we should learn absolutely everything we can in preparation for a session (see for example, Forester, 2009) and with my teacher, Myrna Lewis, who takes the extreme opposite view, recommending that we do not learn anything about a situation we are about to facilitate until the night before (or until you have *entered the field* of the session)! She discourages reading background materials or interviewing people in the community in advance or doing any of what most facilitators would call 'essential preparatory groundwork' or 'conflict assessment', arguing that if we do we risk losing our beginner's mind, and we will inevitably walk in with a biased or skewed view (likely the view of those we talked to or the background material we read) that will make it harder to be neutral and present to whatever dynamics emerge in the group. I can only assume that this approach works well for Myrna across the different context she works in– but I have also observed her facilitating sessions (here in Canada) where her lack of knowledge about the local situation, including the terminology and the basic understanding of culturally relevant concepts and structures, make her intervention (particularly her amplification) confusing and unhelpful to group participants. Appreciating the wisdom of the two opposite views on the subject, I tend to think that a middle of the road approach is most appropriate: *some* foundational knowledge of our context is helpful, as long as we are prepared to be with the paradox of being knowledgeable *and* maintaining a beginner's mind.

How do we get there?

Within this section so far I have attempted to provide some answers to the second question of this action research: what do planners need to learn and who do they have to become in order to play a therapeutic role most effectively? I have suggested that developing metaskills is the most important component of this learning, *and* that it can

288

and perhaps should go hand-in-hand with the development of skills. Now I consider the question of learning more broadly, trace some elements of my own learning through the fieldwork, and get into the discussion of *how* such learning can be organized and supported.

The literature on developmental learning is vast. Of particular interest to me is the work of Lang and Taylor (2000), who have developed a theoretical framework describing, specifically, the skill development of facilitators and mediators. They identify four developmental stages for this class of professionals:

1) The novice stage: a time of enthusiasm, inquisitiveness, and curiosity. The novice is a mimic, modeling his or her behaviour on that of his or her instructors.
2) The apprentice stage: in which the apprentice has gained rudimentary skills and basic knowledge and is testing his/her abilities in practice settings, becoming more adept and skilled.
3) The practitioner stage: in which the practitioner is an accomplished professional, able to use a wide range of skills and strategies with purpose and effect.
4) The artist stage: associated with beginner's mind – open, curious, seeking new ideas and information and working with the "flow". The artist is able to bring his or her own interpretation to the practices of the profession.

There has been no explicit evaluation or verification of Lang and Taylor's four-stage model to date, so we do not know to what degree it is a realistic, accurate, and useful representation of the path of professional development (Lang & Taylor, 2000, p.241). My overall impression, based on my own experience of the past few years and a preliminary analysis of interviews of 23 others in the Deep Democracy community of teachers and facilitators[84], is that the model generally corresponds well with the reported experiences of facilitators, although the stages may not be clearly distinguishable or necessarily linear[85]. If the learning path can in fact be categorized this

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[84] Subject of a future analysis and writing project.
[85] For example, some facilitators report experiencing moments of "flow" – typical of the artist stage – early in their learning path when they might classify themselves as novices or apprentices. As another example, the confidence and the ability to use tools and skills with purpose –typical of the practitioner stage- seem to come and go in a cyclical fashion for some practitioners on the learning path: the report

way, we may be able to identify specific teaching and learning strategies appropriate for each stage – or for advancing from one stage to the next. Further research and theorizing is necessary before we get there.

Perhaps a more useful starting point is to think about the mechanisms for learning, or 'levels of learning' discussed in this literature. Peter Senge and colleagues (cited in Tiesinga et al, 2012) identify four levels of learning[86]:

1) Adaptive Learning: reacting almost automatically to stimuli to make changes to what we are doing as a coping mechanism. This is the most familiar learning process, referred to as 'single loop learning' by Argyris and Schön (1996). Adaptive learning often occurs unconsciously, without much processing, as we encounter unexpected demands, changes, challenges, or non-routine situations. It can lead to iterative, incremental change in behaviours, approaches or tools.

2) Generative Learning: learning reflectively, pro-actively and intentionally and applying new skills, knowledge, behaviors, and interaction patterns to improve one's performance. This is similar to Argyris and Schön's 'double loop' learning and Vera and Crossan's (2004) 'explorative learning'. This level of learning encourages exploration of alternative methods, asking questions, challenging assumptions, seeking different perspectives, and evaluating alternatives.

3) Transformative Learning: re-shaping or altering our individual or organizational purpose, goals, structure, or processes, sometimes referred to as triple-loop learning (Peschl, 2007)[87]. Unlike adaptive learning, which tends to be incremental, and generative learning, which builds on prior perspectives, transformative learning requires experiencing disorientation and then reorientation for an entirely new direction for growth that can produce a new structure, strategy, goals, and identity.

"getting it" and the "losing it" and then "getting it again".

[86] These are originally and primarily articulated as organizational learning processes, but I see them as being applicable to individuals equally well.

[87] There are in fact many different understandings of what the term "triple loop learning" might signify. See Tosey et al, 2012 for a discussion.

4) Existential learning: a more rare and profound mode of learning referred to by Scharmer as "presencing" (2007). In this mode, change is not solely based on cognitive reflection, but more importantly on existential reflection and learning. In this learning we reflect and question our deeper underlying values, sense of identity, *who* we are and ultimately the purpose of our life.

In examining my own learning path I can easily note instances of all four processes of learning, sometimes associated with a single event or interaction. I use the example of Abrielle facilitating the very first workshop on Tsulquate, told in section 2.4, to illustrate the different levels of learning with some examples:

1) Adaptive learning: There is an almost continuous –largely unconscious or semi-conscious– process of adjusting her approach, language and pace as Abrielle perceives the impact of her facilitation on the dynamics of the group, and *learns* how to be more effective in this specific context. She slows down the check-in and later the decision-making processes, repeats and rephrases instructions and questions in an attempt to better include the youth in the conversation. All of this happens while she is "thinking on her feet" in what Schön (1983) would describe as a processes of "reflection-in-action". The learning is subtle, incremental, and entirely essential.

2) Generative learning: At a more conscious level, Abrielle adjusts her facilitation tools and techniques, changing the session's design and agenda based on what she is learning about the group's dynamics. Most notably, she decides against continuing the Soft Shoe Shuffle exercise and instead leads the group in making a decision about the direction of the workshop. The basis for these changes is an immediate "reflection-on-action" (Schön, 1983) in conversation with colleagues during a break. Challenging of previous assumptions (e.g. that youth are supposed to like "active" facilitation methods) and exploration of alternative methods is truly generative in this case, leading to the desired outcome: further engagement of the youth.

3) Transformative learning: At times in the course of the session, Abrielle becomes aware of powerful feelings and body sensations in herself (e.g. anxiety about her research project, becoming overwhelmed with a feeling of despair and "tuning out"). She is not able to process these on the spot, but she "shelves" them away for further reflection-on-action, and returns to them in her conversation with her coach. Exploring these triggers and disorienting feelings leads to more profound learning that challenges the paradigms of both research and teaching that Abrielle previously subscribed to, replacing them with more culturally appropriate and nuanced understanding. For example the experience gives her respect for the different styles of learning exhibited by community members (some silent, some visibly engaged) and leads to a redesign of the phases of the action research.

4) Existential learning: As the coach takes Abrielle further into a therapeutic and highly emotional space, what has been triggered in the session leads into significant learning about Abrielle's personal and professional-academic identity, her image of herself, her worldview, and her purpose and mission in the world. She reconnects with her need to take care of important relationships in her life, her desire to be a change agent, to stay optimistic about the possibility of change and to reform the institutions she works within, particularly the university. The re-alignment with her purpose(s) allows her to become neutral again, develops her metaskill of compassion (particularly for the absent leaders of the community and for the silent youth), confirms her desire to be in the community doing this work and allows her to chart a path forward for her ongoing project.

The learning from that particular session and the coaching process that follow it is clearly rich for Abrielle. But is that level of richness absolutely necessary? Could Abrielle have done without some of the deeper learning and maintained her effectiveness in the community? I doubt it. I think Abrielle needed all those learning processes on an ongoing basis to survive, to remain sane, centered and effective. This is particularly the case because she was working in a situation of extreme complexity

where reorientation and shifting of paradigms (via transformative learning) was a necessity, and where she depended on developing her metaskills while suffering their consequences –particularly compassion fatigue– (via existential learning). From my experience, and based on conversations with other practitioners, ***all four processes of learning, including the transformative and existential levels, are indispensable if we are going to grow facilitators who can be effective actors in situations of extreme conflict or trauma***.

We already have a tradition of reflexivity within the planning profession, and as the example above shows, the reflective orientation ("in-action" and "on-action") can be the key to developing the capacities to act in healing, therapeutic ways. However, the *scope* of reflection, and the way it is being taught and practiced in planning schools, is not up to the task for the kinds of challenges that this work presents. It appears that most planning courses, to the degree that they integrate a reflective element at all, depend on one reflection technique: students are told to journal (Karen Umemoto, pers.comm.). This is simply not enough. Instead ***we need both individual and assisted forms of reflection to support our learning,*** particularly our deeper learning into ourselves. Here I outline five aspects of a possible approach:

Personal reflection can *include* **keeping a journal** and indeed probably should. I kept quite an extensive daily journal over three years of doing this research. In my journal I not only recorded what was happening at an intellectual and emotional level, but also began to see the patterns that dominate my internal landscape, and I began to work some of them out. For example, I became aware that I was getting particularly upset whenever I felt that my relationship with community members was not reciprocal or that I was underappreciated, in the way Hanane describes feeling in relation with Johnny in section 3.11. I wrote about these feelings whenever they came up, then worked out to what degree they were real, to what degree they were based on my assumptions, and to what degree they came from my projections from previous experiences. I then asked myself what I needed to ease those feelings. The journaling about these kinds of issues – which resembled an exploration of my experience and an

ongoing conversation with myself– brought some of my automatic reactions and adaptive learning into consciousness, and resulted in much of the generative learning I went through. The journal became a place to strategize in light of what I was discovering (with a Plan B and C often also written out in case I needed alternatives) and a rich record of my research and my learning process. Based on my experience, journaling is a good foundational exercise for students of therapeutic planning.

My personal work also included **meditation**– sitting meditation when I was able to get ten minutes to myself, and more often meditative walks outside, carrying my son on my chest. Even though I was not able to do this as regularly as I had hoped, the contemplative practice was important to me because it helped me further become aware of the patterns of thought and feeling (many of which were also coming up in the journaling) and also of body sensations, which became an important ally in understanding what was going on for myself and in groups. More importantly, during the meditation I practiced my metaskills: compassion for myself and others, lightness and humour around my annoyingly persistent patterns, and a fresh mind and curiosity about my experiences. Every time I meditated I also exercised my neutrality muscles, attempting to let go of what I was holding onto and of my judgments about it. I also often stayed with feelings of disorientation, not trying to resolve them. Mediation can be seen as the basis for my transformative and existential learning, and as an essential component for becoming effective in a therapeutic planning role. While I imagine that incorporating this element into a secular planning education could be controversial, I think we need to find ways of introducing methods and practices into planning education that serve the meditative role.

A third component of my development path was my **art practice.** My own primary artistic media are visual and I was often sketching and painting during my fieldwork. I was also surrounded by music, which was a primary artistic channel of my hosts and

found expression through the young Hemphills' impressive family band[88]. Art practice(s) serve at least two functions, depending on how they are used. The first is an *expressive* function, allowing us to explore and articulate something about our experiences that may be inaccessible through the more rational/analytic media (of writing and speaking, for example), coming into contact with our unconscious, and bringing creative possibilities to understanding and transformation of our experiences. The second is a *contemplative* function, enabling us to leave the chatter of our busy-mind and experience being in our body. I benefitted from both functions in my engagement with the arts, which I saw as strengthening (and softening) the reflective and meditative aspects of my self-maintenance and self-development. My art practice facilitated my generative and transformative learning to some extent, but it was essential to my existential learning because it offered more possibilities for embodiment and dreaming than any other reflective method. The arts may not be the only way to get these benefits. A range of practices including sports, religious rituals and connecting with nature may prove to be similarly helpful allies (Edwards et al. 2007). It may not be such a big stretch for planning schools to include the arts and/or some of these other practices in their curriculum.

The many dialogues included in the stories in this dissertation are indicative of the central role of **peer conversations** as a method of assisted reflection in the course of this project. Some such conversations involved my friends and community partners on Tsulquate, and others involved calling on far-away colleagues for advice and for gentle coaching. There is certainly an advantage to speaking with peers who are working in the same context and have perhaps been present for the events or interactions that we might need to debrief or deconstruct. The two graduate students who worked on Tsulquate before me both commented on the central importance of the support they got from each other and their ability to think things through together (interviewed in July

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[88] In some ways I see the poetic and metaphoric explorations in this dissertation as a blending of the visual and musical art forms.

2011)[89]. For me personally the most important form of peer conversation involved calling on my closest colleague, Sera Thompson, who is an experienced Deep Democracy practitioner in Halifax (and who often called me for support on her projects as well). The fact that we were methodologically and philosophically aligned meant that we had not only common language but also common tools and approaches for processing what was happening and making sense of it together. For example we often amplified for each other, as Ravenna does for Hanane in section 3.11. Having this partnership in place was very comforting and very fruitful, even though Sera had never been to Tsulquate and did not know the specifics of my context. It supported much of my generative and occasionally some of my transformative and existential learning. I think that setting up a peer system, organized into duos or trios who are committed to being in supportive conversations with each other, is an important component of a personal development structure. The question of the central organizing principles for such a system –e.g. whether commonality in context or methodology is more important– deserves further exploration and may be an appropriate subject for future research.

Finally, perhaps the most significant component supporting my learning and development throughout this action research was the **coaching and supervision** I received from my Deep Democracy mentor Myrna Lewis. Examples are provided throughout the story, often as more-or-less complete transcripts of the supervision sessions in order to convey the real richness of those experiences. The importance of coaching has been acknowledged in the literature (e.g. Lang and Taylor, 2000, p.141) but in my opinion has been grossly underestimated. As I show in section 2.4. the coaching that I received served two functions: (a) it helped me develop my technical skills by helping me identify what I had done right *and* wrong and explore some possible alternative approaches; and (b) it helped me develop my metaskills by taking me into an internal process, in particular through exploration of the most challenging

[89] I suspect that having a colleague to talk things through with on a daily basis is more important for extrovert personalities who need to think out loud with others. For me, as an introvert, these conversations took some effort and in some respect were not as rich as the internal dialogues that showed up in my journals.

moments in the facilitation. In practice, the coaching assisted me in all four levels of learning identified above. Once again, the fact that Myrna and I were on the same page philosophically and methodologically seemed to really help, since she relied on tools and processes already familiar to me and well aligned with my own work[90]. It is important to note that Myrna is not only my DD teacher and mentor, but also comes from a background as a therapist and did on many occasions take me into a therapeutic space (where most of the existential learning took place). I have wondered to myself whether it was essential to be supervised by a therapist, or would another less-psychologically-skilled coach be able to offer the same support? My guess is that the presence and depth of trauma in the community context I was working with required me to have therapy of my own, which Myrna was able to offer[91]. Perhaps if the community context was not as charged then I could be well supported by a different kind of coaching. There is certainly room for further research and theorizing on the role of coaching and supervision within the planning profession and in regards to a therapeutic planning orientation more specifically.

I have suggested that the combination of the above individual and assisted reflective practices –journaling, meditation, art practice, peer conversations, and supervision– would provide the support system one needs to develop into an effective therapeutic planner. Of course, these have to be combined with *actual practice* – with trying things out and learning as we go. My exploration may suggest that supporting the development of a therapeutic orientation for planners is a daunting task. Certainly it requires an approach to education that is unfamiliar to our field, as well as educators with skills that are rare among us. Will planning schools put a value on these types of learning? If so, will they actually be able to support it? Or is this something for

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[90] Following the fieldwork for this dissertation, I have enrolled in an advanced developmental program in which Myrna is training ten of the most experienced Deep Democracy practitioners across the world to be able to offer the kind of coaching and supervision that she has been offering to us. This program is giving me many emerging insights into the role of the coach and the way that DD can be used on a one-on-one basis for deeper therapeutic work in the supervision.

[91] It is common for professional therapists to receive therapy themselves so they can continue to serve their clients. As we think about therapeutic planning perhaps we should be thinking of parallel structures.

continuing education programs to consider? Can we continue to borrow both teachers and practitioners from other disciplines, the way planning has always done, to support a therapeutic orientation in our work? Perhaps more fundamentally: does a therapeutic orientation matter to us enough, or is it seen as enough of an opportunity, to go to the trouble of growing our field in this –fairly new– direction? Once again, many questions remain to be explored as subjects for future research.

5.3. Final thoughts on methodology

By the time I come to writing this final section of my dissertation I have far surpassed the recommended word-limit, and I am also dangerously close to the due date of my second baby, expecting to go into labour at any minute (but most likely not until I press "print" on the complete dissertation draft!) Nevertheless I cannot resist ending with thoughts on the process of doing this research and presenting it in its current form – what I think of broadly and generously as my "methodologies". While my doctoral research has explored some uncharted territories in terms of content, perhaps its true novelty lies within the actual processes of doing and presenting the work. The methodology I have used to *do* this work, situated within the action research family, is remarkably rare in the planning field. Even though we talk lots about "action", there are very few planning scholars who ground their research in their own actions and experiences in the way that I have. The methodology I have used to *analyse and present* this work, positioned within the creative analytic process (CAP) ethnography family, is even more rare. Though we have long ago acknowledged the importance of stories in the planning field, I know of no others who have taken the kind of creative license I have with my work as a story-teller. In this final section I would like to briefly explore some underexplored aspects of my unique methodologies, making a case for their potential to serve planning research and scholarship in ways that are much needed.

When I first graduated with my masters of planning degree I worked for a few years in a large consulting firm. At one point (in 2007) I took on a consulting assignment for the Federation of Canadian Municipalities that involved surveying and then interviewing a few hundred municipal employees –mostly municipal planners– across Canada to find

out what factors influence the uptake of new and innovative practices by local governments. The outcome that stood out for me most strikingly was that "academics" and "academic research" were at the very bottom of the municipal practitioners' list of 'influencers'. What I heard over and over again was, "look, we hear about some neighbouring municipality or some far away place that has done something cool, and it seems to have solved a problem similar to one that we have, and we're like: hey we should do that!" It doesn't matter if the success of the 'cool', innovative practice has been proven by repetition or by rigorous studies – what matters is that a compelling story has travelled within the formal or informal social networks of municipal planners (and also municipal politicians and active citizens) and landed somewhere else on fertile ground.

This discovery was somewhat disheartening and almost enough to deter me from doing a PhD – though obviously not quite enough! Accepting it as reality has largely influenced the orientation of my academic work: I have opted for telling what I hope is a compelling story, in a manner as honest and as accessible as possible, hoping that it may germinate somewhere else like a gypsy seed. My choice of methodologies has primarily followed from this aspiration: I chose action research in order to generate a rich (and real) story, and I chose CAP ethnography in order to tell the story most effectively. In the introduction to this dissertation I have already spoken to the rationale behind these choices, citing the existing literature on the expected benefits of each (see section 1.2. and 1.3.). In the following pages I touch on some of the benefits that were *unexpected* to me, intending to expand our collective thinking on methodological issues.

The gift of the creative process
The techniques of CAP ethnographies were part of a series of creative processes that found their way into this research at various stages from conception to implementation, to analysis and presentation of findings. At times the creative processes and the research itself blended so closely that I could not make a distinction between them – at other times I saw them as parallel processes, supporting, reinforcing or challenging each other. What I found most interesting and perhaps most rewarding about the path I

chose was that ***creative processes helped to raise critical questions and explore***
possible new directions within the action research, in ways that often felt more
grounded, embodied and "real" than a purely intellectual excursion into these same
territories. Ultimately, the creative processes made the inquiry more self-reflective,
more accountable, more rigorous, and more effective.

To illustrate these relations, I explore the parallels and intersections between three
elements: the mural I created with the community towards the end of the fieldwork
(visual process), the presentational body of the dissertation (verbal process), and the
action research. I think of both the mural and the body of the dissertation as synthesis
and dissemination pieces: in creating the mural we brought together and made visible
the parenting aspirations of the community (the results of the workshops I facilitated),
while in writing the stories of the dissertation I collected, organized and communicated
information that would speak to my research questions (the results of my action
research activities). Chronologically speaking, the painting of the mural came before the
writing of the dissertation, and both of them came towards the end of the action
research as a whole. In some cases the questions and discoveries were first ignited in
the process of painting the mural and then expanded to the writing of the dissertation
and reflecting on the action research. In other cases I had been grappling with the
questions since the start of the inquiry, but found new ways of thinking about them
through the creative processes.

Questions about style and tradition: The idea of creating a painting with and about
the community, with *I* as the main leader/facilitator/artist, brought up the question of
artistic approach or more accurately, artist style or tradition. *Given the context of the*
research, should the mural be painted in a Pacific Northwest 'Indigenous style'? What
would it mean for me, as a non-Aboriginal person to produce this piece? How would it be
received in the community? Would I be guilty of cultural colonialism if I imposed my own
style? Would I be guilty of cultural appropriation if I somehow learned enough to be able
to borrow the local style? Should I step away and abandon the idea of the painting
because I cannot do it in a way that would be fully aligned with the local traditions? Or

300

does what I have to offer have some value despite my outsider status and my outsider's style?

As I stayed in a state of paralysis with these questions over many days, I understood that they were not specific to the painting, but ran through the writing of the dissertation and the very nature of my inquiry. Regarding the stories within the dissertation I had to ask: *Should (and could) the dissertation be written in an Indigenous style (and what would that look like)? Could I give my characters (Ravenna and Xenia in particular) 'Indigenous voices' including ways or speaking, and styles of humour? Could I do that authentically or would I fall into stereotyping and cultural appropriation? To what degree could I borrow and bring in local voices directly and how would these voices 'read' within my own manner of writing? Would inclusion of local voices make the narrative choppy and awkward, or would I find a good fit? Even though I have done all this work, am I entitled to –and would I find a non-problematic way to– write the dissertation?*

Regarding the action research itself I was now asking questions such as: *Am I (and should I have been) following Indigenous research methodologies and ethics, or could I rely on methodologies and ethics that feel most familiar and natural to me? Again, what would be the implications for cultural colonialism and cultural appropriation? How would my ways of doing things – running workshops in particular– be received? Should I be searching for ways of 'indigenizing' what I do in the workshops? Would the community take offense? Do I have enough of a license to be a "leader" in this context? Does what I have to offer have value despite not being locally rooted, or is it time to pack it and go home?*

Questions about representation: Related to and overlapping with the above, there were also more specific questions of representation, particularly of the people within the community. As I began to make rough sketches for the mural I came face to face with these practicalities: *Whose faces should I depict? Should I get specific community members to model for the drawings on the canvas (and if so, which community members*

of the many who had participated?) or could I draw some 'generic' GN faces? Would it be rude to create a generic GN face? How would community members react to either seeing or not seeing their own reflections in the painting? Would it matter if they could recognize themselves or not? And after I took the canvas home to complete the half-finished mural (once the children had had their go at it) even more practical questions arose: *How much should I 'fix up' and 'correct' what the community has done? Should I keep the children's brushstrokes (and their tendency not to stay within the lines I had originally drawn) or should I paint over them to create a cleaner, more artistically pleasing product? Would I keep the elements that I thought didn't look good (e.g. 'wrong' colors in the wrong places, children's sketches too small to make out, a handprint that had been planted right in the middle of the canvas!)? Do I have the right to pick and choose what remained on the canvas in the interest of beauty, or would that be censorship? Would that be disrespectful?*

Parallel questions came to me regarding the stories in the dissertation: *Whose stories would I re-tell and how would I choose? Is the academic tradition of picking out quotes from interviews and transcripts to support the claims I am making appropriate here (and do I have an alternative to that)? Do I have to use direct quotes, or would I be allowed to 'clean up' what people have said to read better, more harmoniously within my stories? Would I bring some community members directly into my stories, or would I create generic characters? What would either choice mean for anonymity? What would either choice mean for respecting the words and wisdom of individuals? How would these choices affect how the writing is be received by the community?*

And again, parallel questions with respect to the action research itself: *Who should I engage in the research and in the workshops in particular? Does random sampling make any sense, should I target and invite specific people known locally for their wisdom and knowledge instead (as would be better aligned with Indigenous traditions), or could I trust that whoever came were the right people? How much would I control what happened in the research/workshops, and how much would I leave it to the community to decide? Would I seek elegance, safety and transformative potential in the workshops, or would I let the people in the room effectively decide what the appropriate principles were?*

What is the respectful way forward? And how would I be received based on the choices I make?

The stories in the body of the dissertation speak to some of the questions above as they also became interesting to my characters. In most cases the answers just had to be worked out one way or another –despite some ongoing discomfort and second-guessing – in the interest of the pragmatic imperative of moving the project forward. I could easily take another 50 pages now to go into how I ultimately dealt with all the questions above and where I stand on them – but instead let me emphasize the point I am trying to make: the creative processes, the practical necessity of making decisions about what shapes and colours and words would end up on the canvas and on the page, brought into my consciousness the critical questions that I was grappling with in the action research itself, *and,* in many cases, the creative processes also provided some guidance for their –pragmatic– resolution. For example, when I got really bogged down in a question about the research or about the writing, I could look into how the parallel question had been negotiated or resolved (either intentionally or accidentally) in the painting and see if a parallel answer would be appropriate. Some examples include:

- As I began to create the mural, I had come to a decision that it was okay for my artistic style to act as a general platform or base– but that I would remain open to whatever other styles seemed to want to enter, including the children's. Somewhat coincidentally, the day that I was painting the mural in the community, one local teenager came forward and with my encouragement brought what he called his "First Nations Art" into the project. That was how the stylized eagle appeared on the top right corner of the mural, fitting perfectly with the rest of the design, and corresponding to my desire for authentic local artistic elements. When I started to write the dissertation stories, I watched for similar opportunities to include local styles and local voices. The best example of this, which also happened coincidentally, was the integration of Richard George's and Gerry Oleman's anecdotes into my poems *without changing a single word*, almost as if their speaking style fit seamlessly into my way of writing poetry

(sections 2.2. & 2.9.). Within the action research, and particularly within the workshops, I now realize that seeking a similar pattern was what led to success. A commitment to neutrality allowed the sessions to move in directions most appropriate for the local culture, becoming 'healing circles', story-telling sessions, or 'Elder wisdom circles' when appropriate (sections 3.3. & 3.6.), without jarring with my overall framing or use of methods.

- I long struggled with whether or not to 'fix up' the imperfections or mistakes in the mural from the children's participation. At the end I opted for retaining almost all of the original brushwork the children had contributed, fully embracing, integrating and often *reinforcing* the mistake lines, by putting, for example, a complementary colour in the background that made the lines stand out more. In this way I was going for creating a pleasurable aesthetic on every square foot of the canvas, even if on the whole it was full of 'mistakes'. I was quite happy with the results and with my own sense that the contributions had been respected. What I had originally seen as mistakes did not look like mistakes at all, but contributed to the overall beauty of the mural. In a similar vein, I attempted to embrace, integrate and reinforce the language used by locals in my dissertation stories. I kept the wording and the metaphors when I could, even when they seemed at first clumsy or awkward or 'not fitting'. I then used my own comments or reflections to clarify or reinforce their impact (section 3.2. & 3.12.) Finally, within the action research and in my analysis of what I had done, I tried to pay attention to what looked like mistakes, imperfections and challenges– and elaborate them into relevant information: I opted to include – and see as a legitimate part of the project– my own feelings of insecurity and frustration (sections 3.7., 3.8., 4.5 etc), my apparently 'failed' attempts with various workshop experiments (sections 2.4. & 3.5.), and even the story of my friend Jane's suicide. I felt that this strategy gave richness to the equivalent of "every square foot" of the action research process.

- Overall, I came to see all three of the intertwining elements – the mural, the dissertation and the action research – as eclectic blends, as examples of cultural and stylistic fusion, existing in between multiple worlds[92]. In the painting, as in the writing and the inquiring, I realized that I could not make pure 'traditional' work in any sense of the word (either according to Indigenous traditions or academic traditions or any traditions of my own) and I might as well stop trying! I expect that various aspects of my work will be open to criticism as they won't quite measure up to any set of 'standards' or long-standing cultural or institutional expectations of how things are to be done. And yet, my work does offer something new and potentially impactful, inviting a diversity of relevant elements into conversation with each other. I have walked away feeling legitimate in what I have created, and confident that it will find its audience.

I am intrigued by the idea that creative, artistic process and academic inquiries can be in a mutual relationship together. Art does not "just" make research more interesting or accessible or hip – but rather, the artistic realm gives us a space to both discover questions and discover possible resolutions, with implications for our academic inquiry. I think of it as an encouragement for researchers to begin to think more like artists. The potential of this reframing, and the resources it frees up for critical exploration such as those I have described above, may be worth exploring in further studies.

The gifts of multi-perspective action research

For reasons that I have already cited in the introduction to this document, community-based action research is a particularly appropriate form of academic engagement for the field of planning. In fact, to John Friedmann's point, if we are in the business of creating knowledge for action, I cannot see a better way of going about it than generating knowledge *from* action (and vice versa) on an ongoing basis. But if the

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[92] The playfulness, boldness and powerfulness of an art exhibit that came to the Vancouver Art Gallery just as I was grappling with these questions - titled, Beat Nation: Art, Hip Hop and Aboriginal Culture, Feb 25th to June 3rd, 2012- provided the biggest inspiration and encouragement to move forward in this direction. In some ways, I see myself as walking a parallel path with the 27 Aboriginal artists featured in that exhibit who literally remixed traditional and urban-pop culture elements in their creations – to the delight of most spectators, and the horror of others.

stories told in this dissertation confess to one thing about action research it is that *it is extremely hard to do.* I lost track of how many times I was about to give up part way through the conceptualization or the fieldwork or the writing, and go do something more straightforward to get the same three letters besides my name instead.

What made it so challenging to do this work? Certainly the context of my research was difficult. I had placed myself in the middle of a community that was essentially completely new to me, and that was struggling with trauma and conflict and complexity in an extreme way[93]. The difficulty of the community's context often overwhelmed me, making me feel depressed, hopeless, or out-of-place. I also had a challenging personal situation, carrying one baby after another in the final two and a half years of the work, struggling with the physiological, emotional and social changes that accompany the transition into parenthood[94]. Despite having an amazing support network both onsite and offsite, I often felt somewhat isolated and lonely – which is masked by the creation of three fictional semi-autobiographical characters who make up a 'team' throughout my stories.

But the challenges of doing action research go far beyond what was personally relevant for me[95]. At the core of it, community-based action research presents a situation of profound uncertainty and lack of control on the part of the researcher. There is no way we can plan for our research activities upfront and expect to execute them accordingly. Instead, we have to adjust on a day-by-day basis, constantly problem-solving and coming up with new and creative ways of getting around whatever obstacles appear in the way. Of course this is the case for *any* research, but the shifting grounds are particularly shifty in the case of community-based action research. The central role of community partners –with their own changing agenda, priorities and life

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[93] Then again, I tend to think that most communities and most planning contexts are hotbeds for trauma, conflict and complexity when we look closely. Tsulquate was certainly unique, but the extreme nature of its challenges may not be as unique as we may imagine.

[94] Then again, what researcher does not have a complicated personal life of one kind or another!?

[95] In an upcoming paper Penny Gurstein, Margot Young and I explore these challenges based on interviews with UBC researchers and community members on two sites including Tsulquate. Here I will speak from my own personal observations only.

circumstances– and the reliance on multiple relationships with community members, make it particularly hard for researchers to feel in control of their own work – particularly if they are genuinely committed to collaborative models of working. On top of all this, community-based action research is fraught with ethical issues and philosophical dilemmas of all sorts (including some of what I explore in section 2.7 and the questions I just listed in the last section about representation, style, legitimacy, accountability, perception etc). Almost anything we decide to do is problematic from one perspective or another! Any of these dilemmas can be a bottomless pit from which we may never be able to emerge. I now appreciate why some of my mentors worked so hard to dissuade me from taking on such a demanding project, arguing that it was just too much for the scope of a PhD program.

In retrospect, I was particularly lucky in the course of my action research to have the right kinds of tools (particularly decision-making and conflict resolution tools that I used on myself), practices, attitudes, and support networks to be able to navigate my challenges. Unfortunately, I have observed other colleagues –particularly other graduate students– who were not so lucky, who suffered more than I did, who got stuck, struggling to finish their degrees. If we want to increase the uptake of action research for the rewards that it offers –which I think should be a goal in planning scholarship- we need to think seriously about how to survive doing it, and how to educate planning students and practitioners in surviving it too. Some of what I have talked about in terms of a developmental learning and support infrastructure in section 5.2. applies here: putting in place mechanisms that encourage and support personal and assisted reflection can make a big difference to the success of this type of research. In addition I want to suggest, based on my experience, that slightly adjusting our methodological approach can also have a big influence:

As I mention in the introduction (section 1.2.) I gravitated towards a specific approach within the family of action research approaches, which Torbert and his colleagues call Action Inquiry. The unique feature of Action Inquiry is that it encourages us to inquire simultaneously into three spheres of attention: the first person (inquirer's internal

processes), the second person (inquirer's relationships with others), and the third person (inquirer's learning about patterns of institutions and environments) – or to use my shorthand: action inquirer looks *within, in between,* and *outside,* all at once. Most examples of action research I have seen and read about, including the frustrating attempts of some of my colleagues, are third person research. They happen *outside* of us. Though the importance of relationships between researchers and research participants are often spoken about in the methodology texts, they are very rarely explored explicitly as part of the research itself. The self is even less likely to be mentioned. Instead, the focus of learning and knowledge production is on institutions and patterns of environment or community we are studying. This is consistent with the traditional views of most other kinds of research –particularly in planning: we look into our context, we probe, we observe, we learn something about the phenomenon we are interested in, and we write it up.

An Action Inquiry orientation requires us to do more than that, by including first and second person aspects into our research. However, I find that ***the extra demand of inquiring into the first and second person, paradoxically, makes our work as action researchers less difficult, more manageable and more rewarding***. Perhaps this is because Action Inquiry requires putting a significant portion of our attention on the personal and relationship aspects that are typically the most challenging aspects of such projects. When we see our own personal processes and our relationships as a legitimate and central part of the research –instead of things that need to be negotiated behind the scenes and kept quiet– then we have a better chance at working through them, asking for help when we need to[96]. In addition, the personal and interpersonal foci give us lots to work with. We tend to have more reliable access to our own internal and interpersonal experiences than to the lives of others in the community, which is somehow reassuring and in effect reduces the anxious feeling that everything is out of the researcher's control. In the course of my research I often said to myself that even if

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[96] We still have a choice about what and how much to reveal of our personal and interpersonal side in any research products –just as we choose which third person elements to include – so an action inquiry product does not have to be a full confession. The point is to get curious about and pay attention in all three realms.

all my workshops and various community actions never took place or ended up in complete failure, I still had my 200+ pages of notes on my own experiences and relationships during the fieldwork – and If I had to I could make a dissertation out of all this material! Even if I never ended up producing a dissertation, the fieldwork would have been worth it, because of the learning that I had intentionally pursued at the personal and interpersonal level.

Another beauty of this approach, as I have illustrated multiple times in the stories (sections 2.8. & 3.7. & 3.8) is that we can see some of the same fractal patterns at the self and relationship level that we see in the institution or environment that we are curious about. Once we enter the field of the community we become part of it in ways that we are not even conscious of, and we begin to pick up on various energies, enacting them in our own self and in our relationship with other[97]. As a result ***becoming aware of roles and patterns in the first and second person, gives us a much deeper understanding of the phenomenon we are interested in studying in the third person, because similar roles and patterns will tend to become visible at all three levels.*** For those of us interested in 'action' and in making an impact in the communities we work with, strategies or attitudes that prove themselves to make a difference at the first and second person level can also give us clues into how to make a difference in the third person realm[98]. Once these parallels and intersections become visible to us, there is no end to the richness of our experience within the field. What we are looking at becomes that much more layered and interesting because it is about us as much as it is about somebody else. I hate to think how much of this richness is lost when we employ traditional ways of doing third-person-only research.

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[97] The entire approach of Deep Democracy is based on this way of seeing fractal patterns in the world. As facilitators we are constantly doing what I describe here: we inquire into ourselves and into our relationships (with co-facilitator, group members, clients etc) as well as into the dynamics of the group. We see them as whole, not as separate phenomena. Each aspect informs our understanding of the others and helps us make decisions about how to move forward. It is probably no coincidence that the Action Inquiry orientation resonates so strongly for me as a DD practitioner.

[98] Clearly the strategies will need to be adapted into the institutional and community realm – in the same way that insights and strategies from creative processes have to be adapted to illuminate something within the action research.

One of the best things that has happened to me as a result of experimenting with these methodologies in the course of this degree is that I have become hopeful about the potential for doing exciting, groundbreaking research in the field of planning. As I have argued in this section, both creative processes and multi-perspective modes of inquiry have the potential to significantly enrich traditional forms of community-based action research, making them more lively and rewarding, and at the same time more rigorous and robust. Progressive planning has a long way to go to become the effective instrument of social change that it often hopes to be – and we need all the innovative tools we can get our hands on to learn how to make and operate that instrument. Whether or not these and other innovative methodologies will become more widespread depends on many factors – Will the legitimacy and usefulness of such approaches be acknowledged in our field? Will academic planning journals publish arts-based or first and second person research? Will planning schools embrace them? Will planning students get excited about them? Will researchers be brave enough to experiment with them? And will anyone else find them as helpful as I did!? In many ways, this would be a big shift within our discipline– seemingly impossible. For now, I am putting this dissertation out there and sitting back with my fingers crossed; because, given the choice, isn't it always better to believe in magic?

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